THE POROUS SELF - CRAFTING AN INTRINSIC ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH TEXT, IMAGE AND MOVEMENT

A THESIS TO BE SUBMITTED TO

THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

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FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

SRISRIVIDHIYA KALYANASUNDARAM

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Private University Established in Karnataka by ACT 35 of 2013

BENGALURU - 560064

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

I declare that this thesis entitled **"*The Porous Self* - Crafting an Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness through Text, Image and Movement"** submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy to THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY, Bengaluru, is my original work, conducted under the supervision of my guide Dr. Geetha Narayanan. I also wish to inform that no part of the research has been submitted for a degree or examination at any university. References, help and material obtained from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

Place: Bengaluru **Signature of the Candidate**

Date: November 2020

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November 2020

THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

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BENGALURU - 560064

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this thesis ***"The Porous Self* - Crafting An Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness through Text, Image And Movement"** submitted by K.Srisrividhiya was carried out under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree or examination at any university. References, help and material obtained from other sources have been duly acknowledged. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

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Dedication

To my family

Love

A hanging vine
shot through my veins
and brought with it
a zillion roots
in the rainforest
entwining themselves
with me.
High up in those hills
I found those relationships
I was looking for,
affection and belonging
with ease
and trust earned
through walking together.
Now everywhere I put my foot
on the ground
I am linked to life
through those unending
entwined roots
and their love
for storytelling.
They whisper through my veins
and we understand
with affection and trust
and a pervading
sense of belonging.

(from my collection: Iyalbu- On Being)

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan and Dr. C.Sivaramamurti, whose work profoundly influences mine and they remain my mānasiga gurus and sources of inspiration.

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Photograph Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

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Photograph: Srivi Kalyan

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Fig 13, 14 and 15: Shiva, the great dancer disguises himself playfully to dance with Śakti also known by the name Kor̲r̲avai in the south when she is younger. Śiva and Śakti are also considered to be Puruṣa and Prakṛti, the essence of life and its counterpart in the ceaseless play of form. This collection of paintings, written as an illustrated story in 2007, plays on the symbolism and metaphysical truths using dance to highlight complex metaphors. In his form as Nataraja, Śiva holds fire in one of his hands, indicating destruction. This series, plays with many of these symbols bringing them to vivid life.

Watercolours, Photocolours, Pen and Ink on watercolour paper, 2007.

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Śakti have been photographed together, 2006. The story emerged with my own choreographic ideas for the Śiva-Śakti tandava. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

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Fig 26: Sketch of a young Odissi dancer, Brush pen and multicolour pencil on watercolour paper, Calcutta, 2012.

Fig 27: Photographing a tree. The posture of taking a photograph was an intuitive response to the land and the tree and showcases how my training in Bharatnāṭyam influenced my other artistic processes, 2002. Photograph: Ambica Banu.

Chapter 10

Fig 1: A quick study of the common pochard, for its lazy intensity, 3.5 in X 2 in, 2017.

Fig 2: Sisters and Geese, Pencil drawing, 8.27 in X 11.69 in, 2017.

Fig 3: Dreaming Wolf. Mixed media on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

Fig 4: Pages from journal, Reflective poem on Self drawing out the relationship between the inner and outer worlds. The reflection draws upon the cultural perspective of the macro and micro entwined and reflective of each other. This kind of reflection allows for a flow of consciousness that moves seamlessly across all beings and derives from a cosmology as well as highly developed symbolism in the Indian tradition. 5 in X 5 in Journal size, 2008.

Fig 5 & 6: Transformations of the Golden Mongoose, watercolours on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2016.

Fig 7: Yāḻi Pillar inspired by 7thcentury Pallava Sculptures, Mahabalipuram; Illustration created for Young Adult fiction – 'Parthiban's Dream', 2005, Katha Publishers, New Delhi, Indian Ink with dry brush technique in cartridge paper, 5 in X 8 in, 2005.

Fig 8: Yāḻi and child playing with words, Illustration for self authored story 'A pearl! A costly pearl! Did you find any?' selected for Katha Chitrakala Award 2005, 11.7 in X 16.5 in, 2005.

Fig 9: Sahṛdayās - The Great Wilderness. Acrylic on Canvas, 3ft X 3.5ft, 2009.

Fig 10: Grey Heron in Flight. Acrylic on Canvas, 2016, 1.5ft X 2ft

Fig 11 & 12: Korravai and the peacock; Korravai and the Golden Deer. Illustrations for a self-authored story 'Korravai and the blue stone", that investigate the relationship between Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, Nature and Matter in the form of dance. The myths and movements are informed by own practice of Bharatanātyam as a classical dance form. Watercolour and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 16 in, 2007.

Fig 13: Nekilci: Moments of transformation, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 4ft X6ft, 2016.

Fig 14: "This Becomes That." A journal sketch in planning for a series. The sketch uses folk style form and imagery to capture seamless flow of life and death, through a continuous narration sequence, that looks at the paradox of one form transmuting into another. Pen and ink on handmade paper,
12 in X 7 in, 2016.

Fig 15: A recent image of self, holding a Bharatnāṭyam posture that indicates harmony with nature and allows the dancer to connect her axis with the axis of the landscape. This embodied practice of drawing correspondences between inner and outer is the essential premise/ condition under which porosity becomes a lived reality for me, Seattle, 2017.

Fig 16: A shot from scenes of a 3DS max animation sequence titled "The Living Brain" that explores the relationship between self, compassion and experience through a surreal space narrative. Animation uses paintings in mixed media to create textures and backgrounds. New and mixed media techniques allow for one to inquire into more mythical/ alternative space-time options, particularly the way time and space move in our consciousness and imagination. Storytelling and animation allow for the construction of narratives of the inner reality. Form here inquires into these fluid space-time concepts allowing different inner realities to become visible, 2002.

Figure 17: 'Temple' is an installation that looks at exploring the inner and the outer in a constant series of reflective exchanges through mixed media. Materiality is essential study when working with form. In this work, illusion as an aspect of the materiality of aluminium is used to capture a complex mystical experientiality and how discovering the correspondences between inner and outer feels like. Media - Aluminium foil, wire and plaster of paris, 2.5 ft X 2 ft, 2004.

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Fig 19: From a series of paintings of the mythical Haṃsa, A swan/ goose that represents consciousness and breath. Acryclic on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.

Fig 20: Naturalistic painting of the blue-eyed bush frog, Raorchestes luteolus, neelanethrus, a species that I encountered in the Western Ghats as part of my ecological inquiries. Water colours and ink on water colour paper, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

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Chapter 11

Fig 1: Pelican gliding in Jakkur lake at dawn, March 2017.

Fig 2: Time to ponder - Painted Stork, egret and birds resting on a tree at Pulicat, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

Fig 3: Close up of common pochard from a larger painting - Nekiḻcci: Moments of transformation, Acrylic and ink on canvas, Full canvas size- 4ft X 6ft, 2016.

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Fig 5: When sea meets sky - Black headed ibis in flight at Pulicat, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

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Fig 8: Valmiki's inspiration to write the Ramayana is said to have emerged at the point of deep sorrow he felt when one of the Krauncha birds who mate for life is killed by a hunter. The deep overwhelming sorrow that he felt at the death of one bird,

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Fig 9. The Greater Coucal pausing to look around. Photocolours and Indian ink on watercolour paper, 2014

Fig 10. Soaring in inner sky - The mythical hamsa in flight. Stylized. Acryclic, watercolour and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.

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Fig 12: Heroine talking to a parrot as she entices it with seeds to play with her and talk to her, In traditional Bharatnāṭyam Attire, 2006.

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Fig 15: Soaring Together, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

Fig 16: Dreaming. Both works created in response to the sound of piano and violin and one of the Four romantic pieces by Antonin Dvorak, played by Dan Sedgwick (Sonata, Work in progress 2016-17) and Marjorie Gere. Watercolours in journal sketchbook, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

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Fig 19: Sita and Jatayu in a conversational dance. Playful memories that draw them closer when the battle with Ravana begins. Chinese Black ink on Cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.

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Fig 29 and 30. Playfulness –Moods of Jatayu, Chinese black ink on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2018.
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Chapter 12

Fig 1, 2, 3: Painted storks and egrets at Pulicat Lake, December 2016. Photograph.
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Fig 1: Shiny Blue Delight - Kingfisher and Dragonfly, Acrylic and ink on canvas, 2016.

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Fig 9 and 10: Dawn and dusk on the Oregon coast: Scenes from the Oregon cCoast, Watercolours and Chinese ink on watercolour boards, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.

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Transliteration

In transliterating Indic words, I follow the scheme suggested by the Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html) (Relevant Pages inserted below). For ease of reading, I have chosen not to transliterate names of people (except when they occur in poetry I quote or are ancient Tamil/ Sanskrit names). Nor have I transliterated more common words, names of places ("Sanskrit", "Madurai", etc.), excepting a few that have complex pronunciations.

All other translations, unless otherwise specified, are mine.

Sanskrit and Prakrit (in Devanagari script)

When Sanskrit is written in another script, the corresponding letters in that script are transliterated according to this table.

Vowels and Diphthongs (see Note 1)

अ	a	ऋ	ṛ
आ	ā	ऌ	ḷ
इ	i	ए	e
ई	ī	ऐ	ai
उ	u	ओ	o
ऊ	ū	औ	au

Consonants (see Note 2)

Gutturals	**Palatals**	**Cerebrals**	**Dentals**
क ka	च ca	ट ṭa	त ta
ख kha	छ cha	ठ ṭha	थ tha
ग ga	ज ja	ड ḍa	द da
घ gha	झ jha	ढ ḍha	ध dha
ङ ṅa	ञ ña	ण ṇa	न na
Labials	**Semivowels**	**Sibilants**	**Aspirate**
प pa	य ya	श śa	ह ha
फ pha	र ra	ष ṣa	
ब ba	ल la	स sa	
भ bha	ळ l̲a		
म ma	व va		
Anusvāra (see Note 3)	*Anunāsika*	*Visarga*	*Jihvāmūlīya*
ं ṃ	ँ m̐	ः ḥ	)(h̲
	Upadhmānīya	*Avagraha* (see Note 4)	
	≍ ḫ	ऽ ’ (apostrophe)	

Notes

1. Only the vowel forms that appear at the beginning of a syllable are listed; the forms used for vowels following a consonant can be found in grammars; no distinction between the two is made in transliteration.
2. The vowel *a* is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:
   a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign; and
   b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the subscript sign (◌्) called *halanta* or *virāma*.
3. Exception: *Anusvāra* is transliterated by:
   a) *ṅ* before gutturals,
   b) *ñ* before palatals,
   c) *ṇ* before cerebrals,
   d) *n* before dentals, and
   e) *m* before labials.
4. When doubled, *avagraha* is transliterated by two apostrophes (’’).

Tamil

Vowels and Diphthongs (see Note 1)

அ	a	எ	e
ஆ	ā	ஏ	ē
இ	i	ஐ	ai
ஈ	ī	ஒ	o
உ	u	ஓ	ō
ஊ	ū	ஔ	au

Consonants (see Note 2)

ஃ	ka	ம	ma
க	ka	ய	ya
ங	ṅa	ர	ra (see Note 3)
ச	ca	ல	la
ஞ	ña	வ	va
ட	ṭa	ழ	ḻa
ண	ṇa	ள	ḷa
த	ta	ற	ṟa
ந	na	ன	ṉa
ப	pa		

Sanskrit Sounds

ஜ	ja	ஸ	sa
ஶ	śa	ஹ	ha
ஷ	ṣa		

Notes

1. Only the vowel forms that appear at the beginning of a syllable are listed; the forms used for vowels following a consonant can be found in grammars; no distinction between the two is made in transliteration.
2. The vowel *a* is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:
   a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign; and
   b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the superscript dot (◌்) called *puḷḷi*.
3. This letter has the same form as the vowel sign for *ā* appearing after a consonant. Where ambiguity arises, it is written ர் .

Glossary – Sanskrit and Tamil Words Alphabetical

Meanings have been drawn from the following resources:

Websites

http://spokensanskrit.org/

http://www.sanskritdictionary.com

https://www.wisdomlib.org/),

http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Main_Page

Books

Kalātattvakośha series of books 1 to 7 published by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (Details in References)

Indian Aesthetics Edited by V.S.Seturaman published by Trinity press (Details in Reference)

Transformation of Nature in Art by Ananda Coomaraswamy published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (Details in References)

Bliss Divine by Swami Sivananda, Published by Divine Life Society (Details in References)

Glossary of Sanskrit Words

A

Abhinaya Darpaṇa - A book on theatre and gestures written by Nandikesvara around 4th-5th century BCE

Abhyāsa - exercise, practice

Adharma - unrighteous

Adhunā - now, at present

Ādivāsi - aboriginal, first inhabitant

Adṛṣṭa - not seen, not visible, unobserved

Āgamic - tradition

Ahaṃkāra - ego, I-Maker

Advaita Vedānta

Adhidaiva-Adhibhūta-Adhyātma: Cosmic, Divine - Terrestrial, Earthly - Personal, Self

Sri Aurobindo explains clearly their meaning in his essays on the Upanishads: "In the ancient conception of the universe our material existence is formed from the five elemental states of Matter, the ethereal, aerial, fiery, liquid and solid; everything that has to do with our material existence is called the elemental, adhibhūta. In this material there move non-material powers manifesting through the Mind-Force and Life-Force that work upon Matter, and these are called Gods or Devas; everything that has to do with the working of the non-material in us is called adhidaiva, that which pertains to the Gods. But above the non-material powers, containing them, greater than they is the Self or Spirit, Atman, and everything that has to do with this highest existence in us is called the spiritual, adhyātma.

Adhiyajña - relating to sacrifice, The Gita mentions the tripartite division together with the mapping into the creative space of adhiyajna (Kak, 2017, Personal communication)

Ādi Kāvya - first poem, The Ramayana

Akṣara –letter, syllable

Alaṅkāra-śāstras, alamkāra-śāstras - The science of figure of speech, literary embellishment

Anāhata nād- Mystical sound heard internally, unstruck sound

Aṅga- limb, component part

Ānanda- bliss, ecstasy, deep joy

Ananta - endless, infinite

Ānandatāṇḍava - Dance of joy/ Ecstasy, one of the dances associated with Siva/ Nataraja, sometimes performed as a duet with Sakti

antarhṛdaya ākāśa - Interiority, Inner Sky, Space within the heart

Antarātman - inner being, inner-self

Anubhava - Experience

Anubhāva - Firm opinion, belief, determination

Anubhāvanā- act of indicating feelings by signs or gestures

Apāna - prana vayu that involves downward or outward flow of energies

Apasmāra Puruṣa - The demon writhing under the feet of the dancing Nataraja, is used to symbolise ego, a dwarf who symbolises ignorance particularly spiritual ignorance.

Apsaras- Heavenly/ Celestial maidens

Āraṇyakas - Aranyaka comes from the Sanskrit root word, aranya, meaning "forest." This is because they were intended as texts to be read and studied by ascetics, or rishis, who had retreated to the solitude of the forest to deepen their contemplation and meditative practices.

Ardhanāri - Half Woman, A form of Siva, where half is body is Sakti/ Parvati

Artha - Meaning

Arūpa - formless

Āsana - posture

Aśokā - not feel or causing sorrow

Asti-bhāti-priyam - exists, shines and is pleasing, indicates the existence of an object/ person, the presence of the object/ person or identification of person/ object in one's consciousness, the nature of which is pleasing and causes bliss or ecstasy or love.

Atharvaveda - One of the four main Vedas

Ātman - essence of anything that is all-pervading. At the secondary level ātman (self) is also identified with body, mind, intellect, vital force, heart and so on

Ātma-vicāraṇā - Self-Inquiry, Self-reflection, contemplation, questioning the self relentlessly, a method evolved in detail by Ramana Maharishi in his work as addressed in this thesis..

Avidyā - literal meaning is "ignorance", "delusion", "unlearned", "unwise" and opposite of Vidya. Cognitive limitations of ourselves and world giving rise to root causes of misery

Āyurveda - science of life, a holistic system of medicine that is indigenous to and widely practised in India. Its purpose is to maintain the health of the individual and alleviate disease in both symptomatic and causative state.

B

Bandhu - relationship, bond, connection, relative

Bhāramāsa - 12 months, Song of seasons, Poetry and art were created around seasons.

Bhairava - One of the forms of lord Siva

Bhakti - selfless, loving devotion, surrender

Bhakti mārg - The path of Surrender to one's cherished deity

Bhaktā - Devotee

Bharatanāṭyam - A classical dance form practiced in South India

Bhagavad-Gītā - 'The song of god', set in narrative framework as part of the great epic Mahabharata, a dialogue between the warrior prince Arjuna and god Krishna serving as his charioteer at the battle of Kurukshetra

Bhāva - sentiment or mood, emotive meaning

Bhāvādhyāya - Chapter on bhava

Bhāvanā - aesthetic contemplation

Bhāvaka - Having poetic taste, taste for the sublime, manifestation of one's feelings, Conoisseur

Bhāvakatva - the power of universalization, a sensibility for relishing beauty, the sublime

Bhāvayitrī - a type of poetic intuition as recognised by Rājaśekhara

Bhāvavṛtta sūktas - Hymns of Creation, where Bhāvavṛtta is an epithet of Brahman

Bhoga - Enjoyment

Bhikṣāṭanār - one of the gentler forms of Siva, where he is a sensuous naked beggar.

Bhū - Earth

Bhūta - Element

Bībhatsa - Disgust, one of the nine emotions or navarasas

Bīja - Seed

Bodhi - Awakenment, enlightenment, supreme knowledge

Bodhisattvā Padmapāṇi - A subject of one the famous paintings in the Ajanta Caves, One who holds the lotus, Embodies compassion

Brahman - Brahman, derived from bṛḥ "the expansive" (bṛhatvam = greatness) can be defined as the Absolute, whence all existence arises, by which everything is sustained and into which everything ultimately dissolves. Brahman or the Absolute is by definition super-sensuous, it is beyond comprehension or cognition

Brāhmaṇās - A category of literature that consists of precepts and explanations of rituals/yajnas

Brahmānanda - The bliss of one who realises the Brahman, ecstasy, rapture

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad - Name of a celebrated Upaniṣad, forming the last six chapters of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa

Bṛhadīśvara - A form of Siva, Indicates the 11th century temple in Tanjavur built by Raja Raja Chola I

Buddhi - Intellect, wisdom, sense, judgment, discernment

C

Caitanya - sentience, essential motivity or activity

Caraka - Wanderer

Cāraka - Setting in motion

Carvaṇā - Chewing, Tasting, aesthetic relish

Carvyamāṇataikasāra - Aesthetic pleasure

Chāndogya Upaniṣad - One of the oldest upaniṣads embedded in the Sāma Veda, discusses the importance of speech and language

Cetanā - knowing, sentient, alive

Citrasūtra: the ancient Indian manual for painting techniques

Citra - Painting

Cit - Consciousness, Intellect, Soul/ Spirit

Cittavṛtti - Imagining, Feeling, Discursive thought process

Citsabhā - Hall of consciousness

D

Darśana - direct immediate and intuitive vision of truth, observe the nature of reality as a whole

Devadāsī - A temple dancer/ artist dedicated to worship and serve a deity according to tradition, Colonial views on the Devadāsīs are disputed and the practice was outlawed in India during the colonial period.

Dharma- Justice, Nature

Dhvani - a poetic factor that goes beyond simple denotation or metaphor; A meaning implied or suggested

Divya-pārthiva - Divine - earthly

Dvāram - Entrance, Doorway, Gate

G

Gam - To go, move

Gandharvas - Celestial beings

Ganeśa - Elephant-Headed God worshipped by the Hindus

Garbhopaniṣad - Minor Upaniṣad of the Krsna Yajurveda group, deals with the development of the foetus and the evolution of the individual soul in the womb.

Gandha - Scent, Smell

Gaṇita - Mathematics

Gharma - Heat

Gopatha Brāhmaṇa - The Gopatha Brāhmana is an extant Brāhmaṇa of the Atharvaveda, written between 2000-1000 BCE and deals with the practicalities of Vedic rituals.

Gond - One of the largest tribal groups of people living in India in the states of Madhya Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

Grīṣma - Summer

Guṇa-Doṣa - virtue and vice

Guru- Śiṣya paramparā - tradition of transmitting knowledge by teacher to disciple

H

Haṃsa - gander, symbol of inbreath and outbreath

Haṃ-sa-'haṃ - This is I, Becoming one with primordial breath, becoming the Great Gander or Parama haṃsa

Hanuman - Monkey god

Hāsya - laughter

Hemanta - Winter

Hindutva - originally state or quality of being Hindu (practicing a form of the religion), more recently identified as a political form of Hinduism

Hiraṇyakaśipu - Name of a demon who was killed by the lion-headed avatar (Narasiṃha) of Vishnu.

Hṛdayasaṃvāda - Internal dialogue or conversation that happens between hearts, a resonant conversation happening between people

Hṛdayaviśrānti - Equilibrium, heart at rest, repose

I

Indriya - Sense, sense organs

iśta devatā - One's favourite deity, Cherished divinity

Īśa Upaniṣad - One of the principal scriptures, embedded in the Shukla Yajurveda and considered a key scripture of the Vedanta Subschools.

Īśvarapraṇidhāna - Devotion to God

Itihāsa - History

J

Jagat - that which moves, earth, world

Jagannāth - An avatar of Visnu

Jāgṛti - awakened

Jaṭāyu - Mythical bird, a vulture

Jāti - Descent, family, tribe

Jīva - Life, alive

Jyotiṣā - Astronomy, Astrology

K

Kaivalya Upaniṣad - One of the minor Upaniṣads grouped mong the Śaiva Upaniṣads and assigned to the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda. It deals with liberation.

Kalā - Art

Kāla - Time

Kalākār - Artist

Kalam - Pen

Kalamkāri - pen craft

Kālī - A powerful female deity of the Hindu Pantheon, the destructive counterpart of Siva; Shiva is called Kāla— the eternal time — the name of Kālī, his consort, also means "Time" or "Death"

Kalpanā - idea, concept, imagine

Kalpavṛkṣa - the tree that grants boons

Kamalam - Flower, Lotus

Kāraṇa - The reason by which something is accomplished, Determinants

Kartarīmukha - A dance gesture, single-hand, scissor-like, used to indicate creeper, separation of lovers, corner of the eye, lightning, death etc.

Kārayitrī - a type of poetic intuition as recognised by Rājaśekhara

Karma - any activity performed in the course of material existence

Kāśmīr Śaivite - One who practices the Kāśmīr Śaivism

Kāśmīr Śaivism - A form of Śaivism, a nondualist tradition of Saiva-Sakta tantra that originated in Kashmir around 850 CE, and is a pan -Indian movement.

Katha Upaniṣad - One of the principal upanisads embedded in the Krishna yajurveda and recounts the story of the boy Naciketas and his conversation with the God of Death, Yama on life, knowledge, soul and liberation.

Kavi - poet

Kāvya - poetry

Kāvyaprakāśa - light of poetic work

Kriyā yoga - designating the "practical" aspects of the philosophy, i.e. the "union with the Supreme" due to performance of duties in everyday life.

Krīḍā - Play

Kṛtis - Devotional songs

Kṛṣṇa - dark-complexioned

Kṣetra - Space, Place

L

Lakṣaṇa - constituting the essential character of a thing

Lāsya - Lāsya is a gentle dance. The word lāsya is derived from the root 'las' meaning to play, to frolic. It is so called due to the mutual state of attraction between a woman and a man.

Lāsya Kāvya - Lāsya - Gentle form of dance, a documentary on the dancer Alarmel Valli

Līlā - Play, divine sportive pastimes of the Supreme Lord or His eternal associates

Liṅga - aniconic form of Siva, Source of all existences, a symbol of Siva

M

Mahābhārata - Epic describing the ancient history of the world leading up to the battle of Kurukṣetra. It was composed by Śrīla Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsadeva for the benefit of the people of this age of Kali, who have no interest in philosophy.

Mahābhūtas - The five elements - Space, Wind, Fire, Earth,Water

Manas - it is the mind derived from Ahamkara in a cascade fashion. Its function is to obtain knowledge of the external world and build a library of impressions, perceptions... from its distal elements such as the organs of perception (Jnanendriyas)

Mānasa Sancararē - Manasa Sancharare is a Sanskrit Kriti composed by Sadashiva Brahmendra of 18th Century describing the desire on one's mind to move around the Brahman

Maṇḍalas - A geometric drawing or spiritual symbol of concentrated energies, used as an aid to meditation to contemplate and travel into the process of creation to its original source

Māyā - Illusion, Creative Play, Wisdom

Mīnākṣī - Fish Eyed Goddess who resides in Madurai, Form of Parvati

Mīmāṃsā - reflection, profound thought

Mokṣa - Salvation, Liberation

Mṛiga Sapnovbhava Parva - One of the cantos of Mahabharata, that has the deer questioning Yudhistira about the destruction of the forest and lamenting to him

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad - One of the principal upanisads embedded in the Atharva Veda.

Mūrti - idol, deity, figure

Muyalaka - the demon writhing under the feet of Nataraja, symbolising ignorance

N

Nābhi - Navel, Origin, Centre

Namaskāra - Offering of Respect

Nāsadīya Sūkta

Naṭarāja - Lord of Dance

Nāṭya - Dance

Nāṭya Śāstra

Narasiṃha - Lion form of Vishnu

Nirvāṇa - complete annihilation of individual existence or of all desires and passions

Nitya-anitya - Eternal - Temporary

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika

O

Om/ Aum - A sacred syllable, Considered to the primordial sound by the Hindus.

P

Pañcakṛtyas - five actions of Śiva- Creation, Destruction, Preservation, Concealment and Revival,

Pañcabhūtas - consisting of the 5 elements, The 5 elements of Air, Wind, Water, Earth and Space

Pañcakośhas - five sheaths supposed to invest the soul

Pañcamahābhūtas - The 5 elements of Air, Wind, Water, Earth and Space

Parama-haṃsa - A spiritual person who has subdued or transcended the senses, Sublime asceticism

Pāṭava- proficiency

Para - Transcendental

Pārvatī - Female Goddess, Consort of Siva

Piṇḍa - metaphorical identification of body indicating joining, uniting, assembling of various parts or elements

Pīpal - Sacred fig or ficus tree native to the Indian subcontinent

Prajāpati - Vedic deity, Lord of all beings

Prajñā - insight, knowing

Prakāśa - Light

Prakṛti - primeval matter, cosmic nature

Pralaya - End of the world/ dissolution

Prāṇāyāma - restraint of breath

Prāṇa - breath, vital force

Pramāṇa - valid perception, measure and structure

Pratibhā - appear bright or luminous; "poetic intuition", an inborn impression (saṃskāra) inherited from previous births

Pratibhā bhāvayitrī - Power of imagination

Prayoga - It is the performance of sacrifice, the application of text to perform yajña, experiment, application

Prthgartha - The *margam* collection of items as presented in Bharatanatyam is *prthgartha* style of nritya in which each item is isolated from the other, as indicated by Mrinalini Sarabhai in her book on the Tanjore Quartet.

Puṇḍarīkapuram - One of the names of Chidambaram, the abode of Nataraja

Purāṇa - Ancient legends and traditional lore

Pur-pura-purī - metaphor of the body, is associated with protection as in a fort or city, and the body is seen as a habitat of the ātman

Puruṣa - subtle all pervading spirit, vital sentient Truth

Puruṣa sūktam - is hymn 10.9 of Rigveda dedicated to the Cosmic Being

Pūrṇa - complete, whole

Puṣpānjali - A dance item of invocation to deities and indicates offering flowers as a form of worship

R

Rādha - A female goddess, Consort of lord Krishna

Rāga - melodic framework for improvisation

Rāgamālā - A form of Indian miniature paintings

Rājaśekhara - eminent Sanskrit ***poet****, dramatist and critic and court poet of the Gurjara Pratiharas from 8-9th century CE., Author of Kavya Mimamsa*

Rajas-Tamas-Sattva - Activity, inertness and balance in objects or beings that create varied intensities, dimensions and levels of being, experience, engagement and relationship.

Rākṣasi - Female supernatural being in Indian mythology, could be good or evil, evil ones are considered to have bloodlust

Rākṣasas - Male supernatural being in Indian mythology,could be good or evil, evil ones are considered to have bloodlust

Rāmāyana - Indian Epic

Rasa - Essence, Juice, Aesthetic beingness, relish, taste

Rasās - Eight/ Nine emotional states/ states of being as indicated in Natyasastra and later texts.

Rasānubhūti - aesthetic bliss, aesthetic relish, delight

Rasānubhava, Rasānubhavam - Aesthetic Delight

Rasika - Aesthete

Raudra - Anger, one of the nine rasas or states of being

Rāvanā - One of the kings of ancient times, considered to have ruled Lanka/ modern day Srilanka, a devotee of Siva and the main antagonist of the Ramayana.

Rekhā - Line

Ṛgveda - One of the four Vedas

Ṛṣis - Sages, hermits, Enlightened beings

Ṛta - Cosmic Law, Cosmic Order of harmony

Ṛtu - season

ṛtu varṇanā - Poetic Description of the seasons

Rūpa - Form

S

Śabda - Sound

Sabhā - Place where people assemble for performance

Sādhanā - Preparation for any goal, Rigor, Praxis, Contemplative practice

Sadhir, Sadir - Dance practiced in ancient times, a revival or transition of which led to the contemporary Bharatanatyam form

Sādṛśya - Similitude, Likeness, analogy, One of the six limbs of ancient Indian Painting

Sahacāra - Causes and effects, Companion, That which accompanies

Sahṛdaya - Sympathetic aesthete, one who resonates with the heart of the artist, poet

Sahṛdayatva - Resonance with artist or poet

Śaiva Siddhānta - The principles which worships Lord Siva

Śaivism - The sect which worships Lord Siva

Śaivaite - Those who worship Lord Siva as their sole deity

Sākṣi - Witness

Sākṣin - Person who stands as witness

Śakti - Power also used for God as Mother of the universe

Śālabhañjikā - Tree Spirit, Tree maiden

Sāla - Tree, Shorea Robusta, Sal tree

Sāman - Hymns of the Samaveda, Older Melodies

Samādhi - The ultimate stage in Yoga Sadhana in 8 fold path of Yoga

Saṃskāras - The memories dormant in the mind over a period of time

Saṃvād - Dialogue, to speak together, discourse, converse

Saṃvedana - Perception, consciousness, compassion

Sāṃkhya - Counting, discerning, A school of thought or philosophical system, One of the darsanas

Samuparañjakatva - adding colour to chosen emotions in poetry/ performance, colorizing aesthetic experience

Sañcāri - Passing or ecstatic emotion, Transitory emotional feelings

Saṅgīta - Music

Sanskrit - One of the language which is ancient and continues to be in practice. Major philosophical and religious texts of Hinduism are still read in their original form in Sanskrit by many practitioners of this faith.

Śānti - Peace

Śārdula - A mythical creature, part lion and part other animals, a symbol of language or Vāc.

Śarīra - Body

Śāstra - The do's and don'ts regulating life

Sat-asat - Truth-Untruth

Sat-cit-ānanda - Existence Absolute-Knowledge Absolute-Bliss Absolute

Satya - Truth

Śaṅkha - Conch

Śarad - Autumn

Śānta - Peace, Ninth rasa added after much debate as a permanent emotion/ state of being

Śiśir - Late winter

Śūnya - Emptiness

Siddhasvabhāva-Accomplished/established nature

Śilpa - Images in any form may be stone, marble etc.

Śilpi - The persons who creates Silpa or sculpture

Sīta - Wife of Rama, Daughter of the earth. The heroine of Ramayana

Śiva - One of the main deities of Hinduism considered the destroyer in the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. One who is attributed to the function of protection the

world is Vishnu; One who is attributed to the function of destruction and giving peace is Siva

Śiva Sūtras - The hymns which worships Lord Siva

Śloka - Couplets

Somajñāna - Knowledge of bliss

Spanda - Vibration, Spinning, quiver

Spandana - Vibration, quivering, moving

Sparśa - Touch

Sphoṭa - utterance

Sphurattā - Dynamic Oscillation

Srimad Bhāgwat The book which is written in praise of Lord Krishna and his teachings

Śṛṅgāra - Love

Śrī Yantra Geometrical form through which worship is done

Sṛṣṭi-Sthiti-Saṃhāra - one of the major triads of Indian philosophy, particularly in Saivism that indicates Creation, preservation and Destruction

Sthāyibhāvas - Permanent moods, Dominant emotions

Sthira - Constant, stable, fixed

Sthapati - Sculptor - Architect, Temple architect and builder

Sthāpatya Veda - The book of knowledge which guides to make sculptures/temples

Sthyāyyātma - Basic, constant emotions of people

Sthitaprajña - One who is balanced in all conditions

sūkṣma- sthūla subtle - gross

sthūla - sūkṣma – śarīra -para

śuddha/aśuddha purity/impurity

Sukha - Condition of happiness

Sūkta - Division of prayers in the Vedic Prayers

Suṣupti - Condition/ state of consciousness when one is in half dream and half wakefulness

Sūtras - Principles

Svadharma - One's role in social order or cosmic order, one's duty or responsibility

Svādhyāya - Self-study

Svarūpam - One's condition

Svabhāva - One's nature, intrinsic or essential nature

Svapna - Dream state

T

Tādātmya - Complete identification with another, losing oneself in the other, feelings of porosity

Tāṇḍava - Divine Dance performed by Hindu Gods and Goddesses, forms of dance, dance items performed by Indian dancers, particularly in classical dance forms

tanmātra

Tanmayībhāva - complete identification with something

Tantrik Division of worship especially in Mother Worship

Tāntrika One who does the Tantrik worship

Tapasyā Penance

tātkālika - Duration of aesthetic enjoyment, simultaneous, relating to a particular moment of time

Tattvas - Principles

Turīyā - The state of superconsciousness, the fourth state transcending the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states

U

Udita - Becoming Active

Upaniṣads - late Vedic Sanskrit texts, considered as Vedanta and deal with ontology, philosophy and meditation.

Upāsanā - Worship

Urṇanābha - a spider who weaves from within herself, the incredible web of life, one of the epithets of Brahma, the creator

V

Vāc - Speech, Divine Utterance

Vacanās - a form of Kannada poetry that evolved during the eleventh and twelfth centuries

Vāsanas - Impressions dormant in the mind

Vaiśṇavaite Devotee who worships Lord Vishnu, the Protector of the world

Vana Parva - The Forest Canto, Book of Forest in Mahabharata

Varāha - the boar form of Vishu

Varṇa - Colour

Varśā - Rain, Monsoon

Vasanta - Spring

Vāstu - Dwelling or house, Plot of land

Vastu dharma - Principles which guides the guidelines of construction

Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad - Book of guidelines for construction

Vāyu - Wind, God of Wind

Vedas - The ancient wisdom containing revelation of sages of India

Vedānta- Mīmāṃsā - Schools of thought, darsanas of Hinduism often related to each other.

Vedik - Ancient wisdom principles pertaining to Veda

Veṅkateśvara - One of the forms of lord Vishnu, the God of Tirupati

Vibhāva, Vibhāvanā - Stimulus, Cause provided by characters

Vidya - Knowledge

Vimarśa - Reflection, Self-reflection, Critique

Viraha - Waiting, Separation, Abandonment, realising love through separation

Virāla - A mythical creature, part lion and part other animals, a symbol of language or Vāc.

Viṣṇu - One of the major Hindu Gods and considered to be the preserver

Viśrānti - Repose, rest

Viṣṇudharmmotara Purāṇa One of the Legend which gives details of Lord Vishnu's teachings

Viśvarūpa Darśan Cosmic Vision of the Almighty

Vyabhicāribhāva - Passing moods, transient emotions

Vyañjanā - Theories of suggestion

Vyākaraṇa - Grammar

Vyāla -A mythical creature, part lion and part other animals, a symbol of language or Vāc.

Y

Yajña - Ritual sacrifice, Transformation, Worship, offering

Yajurveda - One of the vedas, ancient Vedic texts dealing with rituals and performance of Vedic sacrifices

Yakṣas - Male nature spirits or celestial beings often associated with nature in Indian mythology

Yakṣi - Female nature spirits or celestial beings often associated with nature in Indian mythology

Yaśoda - Foster mother of Lord Krishna

Yoga - union; union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul; any course which makes for such union

Yoga- Sāṃkhya - Schools of thought, darsanas of Hinduism often related to each other.

Yoga sūtra Bhāṣya - Commentaries in detail on the principles of Yoga

yonija/ayonija - Born from/ not born from the womb

Yudhiṣṭhira - One of the five Pandava Kings from the Mahabharata

Yugās - A concept of time in Hinduism, Relates to past, present and future and is an envisioning of large periods of time.

Glossary of Tamil Words

A

Aiṅkuruṉūṟu - One of the Sangam Poetry collection

Aintiṇai - Classification of Land into five divisions

ajapa naṭaṉam - A form of Dance of Lord Shiva

Akam - Inside mind-thoughts

Akanaṉūṟu - Sangam poetry which expresses inner thoughts

Akappaṭṭu - Sangam poetry which expresses inner thoughts

akattiṉ kaṇ - Looking inside the mind

Alamelu Maṅkā - Consort of Lord Venkateswara Lord of Seven Hills

Alārippu - an introductory Dance piece in Bharata Natya

Āṉantam - Happiness; also denotes endless

Aṉpu - Love-affection

Appar - One of the Saivaite saints

Artta maṇṭapam - Inner sanctuary where Lord/Deity is worshipped

Aṟivu - Knowledge

ātāra śruti - reference pitch of South Indian Classical (Carnatic) Music

Āticētaṉ - Adisesha, the serpent mount of Lord Vishnu

Atvaitam - Advaita Philosophy

Āvuṭaiyār - The circular or quadrangular receptacle upon which the Shivalingam is mounted.

B

Bhārata Tāy - Mother India

Bhārati Pātalkaḷ - Poems written by Tamil Poet Bharathiar

Bhāratiyār - Tamil Poet of 19th century

Bhūlōka kumara - the son of the Earth

Bhūlōka kumari - the daughter of the Earth

Brahmapuram, Piramāpuram - Place where Thiru Gnana Sambandhar sang his first song on Lord Siva

C

Camūka uṇarvu - Social/ Community consciousness

Caṅkam - Sangam period, a period in the history of Tamilnadu spanning from 600 BCE – c. 300 CE

Cempulapeyanīrar - A poet from the Sangam period.

Cidambaram /Citamparam - The place of the elevated consciousness. It is associated with Shiva Nataraja, the cosmic dancer

Ci̲r̲ruḷḷam - The inner heart-self

Cittar - A spiritually knowledgeable individual from the ancient Tamil tradition skilled in medicine

Citambalam /Ci̲r̲rampalam - From the Tamil root word Citu meaning consciousness. The ambience allowing the experience of a heightened/transcendent consciousness

Cuvaittatu - the experience of taste; powerful emotions and memories linked to taste

Cuntarar - The poet-saint from 8th century, one of the prominent nayanmars, or Siva devotee

Caiva ne̲ri - The principle that Worships Lord Siva as Supreme

Cīrka̲li - one of the place where Lord Siva Temple is there

Cuṭala̲n - Siva in his form as a dancer on the burial ground.

Cuntarar - Tamil Saint-poet from the 8th century

Cūrya tarica̲nam - The first glimpse of sunrise

Cūrya stuti - The prayers for sun-god.

Cuvai - Sense of Taste

E

E̲luttu - Alphabet, Letters

ellam uyirppittu - To bring alive all

G

Gopuram, Kopuram - Temple Tower

I

Iḷaṅkīraṉār - One of the Sangam Poet

Iṉitu - Sweetness

Iṉpam - Happiness

Iraicci - 'Iraicci (flesh) is the ancient poetic technique of suggestion. The setting through a distinct emotional link evokes another meaning which is not an intrinsic component of the situation described.

Irakkam - empathy

Icai Pēraṟiñar - One who is Master of Music

Iyalmoḻi - The natural native language that is closely related to place

Iyaṟkai - Nature

J

Jacaranda - a purple flower, It is genus of 49 species of flowering plants in the family Bignoniaceae

Jatīśvaram - a dance item in Bharatanatyam composed of pure dance sequences and is usually the second item in a traditional margam performance.

Jāvaḷīs - a light classical love song, a purely emotive dance item

K

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār - One of the Bhakti Poet who was Called as Mother by Lord Siva

Karuṇai - Compassion

Kaiyaṟu nilai - Utter helplessness

Kākkai - Crow

Kaḻāttalaiyār - Sangam poet, The poet sings of helplessness as King Peruñcēralathaṉ fasts to death facing North, Puranānūru 65

Kālatiṉ kūttu - Play of time

Kāḷi - Goddess, form of Sakti

Kaṇṭatu - the experience of the sense of vision

Karuppaṇṇa - A form of Village Deity

Karupporuḷ - inner meaning

Kaṭal - Sea

Kātal - Love

Kāṭci - Vision

Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉattuc Ceṅkaṇṇaṉar - A poet from the Sangam (Cankam) period

Kēṭṭatu - That which is experienced through the sense of hearing

Kōlams - Ritual floor diagrams

Koḻakoṭṭai - Food item, dumplings made in Tamil Nadu, South India

Koṟravai - The ancient Tamil Goddess of Victory, a form of Durga

Kōvēṅkai Peruṅkatavaṉar - a Sangam poet

Kuṅkumam/Kumkum - A red powder made by combining turmeric and lime, considered highly auspicious in the Indian tradition

Kuṟiñci - one of the poetic classifications of land in Tamil Culture where mountain is predominant ; a flower

Kuruvi - Sparrow, Small bird which flies in groups

M

mahā mauṉam - Great Silence - example Lord Dakshinamoorthy

Māl/ Tirumal - Lord Vishnu

Malai - Mountain

Maḻai - rain

Maṉam - Heart-mind, Interiority

Maṇam - Fragrance

Māṇikkavacakar - One of the four saivaite Poet who is believed to have merged with Lord Nataraja

Maṅgaḷam - Auspiciousness

Marapu - Lineage

Mārgam - Way

Māriyammā - A form of Sakthi-Mother worshipped

Marutam - One of the division of land in Tamil Culture predominantly seaside

Mey - Body; also denotes Truth

Mukti - Liberation from the cycle of birth and death; Merging with Supreme

Mullai - One of the division of land in Tamil Culture predominantly forest area

Muṟai - Procedure

Mutaṟporuḷ - The substance which came first in the Universe

N

Nalvaravē - Hearty Welcome

Nammāḻvār Tiruvāymoḻi, - Songs in praise of Lord Vishnu written by Nammalvar

Naṉṟu - Good

Nārāyaṇacami Aiyar - Writer par excellence and translator several ancient Sanskrit texts from the 19th century

Naṟṟiṇai - Classical Tamil poetic work; the first of the Eight Anthologies (Ettuthokai) from the Sangam period

Naṭṭuvaṉārs - one who sings and guides the Dancer

Neñcu - Heart Centre

Neṟi - Method-procedure

Nēcam - Affectionate relationship

Nekiḻcci - A deep emotionally connected state such as listening to music

Nekiḻvittatu - Event that moves the experiencer to tears

Neytal - One of the poetic division of land in Tamil Culture

Nikaḻntatu - aAn event that has already occured

Nilainiṟuttutal - To keep it in permanent balance

nintaṉai veṇpā - A form of poetry where the Deity is depreciated

Niṟaital - Completeness/Fullness

Nukarntatu - That which was experienced through the sense of olfaction; powerful emotions and memories linked to olfaction

O

Oḻukkam -Character

Ōṇāṉ - Garden Lizard

Ōrampōkiyar - Poet from the Sangam (Cankam) age.

P

Pacalai - Change in body pallor showing the separated state of longing between a couple

Padam - A dance item with purely emotive elements in Bharatanatyam

Pālai - One of the poetic division of land in Tamil Culture referring to arid regions

paḷḷi aṟai cēvai - Praying at the time of the Lord and his consort

Pāñjāli - Wife of five Pandava Princes

Pāṉuve - Sun, used in Bhartiyar's poem Surya Stuti

Pāpanāsam Sivan - Tamil Poet who wrote songs of devotion in recent times

Paritiyē - Sun, used in Bhartiyar's poem Surya Stuti

Parāśakti - Mother Goddess

Pācam - Emotional attachment

Pēruḷḷam - Transcended mind

Pēyaḻvar - One of the 12 Alwar Saints who wrote songs on Lord Vishnu

Pongamia - A species of tree in the pea family

Potuviyal - General order of things

Puṟam - Happenings in outside world

Puṟanānūṟu - Cankam Poetry describing the happenings in outside world

Purandara Dāsa - Great Saintly poet who wrote songs in common man's language

Pūtēvi - Mother earth as Goddess

Putumai peṇ - Term used by Bharathiar who sang on liberation of women

S

Sabdam - Sound, A dance item with purely emotive components in Bharatanatyam

Sruṅkāram - Expression of Beauty one of the Nava Rasas

T

Talaivaṉ - Hero

Talaivi - Heroine

Tamiḻ- Language, Beauty

Tamiḻ Caiva Cittānta

Tañcavūr - Place where the Great Shiva Temple is situted

Tanjore - Place where the Great Shiva Temple is situted

Tattuva pāṭal - Songs which expresses philosophy

Tayai - compassion

Taṉmai - nature, beingness

Tēy-piṟai -The 14 days after the full moon

Tillanā - A Dance item as part of Bharatanatyam. Usually the last item in the margam.

Toṭuṭaiya ceviyaṉ - The first words of first song written by Tiruñaṉa Campantar where he identifies Lord Siva wearing ear ornament

Tiṇai - A poetical classification of landscape based on flora and fauna, deities and social customs of a region allowing for the creation of metonymic tools for poetry.

Tiruñaṉa Campantar - One of the four saivite saints who started singing on Lord Shiva from the age of three

Tiruppati Veṅkaṭacalapati - Lord of Seven Hills

Tiruvaṉantapuram - Capital of Kerala State where Padmanabhaswamy Temple is situated

Tiruvārur - A pilgrimage site of Lord Siva's Temple; also the place of origin of Carnatic music because of the birth of great three musicians of Carnatic music (Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri - The trinity of Carnatic Music)

Tolkappiyam - Earliest Tamil Grammar Book

Tiruvalaṅkāṭu - A Temple city where Lord Siva dances in the cremation ground

Tiruvikramaṉ - Form of Lord Vishnu

Tūṇṭil -hook used for catching fish

Tuṇṭittal - Disconnecting

Tuṟai - port

U

Uḷḷam - heart-mind-soul, interiority

Uḷḷuṟai - inner meaning

Uḷḷuṟai uvamam - inner meaning supported by similar examples

Uṇarvu - feeling

Uṟavu - relationship

Uṭal - body

Uyir - Life force

Uṭampu - Body

ūḻi kūttu - When the entire universe is merged with the Creator, Dance of destruction

Uṭakku - an instrument used by Lord Siva during his dance

Uṇarntatu - Understanding

Uṟaital - Explaining/expressing a matter

uṟcava mūrtis -The images of deities taken in procession

Uripporuḷ - Human emotions in Sangam Poetry

Uvamai - similar examples

V

Vacaṉa kavitai - Poetry in prose form mainly written by Bharathiar

vaḷar-piṟai - the waxing phase of the moon

Varṇam - Colour; one of the Dance items in Bharatanatyam which brings both pure dance and emotive elements together.

Vattal kuḻampu - A sour side dish made with tamarind, with or without vegetables

Vēṅkai - A Tree with red color sap; also Tiger

Veṇmuḷai - sprout

Vīram - Courage

Viḻippu - Awareness

Viśvarūpam - Cosmic form e.g. Lord Krishna shows his original form to Arjuna

Y

Yāḻi - A mixed creature made up of lion, elephant, crocodile, horse etc, found in temple architecture

Yōkam - The process of becoming one with the Universal energy

Thesis Synopsis

The Porous Self - Crafting an Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness through Text, Image and Movement

"Being a planetary citizen does not need space travel. It means being conscious that we are part of the universe and of the earth. The most fundamental law is to recognise that we share the planet with other beings, and that we have a duty to care for our common home."

— Vandana Shiva, Oneness vs The 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom

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Thesis Synopsis

1. Short Background

In observing the fractured relationship that humans share with nature in the contemporary world, this inquiry seeks to find alternative ways to mend, heal and reconnect with the natural world[1] through the arts. The thesis uncovers ecological problems within the frame of the individual human self by seeking to turn our gaze inward, to fix our perceptions of nature rather than externalize the problems. Through artistic inquiry, the thesis zones into the idea of *porosity* as a principle of consciousness to rediscover our relationship with the natural world and our own selves within it by uncovering the physiological, psychological, cosmic, experiential and aesthetic aspects of *porosity*.

This thesis locates itself in the fields of artistic practice and aesthetics at the juncture of ecological consciousness, environmental ethics, eco-philosophy and pedagogy, with specific focus on Indian systems of knowledge. I use text, movement and image to research, interpret and address questions of form, improvisational technique, creative process and, transitions in consciousness.

2. Brief Literature Review

"I have experienced a feeling of oneness with landscape and other beings over the years. It remained a profoundly meaningful and personal experience from which my connection with the natural world deepened over the years. It led me to an interior

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[1] Nature and the natural world as defined here take into account all worlds that are more-than-human (David Abram 1996) and include the elements and landscapes, seascapes, the variety of beings that inhabit all these spaces on the earth as well as cosmic spaces and forces.

space where I could not completely distinguish myself from the natural world and this elusive sense of being, consciousness and nature of experiences, I place under the term *porosity* in this thesis."[2]

The literature review in the thesis is covered in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 focuses on literature review with reference to ideas of *porosity.* It contextualizes *porosity* by drawing from philosophy, aesthetics, sciences and cultures across the world. Chapter 2 provides literature review with positionality, varied eco-related fields, Cartesian and anthropocentric attitudes versus relational and multicentric frameworks. Chapter 2 also draws out multiple frameworks positioning *porosity* in transdisciplinarity and draws out key concepts in Indian philosophy and aesthetics that guide the thesis. This brief literature review draws from these multiple studies to provide an overarching understanding to the key ideas in the thesis.

Anthropocentric attitudes have largely dictated modern sciences, arts and the ever-increasing materialistic cultures of contemporary times. However, traditional cultures see man embedded within a cosmic order and in relationship to life (Saraswati & Vatsyayan 1995). Systems view of thinking, "Biophilia" hypothesis that showcases our relationship to other life forms are emerging concepts in the scientific world view.

However, the shift in cultural worldviews is yet to occur in synergy with these emerging concepts (Wilson, 1984). The Deep Ecology movement resonates with the

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[2] Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

idea of *porosity* (Naess, 1986). David Abram uses phenomenological frameworks that look at the 'intuitive, sensuous communion with the earth' and looks into oral cultures and shamanism to build his framework (Abram, 1996). Nancy Tuana foregrounds the idea of 'viscous porosity' and points out that to study the natural separate from humanities and social sciences is 'stultifying' and calls for an ontology of interactionism (Tuana, 2008). Charles Taylor discusses the pre modern self as a "porous self" where the sense of the boundary between the self and the other was more open and allowed for an open flow between diverse beings to shape and affect both the physical and psychical worlds of a person (Taylor, 2007).

Poets, artists and writers have often embraced the *porous* world by delving into metaphysical spaces, sci-fi or mythical spaces, transcendental and romantic worldviews in order to give form to their own experiences of communion with the natural world. Asian cultures, Native American, African and other aboriginal cultures and with specific understanding of healers and shamans, have had a very different worldview which inherently embraces porosity between human and the natural world in diverse layers. While my work will look at a broad survey of these cultures, I will specifically look into traditional Indian worldviews.

Some such examples of moments of *porosity* as described by different authors/ poets are given below.

"I was all alone on the beach looking for pictures, when suddenly it happened. As dimensions of time and space vanished, I slowly dissolved in the fathomless blue. Something confined within the narrow shell of my mind and body was hurled into a whirlpool of ecstasy." – Ashvin Mehta, Gifts of Solitude

" I shall meet silence with silence under this sky. I shall become one with night,

clasping the earth to my breast." – Tagore, Gifts of Solitude

The Kaivalya Upaniṣad (Verse 10) emphasizes that "By seeing the self in all beings and all beings in the self, one goes to Brahman, not by any other cause: there is no other way to liberation." (Radhakrishnan 2012, 929)

"Human skin is porous; the world flows through you. Your senses are large pores that let the world in. By being attuned to the wisdom of your senses, you will never become an exile in your own life, an outsider lost in an external spiritual place that your will and intellect, have constructed." (O'Donohue 1999)

"What we appear to have, then, in this relationship between land and Indian people is an absence of what we in the Western tradition take to be fixed boundaries between ourselves and others, and between inside and outside worlds. That sort of fixed boundary simply is not present in these statements. Their bodies are the land and the land is their bodies, is their ancestors and their kin, the other life forms." (Dunsmore on Native Americans 1997, 49)

Aspects/ Concepts of *porosity* that emerge across cultures from each of the above reflections by different people include but are not limited to: Dissolution of self and oneness, rights of nature, interwoven notions of being without the nature-culture divide, transpersonal, open boundaries between self and other, embodied experiences, interdependence, co-evolution, reciprocal relationships, self that is not delimited by personal ego, interactionism, intersubjective experiences, self as a network of relationships, essence of being, openness, vanishing of intellectual conceptual structures.

2.1. *Porosity* and the artist

Porosity as a principle is one of the ways that allows us to experience our environment as a related whole, rather than as a divisive multiplicity. Our sensorial interactions with the world are continuously an exchange of energies, whether tactile, tacit or imperceptible.

"The enunciation of the absolute kinship of nature with man masks the most important advance in the whole history of Indian thought" (Hiriyanna, 1954). Further, the intertwining of the *kinship between ethics and aesthetics* (Hiriyanna, 1954) in Indian thought is another critical framework that allows us to unravel and inquire into art, artist and aesthetics within ecological consciousness.

An inherent understanding of multiplicity, oneness and possibilities of transmutation between forms and beings allows for an inquiry into *porosity* within Indian categories of thought (Vatsyayan 1992, 33-34). Further as Ananda Coomaraswamy articulates in his book, *Transformation of Nature in Art,* the ability of the Asian/Indian artist to "perceive all things imaged in himself" further allows him to practice a *porous* principle of consciousness (2014, 55 -56).

Notions of an unfettered, unbounded cosmic self that was at one with the universe guided the artistic processes and creative principles of the Indian arts and aesthetics. (Boner, Sarma & Baumer 1996) The artist in India is synonymous with *Prajāpati* (the creator). Within the Indian tradition there is a philosophical acceptance that art creation is 'sacrosanct,' and the focus of inquiries has largely been in relation to aesthetic experience rather than the artistic process itself (Dehejia, 1996). 'The

essence of creativity or artistic inspiration is termed *pratibhā*' and 'signifies a burst of enlightenment' (Dehejia, 1996). The *Kāśmīr Śaivite* literature articulates human creativity as an act born of bliss in re-enacting the nature of the universal consciousness (Dehejia, 1996).

No one system or tradition of human knowledge has an answer. Even as every system, politically positions itself, including the wisdom traditions, we only get fragmented and divisive viewpoints, practices and intellectual ideas to resolve our tenuous relationship with the earth. In these journeys, how does one arrive at a point, which is a revolution in consciousness, both individual and collective?

India is a country of contradictions. With a strong ecological sensibility, all the thought traditions in the country have provided strong guidelines for local, traditional conservation beliefs (Gadgil and Guha, 2014). The complexity of the impact of industrial growth and a global economy in an ecologically diverse and sociologically multifaceted nation is intense, and works at many levels. (Gadgil and Guha, 2014).

While so far we have looked at the Indian worldview in relation to some of the ideas in Western science, it would be amiss to leave out the rich ideas, research and thought traditions that have emerged out of Western science as well. In Rachel Carson's words, one finds an echo of the Indian notion of *ānanda,* transcendental joy in her articulation of Beauty and a sense of wonder (Carson and Pratt 1965). Further still, her writings have a lyrical quality to them while staying true to rigorous scientific research providing a thoughtful, reflective and exacting paradigm of creative and scientific writing that is aesthetic and poetic.

Likewise similar to the idea of *ṛta* and the cosmic order, new articulations of Ecological Design extend the idea of creating in line with the laws of the natural world (Orr 2002, 104).

E.O.Wilson's articulation of 'Biophilia' also gives a new frame of ecological thinking that is located within the scientific realm. It permits scientific thought and while resident in rationality, allows for articulating emotional connections to nature (1984).

Steven Wise, an animal protection lawyer has been working in the area of animal rights for twenty years. In his book *Drawing the Line,* he argues for the sentience of living beings, the questions of what do we morally consider as sentience and to which beings we can accord it is a careful discussion that arises out of how we can define sentience scientifically, looking at elements of intelligence, cognition and emotion (2002).

Several movements that have risen to talk about ecology and ethics and ecopsychology, further enrich the Western notions of nature consciousness that come closer to the ancient traditional ones. Hence, while there are several differences in beliefs, approaches and observations, the Indian tradition and the modern scientific tradition have much to offer to the dialog of ecological consciousness in different ways.

Likewise, the artistic movements, particularly landscape art and wildlife art in the West also have rich dialogues to offer to this conversation. The scientific exactitude of world's most renowned bird painter, William T. Cooper, in a realistic style inquires into the laws of nature too (Cooper, Personal Website). Of great interest to me is also wildlife artist, Robert Bateman, and his thoughts on representing nature realistically

(Bateman, Personal Website). While these thoughts may vary greatly from the formal qualities and representations of traditional Indian art, in here also lies a quest to appreciate the laws of nature at different levels. Hence, the inquiries into form can be debated and discussed from diverse viewpoints allowing for rich exchange of ideas between diverse notions.

The global movement for environmental and ecological art is gaining greater momentum currently and is emerging as a field of theoretical study as well (greenarts.org). Largely driven by individual artists or small communities, these movements look at the role of art in environmental dialogues at many levels that include drawing out the interrelationships between nature and humans from frames of sustainability, wilderness, aesthetics, equity, exploratory, educational, informative, recycling and upcycling among others.

The qualities/ properties of *porosity* that emerge in these insights and intuitions of diverse people indicate permeation, dissolution, transformation, transmutation, interweaving, integration, amalgamation and embodiment. For most of the people/ communities who work with these concepts of resonance with nature, these concepts form the basis of an ethical relationship, action, principle or guideline to their relationship and engagement with the natural world.

Positionality

Porosity as defined within the thesis is only considered for artistic practice, and as a framework for aesthetic ecological consciousness that emerges through artistic practice.

The author uses only poetry, visual art and movement to make her case and the styles of her personal work as showcased and discussed in the thesis are bound within specific criteria. Given the vast possibilities of how artistic practice can be defined by individual practitioners, and particularly eco-art practitioners, the author offers discussions on what porosity as a framework could offer practitioners by opening her practice for deliberation.

The evolution of the conceptual vocabulary for theorizing porosity and developing methodological frameworks for porosity uses several positions/categories/ lens. These are articulated and challenges and limitations are discussed. The position in the thesis values plurality and a range of dialogues across space, time and cultures.

The author has considered the 'traditional' worldview (Which includes Vedic and Agamic, Bhakti and a combination of other systems that include the aesthetic traditions) from the lived practice and living heritage frames in relation to the author's own upbringing and experience. The thesis takes the position that these traditions that are continuous living heritages for many people, are in themselves also native voices and one of the voices of plurality that must be considered for their epistemic and ontic value as knowledge traditions and not always/ only in relation to the socio-political critique. The author acknowledges the importance of reading Vedic/ Agamic texts through the lens of privilege, however is cautious in defining the entire body of work evolved over millennia only through such a lens, as diverse people have contributed to many of these texts.

While the author acknowledges the critiques, and alternative readings of the traditional texts cited through the thesis, she also brings out the alterity of the 'traditional voice' from the perspective that is internal to the lived practice and has the interiority of the lived practice.

The third argument for positionality that the author takes is that of artistic research and subjectivity and autobiographical work as a key frame of research. It is through this autobiographical reasoning of both past events and present experiences that the author develops a conceptual vocabulary partially, through embodied, contemplative and reflective practices and expands these through both cultural intuition and theoretical research.

Lastly, the East-West differences in ontology and epistemology are not straightforward distinctions as across the world there are several melting points, or local cultures that are enmeshed, or have different worldviews from the dominant paradigm. Hence it is a complex layer to reveal. Here, the Western frameworks discussed are mostly those that arise from a Cartesian worldview and the differences/ similarities in ontologies and epistemologies of dominant paradigms in both East, (particularly India with reference to the thesis) and West.

3. Definition of the Problem

The aim of this thesis is to look at the ecological crisis through the lens of the self to understand our alienation from the natural world. Using 'form' as a lens to investigate, where form is the physical body of any being as well as an artistic output, this thesis looks at human notions that divide us from the more-than-human world and

limits us to the boundaries of our physical body. This work engages with artistic approaches to break open notions of the body and to redefine notions of self. Indian and largely Asian aesthetics rooted in philosophical and mystical traditions that engage with oneness and duality in a variety of creative forms, inform these approaches.

While diverse relational ontologies have been proposed from plural cultural frameworks and current eco-psychology, ecosophy frameworks, my research proposes that using *porosity*[3] as a principle of consciousness alters how we relate with the natural world and redefines notions of what we perceive as reality. The intention is to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for building intrinsic ecological consciousness through artistic practice rooted in *porosity* as principle. As an extension, this approach questions our current notions of creativity.

The central argument of the thesis is that, notions of self alter notions of reality and consequently alter subjective experiences of the natural world. The work will focus on subjective *porous* experiences and the importance of transforming the self through artistic practice. Hence, a subjective approach to inquiring into relationships between self and nature is critical to how we define creativity within a frame of eco-ethics. Additionally, cultural epistemologies and ontologies are critical to notions of reality and ways of relating as well as experiencing self and natural world in any experience. A theory that is based on transforming the self, using artistic practice, then argues for a personal self-reflective auto-ethnographic approach as its core-methodology to

[3] The words *Porous Self, Porosity* and *Porous* have been italicized throughout the thesis, as they are used and evolved by the author to interpret a particular conceptual category in ecological consciousness.

make visible dilemmas, choices, arguments and cultural paradigms to readers. This approach is emphasized as critical to mapping individual journeys into ecological consciousness as essential to understanding the complexity of narratives involved in personal transformation and choice making. As a secondary approach, closer studies of creative practices by different artists, both Indian and other, traditional Indian arts and aesthetics, philosophical and mystical frameworks are also closely studied to develop conceptual vocabulary, adapt and reinterpret traditional ideas in a contemporary frame and emerge new methodologies for artistic practice through *porosity* as a category.

4. Objectives and Scope of Research Work

This thesis stems from one fundamental question: How do we turn our gaze inward to fix our perceptions of nature and our own consciousness rather than externalize the problems? I further extend that question as an artist and ask myself: What would it mean to turn inward to resolve our relationship with the earth and the cosmos through unraveling our shared bond of creativity? This question in the light of my experiences of *porosity* turns into another pertinent inquiry that shapes this thesis: **How does experiencing oneself as a *porous* being impact one's ecological consciousness, artistic inquiry and creative practice? How does artistic inquiry impact *porosity* and consciousness in turn?**

This thesis looks to address the gaps towards crafting an ecological self and consciousness in four areas, by investigating what are the aspects we must address to build a conscious relationship with the natural world:

- Perception and Worldmaking: using processes of reflection and contemplation

- The Limits of Form- Self and body: using processes of personal transformation
- Language and Expression: through relearning and reimagining articulation
- Aesthetics, Creativity and Making: through processes of creative expression/ action through artistic practice

The first one looks at epistemological concerns, the second one more at ontological positions, the third and fourth concern both articulation and action that rise from the first two categories.

The simple premise of this research is that the physical form of the human body in its gross or subtle states; physical body or mind, is not its boundary in relationship to self or life in all its other forms.

The thesis takes a two-fold approach to practice:

i. A conscious active engagement with *porosity* as a principle of consciousness and practice through the arts – Text, Image and Movement.
ii. An active inquiry into the nature of artistic form in such a state of consciousness.

The thesis

i. Discusses notions of self and reality and the human form as a perceived boundary between self and other, introducing an experiential framework of *porosity* as an alternative notion of self.
ii. Approaches consciousness as an active principle that has the potential to transform in terms of the parameters that are set.
iii. Examines cosmological consciousness in Indian thought traditions and investigates the mental models in philosophy, ethics and aesthetics that allow

for new paths of inquiry into the natural world in resonance with the framework of *porosity*.

iv. Questions current relevance of these models and evolves transdisciplinary frameworks that can engage with the contentious space of environment and conservation as understood and practiced today, and in relation to cross-cultural frameworks drawn from Indian aesthetic, philosophical and mystic traditions. These frameworks then root themselves in the critique of 'creativity' by engaging with ethics and justice for life to engage in and then analyze practice.

v. Uses artistic practice – 'Text, Image and Movement' as method to investigate and inquire into tools, approaches and aesthetic theories that inform, influence or illuminate creative processes. Observes patterns and evolution of work to study how redefining self in *porosity* can impact one's ecological consciousness.

vi. Advocates for a broad open framework of artistic/ aesthetic practice that is personal and individualized while rooted in eco-ethics, as integral to developing an intrinsic ecological consciousness (that then informs creativity in diverse disciplines or everyday engagement).

vii. Notions of creativity in intrinsic ecological consciousness/ *porous* consciousness are further investigated and extended within the frames of 'self', 'being' and 'presence' as meaningful action and central to eco-ethics.

viii. Postulates a methodological framework for artistic practice nested in a framework of *porosity*.

5. Research Methodology

Three methods are used in the thesis to develop a research methodology to unravel different aspects of a methodological framework of *porosity*. They are as below.

1. Transdisciplinary studies
   i. Integrated study of diverse disciplines of an essentially trandisciplinary practice
      - This section develops a transdisciplinary argument for positioning *porosity* at the intersection of ecological consciousness, environmental aesthetics, artistic practice, environmental ethics and philosophy and juxtaposes Indian cultural paradigms with Western epistemologies to evolve positions of research and practice.
   ii. Using Kapila Vatsyayan's methods of study and applying them to personal practice.
      - This section uses Vatsyayan's methods of understanding Indian art in an interdisciplinary and integrated manner. By using Indian philosophical and aesthetic frameworks that are pervasive and enjoy a (relatively) continuous tradition of practice, insights are drawn from understanding relationships between environment and creativity in Indian thought. These insights are then applied to develop as well as analyze personal practice.

2. Tracing lineage
   i. Working with intuition.
   ii. Study of poetry, literature, visual art, *yoga* and movement practices in India.
3. Practice and artistic research

This section draws out the challenges and limitations of artistic research and specific methods of practice, journaling, annotation, analysis, and reflection that have been evolved in this thesis.

6. Contributions

This thesis looks at how artistic processes can unravel a deep primordial self, embedded in nature consciousness as integral to creativity in our contemporary world. In that, it looks to redefine – art, artist, artistry, artistic process, aesthetics and creativity in the realm of a dynamic, integral and *porous* ecological consciousness. By working closely with nature, communities and self, I unravel artistic processes and methodologies that probe into how connecting with nature through the *porosity* principle informs our sense of creativity and identity.

This research extends the fields of eco-aesthetics, ecological ethics and eco-philosophy by looking at the intersections of personal artistic practice and ecological consciousness. By connecting creativity and ecological consciousness in an artistic-philosophical frame through Eastern aesthetics and contemplative traditions, the proposed research adds a critical dimension to the conversations on ethics of art, design and ecology. It also allows for unflattening of ecological perspectives by adding rich cultural world-views to the dialogues. Within the realm of art, aesthetics and artistry, it questions our current paradigms of creativity and calls for a thoughtful and contemplative mode of creating in sync with the cosmic order of the natural world.

The second more obvious contribution is the perspectives of a contemporary artist framing her work within the tradition Indian aesthetic philosophy, and the cultural-spiritual intersection of subjective practice placed in close interpretation of traditional philosophies in juxtaposition with other contemporary frameworks. Using the lens of *porosity*, the contributions of the thesis have six aspects.

i. Nature of self as *porous*- *Porosity* as function of *porous*. Bringing awareness of *porosity* back to self and thereby to investigating materiality, consciousness and creativity in a framework of resonance.

ii. Evolving a transdisciplinary framework to study *porosity* looking at cross-cultural concepts, categories and challenges.

iii. Theoretical frameworks of *porosity* as a principle of consciousness.

iv. Indian frameworks – aesthetic, mystic, philosophical and their intersections with ecological consciousness in a contemporary[4] framework.

v. Practitioners framework – Not a critique/ commentator's framework, but an immersive inquiry into the traditional as well as contemporary models of practice informed by intuition, as well as contemporary application and artistic research.

vi. Redefining creativity in an ecological yet universal frame through *porosity* as a principle.

[4] Contemporary is used as relevant to our times and not in terms of contemporary theory.

7. Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into four parts

7.1. Part 1: Introduction

Chapters 1 and 2 form the core of introduction.

- Chapter 1 provides an overview of *porosity*.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the ecological crisis and scenario today, as well as the author's positionality.

7.2. Part 2: Theoretical Framework

- Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 form the core of the theoretical framework
- Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and methods.
- Chapter 4 evolves a transdisciplinary framework that is cross-cultural and cross disciplinary.
- Chapter 5 traces cultural lineage in artistic practice.
- Chapter 6 investigates the idea of body and form.

7.3. Part 3: Practitioner's Framework

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 and 10 form the core of the Practitioner's framework

- Chapter 7 is a survey and study of visual art and image as practice.
- Chapter 8 is a study of text based practices particularly *Caṅkam* poetry and the work of poet Bharatiyar.
- Chapter 9 is a survey and study of movement and dance as practice, looking closely at *Bharatanāṭyam* and the Dance of *Śiva* with a close study of different

practitioners in contemporary *Bharatanāṭyam*, contemporary and modern dance and dance in *Tamiḻ* Cinema.

7.4. Part 4: Application, Analysis and Discussion

Chapters 11, 12 AND 13 form the core of application, analysis and discussion

- Chapter 11 takes up line as an artistic element and an investigation into drawing birds. Using the framework and methods of *porosity*, bird and line shows both application and analysis of how *porosity* works in an artistic inquiry.
- Chapter 12 develops a system for journaling *porosity* using Indian categories. Following the inner journey of *porosity,* this non-linear, yet linear journaling, allows for the unfolding of consciousness in artistic practice through Indian categories.
- Chapter 13 is the conclusion that opens up the dilemmas and conflicts while summarizing the findings of the thesis.

8. Outputs of Research Work

The thesis document has looked at transdisciplinary inquiries into aesthetics, art, Indian philosophy (Predominantly Hindu), ecology on one end, and contemporary artistic practice that delves into ecological consciousness on the other. The three outputs include (a) Research documentation of theories and practices that enfold core ideas of *porosity*, (b) Making visible - practice as research and annotated practice documents,

(c) Body of work, which will include performative aspects, text and image.

9. Accepted Papers/ Chapters/ Conference Publication

1. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya and Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram. 2020. 'Embodied Landscape Language: Tamil Poetry and Aesthetics'. *Indian Literature Journal* (Accepted for Nov-Dec 2020, Publication postponed from April 2020 due to the Pandemic), New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
2. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184
3. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2019. "Creativity as Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness." In *Art, Ecojustice, and Education: Intersecting Theories and Practices*, edited by Raisa Foster, Jussi P. Mäkelä, and Rebecca A. Martusewicz, 152-165. New York: Routledge.

   Chapter Publication: The chapter discusses notions of cultural creativity and in a practice-based approach inquires into intrinsic ecological consciousness through her poetry.
4. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. "Bird and Line: Tracing Indian aesthetics to find an 'Ecosophy' of personal art practice". The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy (Accepted for December 2020) Canada

10. Conclusion

This thesis focused on developing a methodological framework for Eco-art practice and crafting of ecological consciousness through the lens and principle of the *Porous*

Self. A set of ten non-linear methods has been developed as broad open framework of *porosity* that can be practiced by different artists.

As a theory of consciousness, *porosity* opens up a relational paradigm within which a new world of engagement with ourselves and the natural world opens up. A transdiciplinary theory of consciousness across Indian categories of consciousness and concepts of ecological consciousness as a field has been emerged through careful study. Extended as a theory of aesthetics of engagement, experience and practice, *porosity* brings important questions to the field of arts.

Practice of *porosity* through the arts has been theorized in detail. Practice starts with aesthetics of engagement, and includes relational experiences, research with material, form, tools, techniques, methods and consciousness, use of aesthetic devices and artistic directions of creative expression. All these aspects must be treated together as a whole for a disciplined and insightful practice to evolve.

Theorization of consciousness as artistic practice has been detailed out. The method of practice towards eco-art that I arrive at emerges through Indian categories. Each step is a set of actions that constitute Reflection, Meditative Practice, Heightened awareness, Aesthetic perceptiveness, Translation into form, Relishing, and Gratitude for life. The entwining of ethics and aesthetics in Indian thought provides the required inner compass for these actions.

To have an intrinsic ecological consciousness in an informed and insightful way, arts and aesthetics can offer powerful tools alongside philosophy, ethics and mysticism in

an entwined whole. When reductionist and holistic paradigms work in tandem focus on what they have to offer each other, rather than feeling limited and arguing out their differences, a stronger and wiser human culture becomes possible.

The significance of the *porous self* in artistic processes and in relation to ecology and consciousness, bring new directions to artistic research. With its central focus on classical Indian tradition, philosophy and aesthetics, the inquiry into *porosity* also makes valuable contribution to adding voice in artistic research, which is otherwise predominantly euro-centric at this point. The thesis has focused on developing a conceptual vocabulary based on the theory of *porosity,* enabling new studies and further research in this area.

Porosity as a relational theory of consciousness that can be intentionally chosen and practiced opens a new space in environmental ethics, philosophy and aesthetics. *Porosity* brings us back to the heart of aesthetic responsiveness, the *sahṛdaya*, who finds intimacy in resonance with life. It is a revolution in consciousness that is much needed at a time of ecological, as well as social and political crisis. In that sense, *porosity* is as much a political inquiry as it is a metaphysical and aesthetic one.

A new beginning…

The porous self, *uḷḷam*, then emerges through and expresses itself in five simple principles for me

Play: *Līlā* – the lovely play of life.

Love and Compassion: *Śṛṅgāra, Nēcam, Aṉpu, Śānti, Karuṇai* – as a root of all relationship.

Artistic Practice: *Sādhanā* – Meditations of celebration.

Righteous action: *Svadharma* - Reflective intrinsic action

Time: *Kāla* – Reflections on living and dying

Even if one were to leave behind the complex methodological frameworks designed for porosity, these five principles offer a free frame for intuition to guide the artist in emerging everyday practices that are porous.

Porosity is about gentleness of the human spirit. And gentleness is perhaps most difficult because it is so fragile and yet so full of strength.

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List of Publications

Accepted Papers/ Chapters/ Conference Publication

1. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya and Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram. 2020. 'Embodied Landscape Language: Tamil Poetry and Aesthetics'. *Indian Literature Journal* (September, Postponed due to the Pandemic).New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi

   (A section of chapter 8 of the thesis. It is a study of Tamil poetry from the Sangam period, later poets and tamil film poetry to trace the connections of landscape language within the language and its cultural framework.)

2. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20, https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

   (An edited version of Chapter 10 of the thesis that looks closely at various principles of practice through the framework of *porosity*.)

   JAR Is indexed in (The European Research in Humanities Index (ERHI), CrossRef)

3. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2019. "Creativity as Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness." In *Art, Ecojustice, and Education: Intersecting Theories and Practices*, edited by Raisa Foster, Jussi P. Mäkelä, and Rebecca A. Martusewicz, 152-165. New York: Routledge.

   Chapter Publication: The chapter discusses notions of cultural creativity and in a

practice-based approach inquires into intrinsic ecological consciousness through her poetry.

4. Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. "Bird and Line: Tracing Indian aesthetics to find an 'Ecosophy' of personal art practice". The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy (Accepted for December 2020), Canada.

   (An edited version of chapter 11 of the thesis. This chapter takes up line as an element and studies it through the Indian aesthetic framework while applying the approach to bird watching, sketching and painting drawing out an ecosophy for art practice that blends Eastern philosophy and aesthetics with being a naturalist and a contemporary eco-art practitioner.)

Conferences Presented in

1. Title: ***Consciousness, Creativity and Transdisciplinarity: Personal practice as research in the arts***

   This paper looked closely at the challenges and possibilities of artistic research and how institutions in India can support and extend the conversation on artistic research. Conference on Research in Art, Design and Culture, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore. December 21-22, 2018.

2. Title: ***'Porosity and Transdisciplinarity'*** - Invited talk that showcased the diversity of my work in education, educational design, social and environmental design, art, writing, bookmaking, children's books and others and discussing how it is possible to cross disciplinary boundaries to create new paradigms of thought and work and how the pathways have led to my current doctoral work.

Looking Beyond - Confluence of Art and Design: National Seminar on Art and Design at the Department of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai. 25-26th September 2018

3. Title: **Art practice as transformation and equilibrium *(Yajña and Hṛdayaviśrānti)***

   This paper and presentation focused on how artistic practices drawing upon traditional aesthetic methods are meditative and contemplative and hold the same goals as meditation. Looking closely into the two terms *Yajña and Hṛdayaviśrānti* in traditional artistic thought as well as personal practice, how arts offer a different language of meditation was discussed.

   Meditation in the Age of Anxiety A Symposium led by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology and Garden of Samadhi Mind Centre. Bangalore. April 14, 2017

4. Title: ***Play: Pedagogy & Knowledge systems- What does it take to be human?***

   "Play of Knowledge Systems – Pedagogy", Design Dialogues - Curated by Ishita Shah and Rahul Bisht at *The Courtyard*

   The role of arts in education at large, and environmental education in particular were discussed in this presentation.

5. Title: **Bird and Line- Tracing Indian aesthetics to find an 'Ecosophy' of personal art practice (Partial paper from chapter/ journal submission was presented)**

Work in Progress Symposium Saturday August 10, 2019. Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology

6. Additional Paper/ Conference Publication as second author

Ilango, A.V. and Srivi Kalyan. 2018. "The Loom and the Pot" in *Creativity and Cognition in Art and Design.* Edited by Aneesha Sharma, Jamuna Rajeswaran, Bloomsbury India, (Publication of conference proceedings, ICCCAD, the first International Conference on Creativity and Cognition in Art and Design, organized by NID and NIMHANS)

(Co-authored with Artist A.V. Ilango, this publication draws from the book "Coming Home to the Earth: Space. Line. Form co-authored also with the artist. It looks at how artists can awaken the 'cosmic space' within themselves using space, line and form as a scaffold. The intuitive faculty of artists can take them through a journey transcending the body, mind, emotion and intellectual spaces discovering the creative nature of the universe.)

Thesis Overview by Chapter

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: *Porosity*

This chapter is focused on unraveling the idea of *porosity*[5] through personal experiences, literature review and personal artistic practice as well as a research inquiry. It will discuss *'The Porous Self'*[6] *and 'Porosity'* as a particular framework for an ecological self and consciousness. It further develops to discuss the gaps within developing an ecological self and consciousness. A possible model for practice using *porosity* is hypothesized.

Chapter 2: Mapping Positions: Personal-Political, Artistic and Environmental

Starting with a positionality statement, the author's positions on tradition, socio-political aspects of environment and conservation, plurality and choices of textual traditions, cultural positions of epistemology and ontology are discussed.

This chapter sets the context to understand the separation of human and natural worlds, and the need for a relational approach to understand the nuances of the environmental crisis at large. A short survey of changing ideas across several disciplines provides a glimpse into how 'relationship' has emerged as a key lens for engaging in environmental actions. The need for crafting an ecological self and creating a different understanding of human relationships with the natural world

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[5] The words *Porous Self*, *Porous and Porosity* have been italicized throughout the thesis, as they are used and evolved by the author to interpret a particular conceptual category in ecological consciousness

[6] ibid

through an approach of multicentrism, pluralism, and cultural worldviews is emphasized.

Crafting new relationships and an ecological self as well as ecological consciousness would require attitudes, methods and lenses that transform our current understanding of relationships with the natural world. Keeping the position of an artist-practitioner, the gaps that need to be addressed while crafting an ecological self and the corresponding consciousness are structured through four key areas

- Reflection and contemplation on - Perception and Worldmaking,
- Personal transformations by reframing - The Limits of Form: Self and body,
- Articulation through finding appropriate - Language and Expression,
- Creative expression/ action through practice - Aesthetics, Creativity and Making

This chapter leads onto the third chapter on methodology

PART 2: THEROETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This chapter discusses three methods used to unravel different aspects of a methodological framework of *porosity.* They are as below.

1. Transdisciplinary studies

i. Integrated study of diverse disciplines of an essentially trandisciplinary practice

This section develops a transdisciplinary argument for positioning *porosity* at the intersection of ecological consciousness, environmental aesthetics, artistic practice, environmental ethics and philosophy and juxtaposes Indian cultural

paradigms with Western epistemologies to evolve positions of research and practice.

ii. Using Kapila Vatsyayan's methods of study and applying them to personal practice.

This section uses Vatsyayan's methods of understanding Indian art in an interdisciplinary and integrated manner. By using Indian philosophical and aesthetic frameworks that are pervasive and enjoy a (relatively) continuous tradition of practice, insights are drawn from understanding relationships between environment and creativity in Indian thought. These insights are then applied to develop as well as analyze personal practice.

2. Tracing lineage

iii. Working with intuition

iv. Study of poetry, literature, visual art, yoga and movement practices in India

3. Practice and artistic research

i. Field studies and journaling

ii. Reflective documentation and annotated practice

A possibly hypothesis for practice as well as *porosity* as a principle of consciousness have been discussed in the first chapter. Theory and practice work hand in hand, each informing the other at different points of time. As discussed in the first chapter on *porosity*, my experiences, encounters and the artistic practice that emerged from these have been intuitive over the years. A lot of it also was strengthened by my study of world and Indian art history, Indian aesthetics and philosophy providing confidence and direction to the evolution of my work.

Chapter 4: Designing a Transdisciplinary Framework and Theory of *Porosity*

When drawing connections across epistemologies and cross-cultural frameworks that are incommensurate, two key aspects are to be kept in mind

1. How does one define a transdisciplinary conceptual/ philosophical framework?

2. In what ways does one evolve tools and methods of practice?

The challenges are first laid out at the different levels and across different categories.in which one must find a structure for transdisciplinarity.

Then a transdisciplinary framework of *porosity* is evolved across several categories leading to a transdisciplinary theory of *porosity*.

Chapter 5: Tracing Lineage

My work is an inquiry into transience and permeability to craft an intrinsic ecological consciousness using *porosity* as principle and practice. In this chapter, I emphasize the importance of the practitioner's frame to inquire into consciousness through artistic practice. I argue for the intuitive lineage of cultural memories that become available to individual artists in their practice and the need to inquire into practitioner's frames as a valid methodology for investigating consciousness. I use text and image to research, interpret and address questions of form, improvisational technique and transitions in consciousness.

Chapter 6: Self and Body

Chapter 6 develops the premise of the thesis by locating the *porous self* within the definitions of self to unravel the boundaries that we set for ourselves.

a. Body, Self and Boundaries

The body and self in phenomenological, aesthetic and ecological traditions is surveyed quickly to provide an international contextualization to the inquiry. A

more detailed inquiry into notion of *ātman* and *śarīra*, *uyir* and *mey* are taken up from the Indian traditions. Body and self as a premise for environmental aesthetics will be explored. Drawing from broad philosophical frameworks and then extending these frameworks to position them within the arts will conclude the positioning of the body and self in relation to environment.

b. *Porosity* in and through the body.

c. *Porosity* in subtle and gross body framework.

d. The second aspect this chapter deals with is the problem of form. What constitutes form and the manifestation into form. Looking at the body as a culmination into form, as well as the artistic form in tandem with each other, the chapter interrogates into form and being as relevant to *porosity.*

PART 3: PRACTITIONER'S FRAMEWORK

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Image, Text and Movement

The next three chapters - Image, Text and Movement consider questions of practice, build on stylistic, symbolic, conceptual and textual analysis of works of different artists, writers and dancers in a quest for languages of expression for *porosity*.

The choice of images, dancers, and poets/ poems are based on the following factors

i. Styles, forms that have influenced my work and artists whose work has inspired or influenced my work.

ii. Show strong evidences of *porosity*, principles of *porosity* or methods and tools relevant to *porosity.*

iii. Show methods/ tools that are relevant to transformation of consciousness.

iv. Show evidence of ecological consciousness as a subject of artistic inquiry and practice.

In Image – I detail out

- Principles of transformation of nature into classical Indian art
- *Gond* Art
- *Kalamkāri*

The chapter will additionally provide an overview of eco-art in India in the contemporary context and a glimpse into other artistic influences that include Miniature Paintings, Santiniketan movement, Santiniketan School and the Bengal school of art, Impressionism and Romanticism, Wildlife Art, Chinese brush painting with reference to Karl Martens work.

In Text – I detail out

Caṅkam poetry and embodied landscape language

Bharatiyar's Poetry

In Movement, I do a broad survey of *Bharatanāṭyam*, Dance of *Śiva*, and select dancers like Alarmel Valli, Malavika Sarukkai, *Tamiḻ* film dancers Kumari Kamala, Padmini and Vyjanthimala, modern and contemporary dancer Chandralekha.

Questions of Practice that are common to all three chapters consider philosophical inquiries into form, materiality, and aesthetic experience. The questions are generative and lead to critical discoveries in gaps in language and expression, as well as creativity, aesthetics and making. Keeping these questions as guiding inquiries, specifics aspects are studied in Image, Text and Movement.

The intention through these three chapters is to draw out clear principles and techniques for practice of *porosity* in art making. At one level, the chapters clarify cultural factors that influence creative intuition and process. At another level, they

provide a clear understanding of tools and techniques for creative process and art making.

Chapter 10: A *Porous* Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice

The artist trains to be able to move seamlessly through the physical, emotional, psychical and the metaphysical layers of self and the world in intersubjective spaces. In building this sheerness of skins across different dimensions, realities and ways of being, playing with consciousness become the real craft of the artist. In order to understand how ecological consciousness can be unraveled through artistic processes, this chapter inquires into personal practice. This chapter draws insights from practice based research and unravels the practitioner's point of view into subjective, qualitative research using text, image and movement. The philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings are drawn from Hindu Indian aesthetics, philosophy and ancient notions of ecology.

PART 4: APPLICATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chapter 11: Picture of Practice- Bird and Line

'Bird and Line' is an artistic inquiry into the relationship between a deep state of artistic consciousness and the act of drawing a line to arrive at the form of a bird. This inquiry further proposes that by using line as a mode of research, the artist begins to perceive the consciousness of a bird and the relationship it shares with its form.

For me, the embodied and *porous* experiences of watching and knowing birds through the practice of working with 'line' as an artistic element allows for an

intimacy of experiencing, and an unfolding of intersubjectivity. Artistic inquiry also acts as an investigation into self-awareness and self-realization in this space of making eco-art. These acts of being lead me into reflections on how perception and creativity are melded together during creative moments, to allow for a *porous* consciousness to emerge and perform the act of drawing a bird.

Chapter 12: *Sādhanā:* Developing Indian categories for Journaling

This chapter will look at a framework of practice through Indian Categories and discusses the curated journal (which reflects reflective artistic practice across the last five years). Drawing from the full journal, select pieces have been chosen for the thesis. It is a collection of notes and creative work that show creative possibilities within the paradigm of the *porous* and the journeys taken through the quest and expression of the *porous self.*

The journal is curated from the practices undertaken during the last five years of my doctoral research, and reflections on twenty-five years of my work, to enable crafting a rich of methodological framework of *porosity* in both theory and practice. The journal seeks to make visible this *sādhanā*, this meditative nature of the practice, while unraveling artistic processes and journeys, choices of material and media, evolution of line, space and form in non-linear ways, showcasing the way consciousness moves, guides, dissolves and rises again in meditative artistic practice.

Chapter 13: Conclusion

This chapter re-emphasises the methods, theoretical framework, and frameworks of artistic practice as well as practice of consciousness that have been evolved through

the different chapters of the thesis. Following the summary of each of the methods, theory and frameworks, discussion on *porosity* as a theory, challenges and dilemmas and future possibilities for research are presented.

Part 1

Introduction

Note: “The philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings are drawn from Classical Hindu/ Indian aesthetics, philosophy and ancient notions of ecology, which is also the author's own cultural practice and a living tradition in her experience. ‘Hinduism’ is a broad umbrella term for the diverse cultural notions and nuances that she draws from. It is essential to be sensitive to the fact that ‘Hinduism’ as a religious construct is colonial and recent and does not do justice to the plurality of faiths held within the subcontinent (Horn 2006)**.** 'Political Hinduism' as a construct is also different from the traditional perspective of a collection of plural faiths and sects that fall under the broad umbrella of what is currently recognized as Hinduism. This umbrella has a plurality of practices that include theistic, atheistic, agnostic and materialist traditions as well as those sects popularised by individual saints. This complexity of 'Hinduism' in its multiplicity remains challenging to weave into a singular framework of a religion and is problematic when a master narrative is sought or constructed (Kumar 2010). This plurality of Hinduism comes with both organic unity and an incredible diversity of dialogical, opposing and evolving voices within it, making it fairly impossible to impose the category of 'religion' as a singular identity (Balagangadhara and Jhingran 2014, 17-25).

The author draws from both Tamil and Sanskrit texts and philosophical works, epistemologies and ontologies as well as lived cultural experiences.” [1]

[1] Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. ‘A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition‘, *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

Chapter 1

Porosity

yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmany evānupaśyati

sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ tato na vijugupsate.

He who sees all creatures in himself, and himself in all creatures remains unconcealed.

Translation - Rabindranath Tagore (Radhakrishnan 2012, 942)

Sections

1. Personal Experiences of *Porosity*
2. Unfurling Consciousness and Creativity
3. Contextualizing *Porosity*
4. *Porous* Experiences – Other Articulations
5. *Porosity* in Personal Artistic Practice
6. Placing the *Porous Self* in Research Inquiry

    6.1. Developing an Ecological Self and Consciousness: Mapping Gaps

    6.2. Positioning Diverse Frames in *Porosity*

    6.3 *Porosity* in Action
7. Practice through the *Porous* Framework – A Postulation
8. Inquiring into *Porosity* as a Principle of Consciousness – Building a Theoretical Framework
9. The Experience of *Porosity*
10. *Porosity* as a Principle of Consciousness - A Hypothesis
11. Contributions

Chapter 1: Porosity is focused on unraveling the idea of *porosity*[2] through personal experiences, literature review and personal artistic practice as well as a research inquiry. It will discuss *'The Porous Self'*[3] *and Porosity* as a particular framework for an ecological self and consciousness. It further develops to discuss the gaps within developing an ecological self and consciousness. A possible model for practice using *porosity* is hypothesized.

1. Personal Experiences of *Porosity*

"I have experienced a feeling of oneness with landscape and other beings over the years. It remained a deeply meaningful and personal experience from which my connection with the natural world deepened over the years. It led me to an interior space where I could not completely distinguish myself from the natural world and my identity. I also realized that oneness, was only a vague way of describing the feelings that seems to have many different nuances. I have allowed myself to experience these feelings without giving them a name. I categorized diverse kinds of experiences into a singular category of mystic experiences. I also found correspondence or concurrence by several other philosophers, mystics, artists and poets about similar feelings. As my concerns surrounding the ecological crisis deepened, I delved into these feelings, and began to isolate them within experiences that were directly related to the natural world. This led me to inquire further to elaborate on what I perceived as the potential of this feeling. These experiences are largely subjective and inter-subjective. The feelings evoked a sense of being *porous* at the heart of any experience. I attempted to

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[2] The words *Porous Self*, *Porous and Porosity* have been italicized throughout the thesis, as they are used and evolved by the author to interpret a particular conceptual category in ecological consciousness
[3] ibid

locate this feeling within empathy or love, but realized that it transcended these categories. I realised the need for a more directed study into this feeling and sense of being that I termed as the *porous self*."[4]

I believed I had a profound relationship with nature for many years. All my art was inspired by nature in some form of the other. Oftentimes I had metaphysical moments and a deeper awareness of nature; birds, animals, mountains and seas that hinted at a more mystical, mysterious relationship with nature. This remained a private world of experience and art making. However, I deeply grieved the pollution, and very visible destruction of the natural world by human beings. This sorrow became visceral and overpowering that led me to inquire into why I was so deeply affected about what was happening to the natural world that I loved, enjoyed and drew inspiration from.

I began investigating this sorrow and observed that I had become disconnected from nature and was predominantly living in the cocoon of a very human-centric world. Even my *porous* experiences were disjointed and did not have a seamless flow that I had experienced in my childhood through to my early twenties. They occurred sometimes, but even my alertness to resonating with these experiences had reduced. I had gone through an accident, several health issues that arose from having mumps and chicken pox, my asthma had worsened. I realized that a number of personal experiences and health issues had clouded seamless relationships that I had enjoyed with the natural world earlier. These inquiries started around 2009. I seemed to be

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[4] Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

living a life that did not take into account my relationship with nature – practical or psychical. I became aware that this was leading to dissonance in my mind. I began working with children, teens and young adults with environmental education and creative writing to process my own disconnect. I began to inquire into what caused this disconnect and what practices would help me bridge this disconnect from the natural world. I began to retrace my steps into my past experiences of *porosity* in the natural world in order to comprehend how I had gotten lost. This has become the sustained inquiry of my thesis starting from 2014-15.

At one point as I restored my practice of *yoga* and *prāṇāyāma*, I regained awareness of my breath – I found that my inhalation and exhalation corresponded with that of a tree and as I kept extending the act of breathing, I realized that the boundaries of breathing in and out made for a very *porous* exchange between all life forms and me at any given point of time and space. This momentous discovery led me to deepen my inquiries into how I perceived my self in relationship to the natural world and how I could expand the nature of this relationship from the more dissociated state where I perceived myself as separate from nature. These inquiries led me to a state of consciousness that was more permeable between the natural world and myself where I began to sense that the boundaries that I had established between nature and me were perceptual, bound by the mental models that I believed in. While my sorrow arose from a different place of being that exchanged emotion and energy in an intersubjective manner with the natural world, my everyday practices arose from within these boundaries. Consciously suspending these mental models that believed in distinction from other biotic and abiotic forms, I began spending time in nature trying to become aware of how my relationship changed without the separatist model.

"I began to observe that for brief periods of time, I was able to experience states of awareness that helped me resonate with another being. For instance, as I watched a common pochard duck resting at Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh, I suddenly began to feel deeply rested. In another instance, watching a tailorbird land on a tiny leaf shifted my sense of heaviness to a lightness of being. Watching a grey heron take off at close quarters subtly altered my immediate experience of space and time. Seeing mountains being mined plunged me into grief, while at other times I resonated with their lightness and inner song. Over a couple of years of these experiences — sometimes only lasting for short timeframes and sometimes over elongated periods — made me realise that I had stumbled onto a principle of consciousness: *porosity*."[5]

The Oxford University Press and Dictionary.com collaboration Lexico defines the word principle as "A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning" and as "A fundamental quality or attribute determining the nature of something; an essence."[6] Merriam Webster Dictionary defines it as "a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption."[7]

I began seeing *porosity* as a principle because I realized that all our senses were *porous* and permeable, our ability to feel emotions were *porous*, our ability to experience the world at large came from a capacity sensuous as well as tacit exchanges of breath, being, understanding, emotional sharing, reflection and

[5] Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

[6] https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/principle
[7] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principle

transforming ourselves in response to the environment around us. How our waste and our death is also recycled back into the elements is another aspect of *porosity* that is an inevitable part of living. "There was a deeper awareness of my identity in the background, but it did not disturb the more immediate resonance of life that was happening with a sharp immediacy. At some level, I appeared to be simultaneously operating at two levels of consciousness; One that was *porous* and fluid in a continuous process of transfers and exchanges with other life forms, another that was individual and a lot more opaque due to perception of a bounded human identity." [8] I saw that being *porous* is the essence of being human, being; it is also an attribute that determines the nature of all life.

"Porosity, I realized enabled me to relate better to the natural world, it made me more empathetic to other life-forms, it expanded or altered my sense of self, and it helped me ask harder questions about how to live a life that was in resonance with other life around me."[9] While it is a fundamental essence, truth of how life functions, I realized that our ethical systems, lifestyles, creative practices are not always emergent from this principle and if they are, then the connections are not visible. In particular, how *porosity* as a principle impacted consciousness practices in everyday life required deeper engagement and study. "I began using text and image as a way to inquire into this *porous* nature of consciousness while also changing my daily life practices. Wandering, walking, gardening and composting along with writing, sketching,

[8] Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

[9] ibid

painting, performance and reading became loosely connected practices to inquire into *porosity*." [10] Through these practices, I began to observe *porosity* at the level of

a. Body and Senses
b. Awareness and Cognition along with corresponding Intellectual States
c. Psychical and Metaphysical Experiences
d. Form and Manifestation in *Porous* States of Consciousness
e. Being and Consciousness
f. Altered States of Time-Space and Reality.

Throughout these practices I began to understand and arrive at methods, ways in which *porosity* can be built using artistic practices to deepen our relationship with the natural world.

2. Unfurling Consciousness and Creativity[11]

At its most basic, consciousness can be seen as an awareness of oneself and our relationship to the outer world; however, if there is no definitive boundary to our notion of self, and the way senses, emotions, memories are all *porous* through both time and space are considered, then the boundaries of the self become *porous*. (Kalyanasundaram 2019). In such a frame, an intrinsically ecological frame of consciousness is bound to open up, as everything that we perceive can be seen through lenses of intersubjective exchange, interdependence and coexistence. In short, consciousness can be seen through a lens of *porous* relationships and *porosity* can be seen as a principle of such a state of consciousness.

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[10] Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

[11] More detailed discussions on consciousness, self and creativity are in chapters III and IV

However, while we are in a state of constant transfer of energies, matter, nutrients, resources, emotional experiences; it is still easy for us to feel bound to the limits of a physical body and our individual ego, an illusion, albeit an important one that allows us to function independently. We are bound by socio-political and cultural boundaries of our 'selves' that it becomes close to impossible to break out of these limitations to discover the state of flow, a state of constant transferences and transformations across beings, landscapes and the cosmos that are taking place in every fraction of time. A simple cycle of life would include rains that wet the parched earth, new life beginning every season, slow deterioration of life forms that go back to the earth to be broken down as nutrients, feeding new life and the cycle goes on. Everything that transpires, does so because of *porosity* as an underlying principle of the very nature of consciousness that drives life to exist across forms.

A perception of oneness of all life in dynamic multiplicity of relationships forms the fundamental intuition in *Vedic* traditions; transmutation of the inner into the outer and vice versa allows for a constant flow of beingness, consciousness and self across all life and cosmos. Such conceptualizations of life, beingness and consciousness are usually considered as metaphysical and abstract and not very practical in everyday life. However, innumerable everyday practices, which emerge from the fundamental intuition, are abundant in the vernacular traditions. Such a creative awareness of life visualized as oneness while celebrating duality, multiplicity, completeness and void, shapes the essence of how consciousness is conceptualized in much traditional Indian thought systems and practice. In these states, the key guiding principles lie in allowing for openness and exchange, with a self-reflexive awareness that can transcend duality to experience the flow of oneness across all life. Such openness and

exchange, I claim lie in the ability to remain *porous* and uncovering different aspects of such a state of self is imperative to unravel what this essential, yet tacit principle of consciousness can offer towards ecological consciousness as a field.

Concepts of creativity vary among cultures. Reductionist traditional analysis and popular understanding of creativity see it as the ability of a person to create something original or "novel" and "appropriate" (Coleman 2015). However, traditional Eastern approaches to creativity include a moral/ethical component to creativity (Weihua and Sternberg 2006). While both Eastern and Western cultures perceive and appreciate individual creativity, divine and natural conceptions of creativity are also traditionally valued (Weihua and Sternberg 2006). Studies on creativity from 1950 onwards, have shown four distinct themes as critical to individual creativity – personality characteristics, cognitive abilities, behavioural or biographical events (Isaksen, Puccio and Treffinger 1993, 149-150). Looking through the lens of the *rasa* theory[12], creativity is emerged in nonduality. 1) The idealistic world of reality that goes beyond factual reality, 2) the poet's ability to reside in and draw out this idealistic world, 3) the poetry/ work of art and 4) the aesthete *sahṛdaya*, who is one at heart with the poet and able to also reside in this idealistic world through a non-dual frame, form the network of creativity. *Dhvani,* a theory of suggestiveness in Indian aesthetics proposed by Ānandavardana, focuses on how the poet needs to be in the heightened emotional state of *rasa* to create, and how this state of *rasa* is only possible to be translated through suggestion, which then the *sahṛdaya* decodes to experience the *rasa (*Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Ingalls 1990, 19-20). The discipline and practice required to open the heart to oneness, to resonance that goes beyond empathy

[12] Rasa Theory

defines both creativity and creative experience in *rasa* and *dhvani* concepts of creativity (Sundarrajan and Raina 2016). Today, Ecological creativity is seen through lenses of interrelatedness, relationship, and integrated concepts of freedom, responsibility, innovation, systems thinking, ethics and ecological limits across cultures. (Miśra (ed.) 1992; Orr 2011; Papanek 1985).

Placing *porosity* at the centre, the questions around creativity that can emerge are

- How would notions of creativity alter within a *porous* state of consciousness?
- Could ecological consciousness be intrinsic to creativity when defined through the principle of *porosity?*

Traditional Indian thought systems emphasize the critical importance of self and consciousness and a need to closely observe and meditate on the self that creates illusions of diverse realities. "The Indian model of consciousness is a comprehensive conceptualization that allows for great diversity and complements to reside within itself. Hence, the nature of creativity that flows from this model also opens up a holistic approach that takes multidimensional, multilayered, and multilevel methods to making, to language, and to communication" (Kalyanasundaram, 2019).

Ṛta is a cosmic law that has been laid out in Vedic traditions to define ecological limits that bind human creativity, ethical ways of engagement with the natural world and disciplined actions of each human being in this interrelated cosmology. Madhu Khanna defines it succinctly as

> "The sphere of *ṛta* is physical, metaphysical and ethical.…The term *ṛta* signifies, at its most elemental level, the course of the natural world perceived

through its rhythms, time sequences, seasons, and cyclic transformations and the orderly balance and harmony in nature." (Khanna 2004, 2)

In revisiting this traditional notion, that has influenced as well as transformed into the two very critical concepts of *satya* and *dharma* in Indian thought, a traditional holistic lens is made available to explore a *porous* state of consciousness as well as early Indian conceptions of creativity. *Vedic* scholar Satya Prakash Singh (2004) interprets *Ṛta* as consciousness in his detailed study of *Vedic* conceptions of consciousness in relation to reality. He also sees it as the most comprehensive principle alongside *Ātman*/ Universal Self that forms the basis of ethics in the *Vedas* (Singh 2009, 52).

The framework of *Ṛta* provides possibilities to re-engage with traditional cultural concept of consciousness and cosmic order to reconsider a more unified framework of action/ creative action that is possible to map onto socio-political, ethical, spiritual and physical dimensions context-sensitively yet simultaneously.

3. Contextualizing *Porosity*

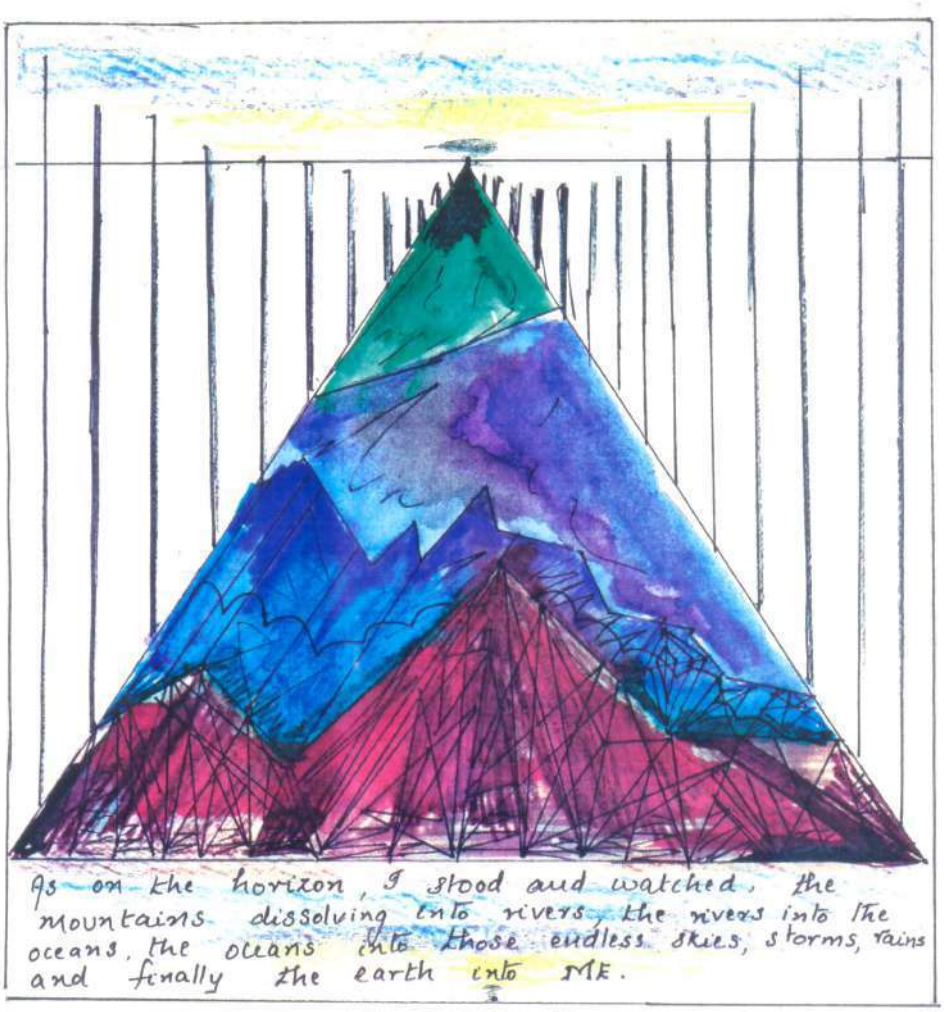
"One of the keys to discovering *porosity* has been suspending the mental model that created a separatist frame of the human and the other. Being open to a more sensuous frame was integral to being able to experience another sense of reality. With this came the quest for alternative views of reality, different constructs of consciousness that would allow for a *porous* sense of being." [13]

[13] Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 2020 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020] https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

Reflections of several of my writings over the years led me to believe that some of these *porous* perceptions were inherent to me and I began tracing this sensibility to my cultural and philosophical views. Indian aesthetic theories and speculative thought traditions began to emerge for me as key factors in my natural ability to transcend into *porous* states of being/ consciousness.

Having grown up with an innate and intrinsically *porous* sense of engaging with the world around me, I realized that art had been my chosen field of engagement to unravel this deeper sensitivity that I had to life. In art, I had found ways to resolve this strange paradoxical relationship I shared with life in all its many forms through contemplation, reflection and creative expression. As discourses on the ecological crisis deepen, I began inquiring more consciously into the *porous self* that I am familiar with to unravel it in research and artistic practice.

My first memories and conscious encounters with *porosity* go back to my seven year old self. I remember walking back from school and suddenly being entranced into complete oneness with a dog on the street. At around the same time, I came across stories of Sri Ramakrishna's visions of a flock of crane against the looming dark black rain clouds as his first transformative state of ecstasy (Swami Yogeshananda 1973). Having heard the stories largely in the work of mystics, I chalked similar experiences that I had to mysticism. My first documented text articulations and inquiries of the same go back to my fifteen-year-old self, writing poetry. In the essay "*Why not be Different?"* written for the Common Wealth essay competition in 1997, I have used abstract visual representation and a clear articulation of an experience of *porosity.*



"As on the horizon, I stood and watched, the mountains dissolving into rivers, the rivers into the oceans, the oceans into those endless skies, storms, rains and finally the earth into ME." – Available on personal website- http://www.sriviliveshere.com/non-fiction.html

Fig 1: Illustration from Essay "Why not be Different?" - Royal Commonwealth Essay Competition 1997-98, Award: Specially Commended
1997, 8.27 x 11.69 in, Water colours, photocolours and Pen and Ink on paper

Through these reflections detailed out in later chapters I realized that the *porous self* is an old friend to the artist and mystic in me. I also realized that I have consciously stayed in the realms of contemplative and meditative practices to keep the *porous self* alive through the years. Art practice formed the core of my contemplative practices. Creating from a state of stillness and inner rest, equilibrium remains at the heart of my

artistic practice. *Bhakti* poetry[14] and poetry from *Bharatanāṭyam*[15] endure at the core of my deepening understanding of mysticism. *Yoga* and breathing are key to my understanding of my body. These states of being and practices have allowed me to express the intensity of experiences that lay in the realm of my *porous* encounters of the world around me, in both form and formlessness.

4. *Porous* Experiences – Other Articulations

I extended my inquiries to understand the nature of the *porous self* as understood or experienced by others, to find reflections and resonances. Poets, artists and writers have often embraced the *porous* world by delving into metaphysical spaces, sci-fi or mythical spaces, transcendental and romantic worldviews in order to give form to their own experiences of communion with the natural world. Asian cultures, Native American, African, Celtic and other aboriginal cultures, and with specific focus on healers and shamans have had a very different worldview, which inherently embraces *porosity* between human and the natural world in diverse layers. Original quotes from the authors are used in this section to draw out the language, vocabulary, and descriptive nature of experiences. Paraphrasing has been avoided to a large extent in order to engage with the original words and descriptions of diverse experiences of people that are similar to *porous* experiences.

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[14] *Bhakti* Poetry refers to the poetry that emerged out of the *Bhakti* Movement in Hinduism. In South India, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār from the 5th Century CE is considered to have started the Bhakti movement that became pan Indian eventually. *Bhakti* poetry comes from a place of spiritual love, devotion, and even erotic poetry written about or to deities. *Bhakti* poetry is often revolutionary and speaks of equality and oneness. It is also a very personal and deep commitment of a devotee to his/ her *ishta devata*, favourite deity.

[15] *Bharatanāṭyam* is a classical Indian dance form, predominant in South India, particularly Tamil Nadu

Ashvin Mehta, acclaimed Indian photographer writes of an intimate experience with dissolution of self and oneness in the preface to his book *Gifts of Solitude* (Mehta and Tagore 1990):

> "I was all alone on the beach looking for pictures, when suddenly it happened. As dimensions of time and space vanished, I slowly dissolved in the fathomless blue. Something confined within the narrow shell of my mind and body was hurled into a whirlpool of ecstasy. When I returned to the reality of the sea, and sand and driftwood logs, it took some time to find my bearings. The invisible bonds of affinity with everything around me made my entry stable and my movements effortless. I don't remember when I finished my photography session and returned home." (Mehta and Tagore 1990, 5)

Ashvin Mehta's writings in this book accompanied by Tagore's poetry and his approach to his photography as outlined here, were similar to my own creative process in states of *porosity*, when my being flooded with a sense of ecstasy propelling my work.

Tagore's poem reflective of a similar state of being felt like a metaphorical guide to being.

> *" I shall meet silence with silence under*
> *this sky.*
> *I shall become one with night,*
> *clasping the earth to my breast.*
> *Make my life glad with nothing.*
> *The rains sweep the sky from end to end.*

In the wild wet wind jasmines revel in their own perfume.

The cloud-hidden stars thrill in secret.

Let me fill my heart to the full with

nothing but my own depth of joy."

- *Rabindranath Tagore* (Mehta and Tagore 1990)

The *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* are replete with ideas of *porosity*. In different verses, the oneness of man, nature and *Brahman* are referred to, and it is in this awareness of them as one being, man is free of the shackles that bind him to his individual self. While concepts of monism and dualism co-exist in the Hindu framework, experiences of merging or coalescing into another being for brief periods of time are recognized in both.

The *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* (Verse 10) emphasizes that

"By seeing the self in all beings and all beings in the self, one goes to *Brahman*, not by any other cause: there is no other way to liberation."

(Radhakrishnan 2012, 929)

This continual reference to the spiritual transcendence in the perception of oneness with all beings translates eventually into myth, symbolism, idea and image in literature, visual and performing arts and architecture in traditional Indian approaches. Also, in this holistic paradigm rests an alternative vision of the universe, of matter and spirit that also informs the conception of medicinal practices like *Āyurveda*, health practices like *yoga*, ethical codes and the very questions on the nature of reality.

In fifteenth century *Bhakti* poet Annamayya's work this consciousness of oneness touches upon social issues as well. In his Telugu song, *'Brahmam okate para',* he emphasizes the oneness of all life, be it human or animal, rich or poor, of lower caste or upper caste, citing that *Lord Veṅkateśvara* dwells in all beings.

Anthropocentric attitudes have largely dictated modern sciences, arts and the ever-increasing materialistic cultures of contemporary times. However traditional cultures see man embedded within a cosmic order and in relationship to life (Saraswati and Vatsyayan (eds.) 1995).

From the Celtic world, John O'Donohue writes of attunement to the world through senses as a way to know one's own path and place without getting lost,

> "Human skin is porous; the world flows through you. Your senses are large pores that let the world in. By being attuned to the wisdom of your senses, you will never become an exile in your own life, an outsider lost in an external spiritual place that your will and intellect, have constructed." (O'Donohue 1999)

David Hinton (2012, xii) writes of the Chinese worldview in his book 'Hunger Mountain' as deeply secular as well as spiritual, a cosmology that weaves human consciousness with nature in such a manner that the western differentiation between human and nature ceases to be.

Basho speaks of this experiencing of the natural world in the art of writing *Haikus*,

> "... to submerge himself within a natural object, to perceive its delicate life and feel its feelings, out of which a poem forms itself. A poem may skillfully

> delineate an object; but, unless it embodies feelings which have naturally emerged out of the object, the poem will fall short of the true poetic sentiment, since it presents the object and the poet as two separate things." (as cited in Ueda, 1963)

Makoto Ueda places this approach to writing a poem within a framework of "transpersonal" theory to point out by extrapolating how this form of close communion with nature "presupposes the dissolution of the poet's ego" (Ueda, 1963).

Charles Taylor discusses the pre modern self as a porous self where the sense of the boundary between the self and the other was more open and allowed for an open flow between diverse beings to shape and affect both the physical and psychical worlds of a person (Taylor 2007).

Dunsmore in his writings on Native Americans brings out the entwined relationship that they share with land,

> "What we appear to have, then, in this relationship between land and Indian people is an absence of what we in the Western tradition take to be fixed boundaries between ourselves and others, and between inside and outside worlds. That sort of fixed boundary simply is not present in these statements. Their bodies are the land and the land is their bodies, is their ancestors and their kin, the other life forms. And what they happen to be at this time in their bodies, is a momentary coalescence of being in the ongoing process of transformations from one form of life into another that is the life process of the land itself." (Dunsmore 1997, 49)

Ecology, Ecosophy, ecological ethics and other emerging paradigms see the interrelationship of all life. Systems view of thinking as it deepens our ecological understanding of the world, “Biophilia” hypothesis by E.O.Wilson, “Gaia” hypothesis by James Lovelock showcase our relationship to other life forms are more entwined than we rationally assume (Wilson 1984; Lovelock 2000).

Paul Shepard (1969) using an ecological framework, writes of the need for us to see ourselves as a being that is an ecosystem and points out how our evolution is intricately bound to the lives of other beings and landscapes. Taking the pond as an ecosystem and man within it, he unravels the complexity of interconnections that man is bound to and expands how our societies, minds and cultures are also integral parts of the same evolution of interdependence as one notices in the pond.

> “The elegance of such systems and delicacy of equilibrium are the outcome of a long evolution of interdependence. Even society, mind and culture are parts of that evolution. There is an essential relationship between them and the natural habitat: that is, between the emergence of higher primates and flowering plants, pollinating insects, seeds, humus, and arboreal life... Internal complexity, as the mind of a primate, is an extension of natural complexity, measured by the variety of plants and animaIs and the variety of nerve cells-organic extensions of each other.” (Shepard 1969, 4)

David Abram uses phenomenological frameworks that look at the “intuitive, sensuous communion with the earth” and draws from oral cultures and shamanism to build his framework (Abram 1996). Abram’s writings evoke the relationship we share with other life by pointing out how interwoven human life is with all that is more-than-

human and how our senses have co-evolved with other beings.

> "Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils-all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness…For the largest part of our species' existence, humans have negotiated relationships with every aspect of the sensuous surroundings, exchanging possibilities with every flapping form, with each textured surface and shivering entity that we happened to focus upon… And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished." (Abram 1996, Preface)

In Abram's words, "The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn." (Abram 1996, 33)

The Deep Ecology movement resonates with the ideas of *porosity* and the idea of oneness with all life. Naess and Rotheberg (1989) write,

> "We are not outside the rest of nature and therefore cannot do with is as we please without changing ourselves ...Paleontology reveals ... that the development of life on earth is an integrated process, despite the steadily increasing diversity and complexity. The nature and limitation of this unity can be debated. Still, this is something basic. "Life is fundamentally one."… The ecosophical outlook is developed through an identification so deep that one's own self is no longer adequately delimited by the personal ego or the organism. One experiences oneself to be a genuine part of all life." (Naess and Rothenberg 1989, 165-174)

Nancy Tuana foregrounds the idea of "viscous porosity" and points out that to study the natural separate from humanities and social sciences is "stultifying" and calls for an "ontology of interactionism" (Tuana 2008).

John Muir writes of his connection with the mountains as an experience of *porosity,*

> "We are now in the mountains, and they in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us," he wrote of his first view of the high country approaching Yosemite (Muir 1911, 20).

The work of phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl, Merleau Ponty and Heidegger, focus on opening ourselves to the world and other beings. Husserl recognizes the world of experience as intersubjective phenomena, where beings are experiencing each other in a multiplicity of ways, where collective subjectivities interact with each other, in ways that are perceptual, physical, sensorial, emotional, felt (Abram 1996). He described these phenomena in terms of the life-world, which he placed between the transcendental world of his earlier philosophy and the more objective world of the sciences, a world that was primal, corporeal and deeply connected to the body's capacity to experience (Abram 1996).

Merleau Ponty extends these ideas further in his work. To him, our experience of the world, our openness to experiencing it, our voice, emerging from the lived experience within it lies at the heart of phenomenology. In his words, "We witness every minute the miracle of related experience, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this

miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships" (Ponty 2011, preface xxiii).

Heidegger takes up the question of being and deepens possibilities of perception and experience by asking what the essence of being is. In his words,

> "But nature must not be understood here as what is merely objectively present, nor as the *power of Nature*. The forest is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'. As the 'surrounding world' is discovered, 'nature' thus discovered is encountered along with it. We can abstract from nature's kind of being as handiness; we can discover and define it in its mere objective presence (Vorhandenheit). But in this kind of discovery of nature, nature as what 'stirs and strives,' what overcomes us, entrances us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow, the river's 'source' ascertained by the geographer is not the 'source in the ground.'" (Heidegger 2010, 70)

David Fleming uses the term *encounter* to describe an alternative way of meeting the natural world on its own terms

> "Encounter. The act of recognising something – a person, a *practice, a *system – on its own terms; the particular character and wholeness of the other is acknowledged; *judgment and opinion about him/her/it are set in a *relevant context, rather than in the context of universal *general principle or immoveable *mindset.
>
> To acknowledge the wholeness of a system – a woodland, a person, a planet, nature – means being aware that you are in the presence of something which

> has business and an agenda of its own, and which cannot be tamed by your understanding. To see nature as a whole, as its own self, you need to approach it with the *manners of the stranger – as noted by the great ecologist, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862):
>
> To conceive of it with *a total apprehension* I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange." (Fleming and Chamberlin 2016, 128)

Stephen Harding, deep ecologist whose experience of encounter with the muntjac deer inspired Fleming's definition of *encounter* says

> "…well encountering means really meeting something in a way that goes beyond one's intellectual process…Encounter is when that conceptual structure vanishes. And you actually meet the being, as the being, coming forth from itself, as itself, revealing itself in a way to you that is beyond the intellect." (Harding 2017)

If one keeps reading or conversing with others it is possible to find innumerable references to *porous*/ intersubjective experiences in the works of poets, philosophers, artists, naturalists, scientists and our own friends and family; some that parallel my own experiences, others that expand possibilities, and still others that are in complete resonance. In many conversations with my friends and students about their connection with nature, they would describe moments of losing their self, of I-consciousness, of feeling completely at one with all life, of bursting into tears deeply moved by finding a deeper relationship with all life. This elusive, intangible feeling is around us everywhere, irrespective of our cultural backgrounds. At one level, the feeling arises

as a response to wonder and beauty, to feeling deeply moved, to being engaged holistically with something. Each person has a differing description. And there is no one way to describe it. It is as if a curtain has fallen away between two beings as Heidegger articulates the experience, suddenly making it possible for them to see each other with alacrity.

> "In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting… Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are."(Heidegger 2001)

Aspects/ Concepts of *porosity* that emerge across cultures from each of the above reflections by different people include but are not limited to: Dissolution of Self and oneness, rights of nature, interwoven notions of being without the nature-culture divide, transpersonal, open boundaries between self and other, embodied experiences, interdependence, co-evolution, reciprocal relationships, self that is not delimited by personal ego, interactionism, intersubjective experiences, self as a network of relationships, essence of being, openness, vanishing of intellectual conceptual structures.

The qualities/ properties of *porosity* that emerge in these insights and intuitions of diverse people indicate permeation, dissolution, transformation, transmutation, interweaving, integration, amalgamation and embodiment. For most of the people/ communities who work with these concepts of resonance with nature, these concepts form the basis of an ethical relationship, action, principle or guideline to their relationship and engagement with the natural world.

5. *Porosity* in Personal Artistic Practice

As I continued to read and engage with ideas of *porosity,* my reflections on my practice deepened. I realized that the diversity of my practices arose from the need for a transdisciplinary unbounded frame. As a contemporary practitioner, I inhabit a metaphysical reality of an older world and the actual reality of the current one, oscillating between the two, sometimes in resonance, sometimes in lost tracts that do not meet. On one end my artistic processes are informed by an intuitive consciousness, which emerges from Indian philosophical traditions that span the unbounded ethos of the culture across class and caste. On the other end my forms are contemporary. I am a designer, illustrator, writer, educator and artist. I write in English predominantly. I work with technology to create, package and market. As an educator, my work lies in art and design education with a strong focus on environment, self-reflective and contemplative practices and consciousness. And in here lies dichotomy and yet a strange unity of purpose and practice. Through my cultural self, I have encountered often '*the porous self*' and its relationship to nature; cosmic, terrestrial, individual and transcendental. My work is an inquiry into transience and permeability to craft an intrinsic ecological consciousness using *porosity* as principle and practice. Cultural memories and lineage import a different relationship with the environment, where *porous* relationships are formed and celebrated with all life. My current explorations as an artist inquire into how connecting with nature through the *porosity* principle informs our sense of creativity and identity I have evolved my work as a practitioner in what would be perceived as different disciplines. However, in integrating these practices in the frame of my 'self', to me, they lie in a singular transdisciplinary frame. Much like the flavors that are integrated in a well-cooked meal, my practices have been integrated through my

inquiry into consciousness and being, through a subjective and intersubjective interrogation and crafting of the 'self'/ 'selves'.

Both the works below arose from a series of interactions with species, landscapes and habitats, ecologists and batrachologists as well as conservationists. All the conversations that I had with these people fused to make new meanings in my perception of space as well as species. Each of the works are in a different style and use completely different media, however they explore nuances of expressing *porosity* in both form and expression.



Fig 2.: Sholiga Narrow Mouthed Frog from a frog watching trip. Memories from Bisle as hundreds of frogs croaked creating a symphony by the lake and yet none were easily visible. Hidden, sound and form melting into the landscape, they were calling out to create new life. There was something powerful and ancient about the ritual that must have occurred for millions of years. And yet it was simple, it was in the now, the vitality of the present and the vulnerability of a tiny barely protected landscape. Watercolours on watercolour paper, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.



Fig 3. Banyan Trees and the Presence of Tigers, Acrylic and ink on canvas, 12 in X 12 in, 2017.

"Gentle Time –
Tigress; Unbound strength
gently caresses the earth
in stealth and stride"
(http://www.sriviliveshere.com/pulse)

The poem was written in 2016 and the work created in 2017. As I visited and dwelled in diverse landscapes with the abundance of banyan trees and other species of ficus, particularly within the bandipur region, the presence of a tiger/ tigress would always be there, though I never saw one. Gentle time, is an exploration into this subtlety of the tiger's presence that hints at a different nature of a consciousness, an ability to be still and quiet and camouflaged in grass and tree and roots, sinking into the life breath of the forest.

From the age of two and a half when my mother first introduced me to the world of art, I have practiced diligently to build expertise, to understand the world, to express, to investigate and to find meaning. I work with text, image and movement. I write

poetry, fiction, non-fiction, long form essays and lyrical prose in my engagement with text. Painting, sketching, cartooning and creating children's books remain my primary practice in image. I trained in *Bharatanāṭyam* and *Yoga* (from the age of 3) and while I do not perform publicly, my thinking and being are entwined in movement. My entire work traverses across diverse audiences of different age-groups and class. My professional art practice spans across twenty years. My first formal exhibition was in 1998 at Gangarams Gallery, Bangalore. My writings have won national and international awards from when I was fifteen and I have published close to forty children's books as a writer/ illustrator. I have also co-authored a book on the meeting points of art practice, inquiry and philosophy with artist A.V. Ilango titled "Coming home to Earth: Space, Line, Form" published in 2015 in partnership with Sublime Art Galleria.

I wrote as a twenty two year old, in Tamil

Nāṉē eṉ iṟuti nilai.

Etu iṟuti nilai eṉṟa ciṟiya vaṭṭatiṟkul nāṉ eṉṉai pulappaṭuttikoḷḷa virumpavillai

I am my own final limit.

I do not wish to reveal myself by defining a small circle of limits.

This was written in the spirit of the mystic, as a reflection of the limitlessness of the inner self. From this poem arose another one of my poems,

Āṉantam (Tamiḻ)

December 2003 - Jan 2004

caṭṭeṉṟu cintaṉaiyil āṉantam

kāṟṟu vāṉ kaṇ mūccu

maṇ maḻai maṉam uṇarvu

eṉṟoru putiya marapē āṉantam

Translation

Āṉantam (Tamiḻ)

Suddenly, a moment of joy arises in thought!

Wind, Sky, Eye, Breath

Mud, Rain, Heart, Feeling

Everything interwoven,

soar into a new lineage of joy(bliss)!

This particular poem *Āṉantam*, written as a prayer in complete resonance with the natural world, remains at the heart of my work. A moment of great insight and enlightenment that I captured in Tamiḻ, it pays homage to the concept and authenticity of feeling '*Āṉantam*'. The bursting forth of this feeling through my being, opened up a new world, a new lineage to how I worked. In some ways it opened the doorways back to a lineage of being that traces its sources to the ancient Indian thought traditions.

This thesis is an unfolding of, and an inquiry into the feeling of this poem, this complete interweaving with life, with *uyir* - the life force. The poem is the spirit of the thesis that I seek to uncover in its truth, *mey*, body. It is my response to the ecological crisis as an artist. It is also my celebration of life, a gentle call to others to respond with a transformation of being.

Porosity as a principle is one of the ways that allows us to experience our environment as a related whole rather than as a divisive multiplicity. There is an instance in which life corresponds with life without the weight and boundaries of form separating it. The knowledge of distinguishing between the human and the other is temporarily suspended in this time-space. The general rules that keep us separated as distinctive forms break to create a visceral fluid exchange of energy. There is a deeper awareness of identity that stays in the background but does not disturb the more immediate resonance of life that is happening with a sharp immediacy. Both space and time turn subtle, and sublime teasing out nuanced relationships that otherwise seem impossible in what we deem as everyday reality. This experience of time, space and energy as they collude with each other is what I seek to study as *porosity*. My work is an inquiry into transience and permeability to craft an intrinsic ecological consciousness using *porosity* as principle through art practice.

This thesis thus plays out as a culmination of reflections on the nature of the *porous self* after thirty years of conscious living in the frame, reflecting, making, sharing, interrogating and practicing. In a way, the transdisciplinarity of my work has emerged from the needs of this self. I chose to build a clear articulation of this nature of self, consciousness and being through the rigor of an academic framework at this point to

add to the methods and conversations around the ecological crisis, especially for those looking towards contemplative, aesthetic and artistic practices as a mode of intervention, activism, action or self-inquiry.

6. Placing the *Porous Self* in Research Inquiry

There are diverse positions to perceptions of nature and therefore to how we relate with nature, how we engage, act and think about it. These rise from different epistemologies and ontologies and are often contentious with each other.

6.1. Developing an Ecological Self and Consciousness: Mapping Gaps

This proposal stems from one fundamental question: How do we turn our gaze inward to fix our perceptions of nature and our own consciousness rather than externalize the problems? I further extend that question as an artist and ask myself: What would it mean to turn inward to resolve our relationship with the earth and the cosmos through unraveling our shared bond of creativity? This question in the light of my experiences of *porosity* turns into another pertinent inquiry that shapes this proposal: **How does experiencing oneself as a *porous* being impact one's ecological consciousness, artistic inquiry and creative practice? How does artistic inquiry impact *porosity* and consciousness in turn?**

There are those of us who believe that there is an ecological crisis and others who deny it. There is climate change, accepted by many, questioned by others. There are the realities of climate refugees, fast depleting material resources, problems of over-consumption, pollution and diseases related to how we misuse the environment. There is the problem of war, politics and economic greed that play a strong role in the

devastation of environment, often brushed aside as major causes of the crisis. In an increasingly confusing future where our relationship with the natural world will define our everyday life choices, lifestyles and being, there arises a vital need to understand ourselves in relationship. Evolving an ecological self in today's complex world requires one to process the environment through diverse lenses, reflect deeply on one's own perception and engagement with nature and be more open to the emotions that arise within us in response to the environment.

This thesis looks to address the gaps towards crafting an ecological self and consciousness in four areas, by investigating what are the aspects we must address to build a conscious relationship with the natural world:

- Perception and Worldmaking: using processes of reflection and contemplation
- The Limits of Form- Self and body: using processes of personal transformation
- Language and Expression: through relearning and reimagining articulation
- Aesthetics, Creativity and Making: through processes of creative expression/ action through artistic practice

The first one looks at epistemological concerns, the second one more at ontological positions, the third and forth concern both articulation and action that rise from the first two categories.

6.2. Positioning Diverse Frames in *Porosity*

Drawing upon the disconnectedness we have with the natural world today, I argue for *Porosity*, a certain quality of experiencing the natural world and a certain state of consciousness that allows one to feel a sense of permeation with all life, to become

the pivot for reclaiming our relationship with the natural world. Using the gaps in four areas of our relationship with the natural world, I look at *Porosity* as a category that emerges to address the gaps immersively through further artistic inquiries.

There is a space between the human 'self' and nature that is *porous*, a space where human emotion is no more a distinct world of one species, but a continuing stream of consciousness that connects us to all of life. *Porosity* can be physical or metaphysical. That we breathe in what another being breathes out, setting forth a cycle of exchange, creation and eventual demise is in itself evidence of physical *porosity*. A more psychical/mystical experience of *porosity* would be intuitive and seemingly metaphysical or transcendental relationships where different individuals, or tribal and aboriginal communities speak of feeling at one with another life form, in transitory states of being.

The key questions here are-

What makes a *porous* relationship possible?

- Is it a worldview?
- Is it an experiential encounter?
- Is it a principle of practice?
- Is it a sense of self?
- Is it a notion of being?
- Is it a state of consciousness?

It is through all of these frames that I begin to observe the critical gap where I frame my work –

- First, to locate *porosity* as a principle of consciousness and practice, particularly within an aesthetic notion;
- Second, how can an artist craft his/ her own intrinsic ecological consciousness?

As a principle of consciousness, I look at how *porosity* impacts the idea of creativity and creative process as well as aesthetic experience. At one level, this implies a shift in worldviews that demand a move from a "separation consciousness" to a more "relational consciousness" (Uhl 2013). At another level, this implies a sense of being, where there is greater openness and fluidity of exchange of energy and experience between oneself and other beings. Another layer is to allow this experience to inform the creative process.

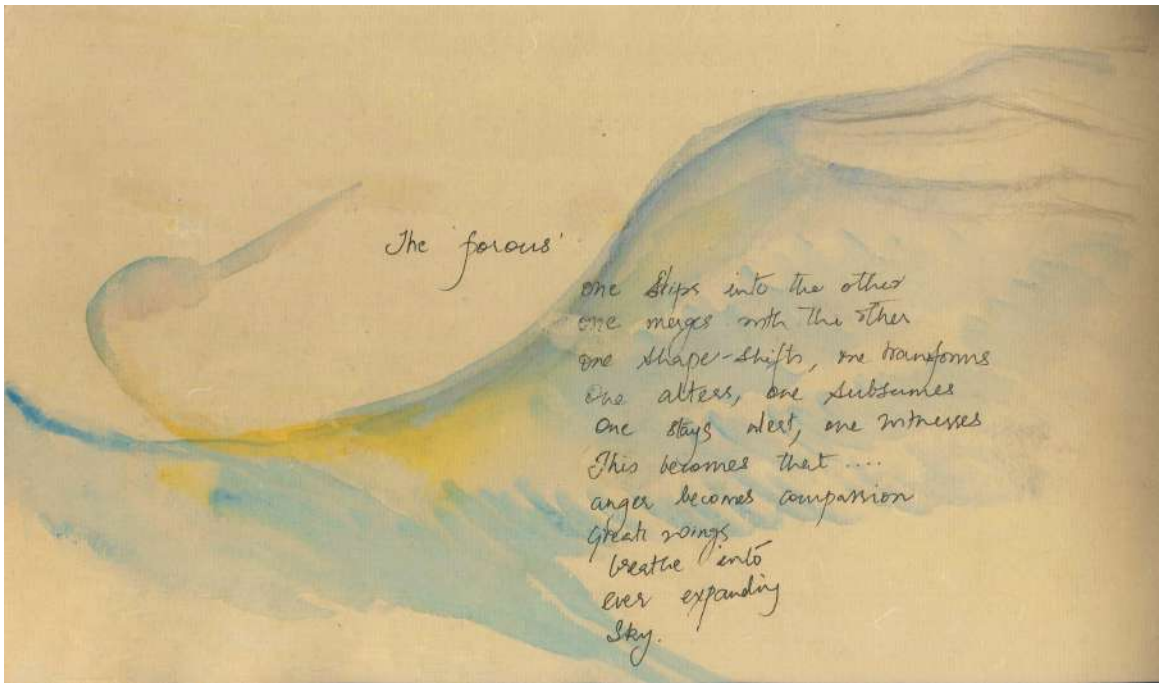


Fig 4. Journal entry that captures an experience of being porous in a casual moment of being, Watercolours on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

The gap that my work addresses will be a bridge between aesthetics and ecological consciousness, which could then inform artistic practice and art education at large.

Porosity has not been framed as a principle of consciousness by anyone and that allows for new perception in the studies around ecological consciousness.

This research inquiry into the *porous self,* is an attempt to think through our notions of creativity to allow them to emerge in and through ecological consciousness. In further expanding *porosity* through the lens of creative, yet another set of critical questions emerge as part of the inquiry.

- In this *porous* space what or who is the self?
- What is the nature of creativity of such a self?
- What is the emotional turbulence and emotional balance in the nature of such self and creativity?
- Can the creativity of the *porous self* impact our relationship with nature positively?
- Is the *porous self* recourse of some artists/ people, or is it a pervading consciousness?
- Is it prevalent at all times or do we fade in and out of moments of the *porous self*?
- Can one study the aesthetic and artistic processes that emerge from the *porous self*?

Documented in philosophical, poetic and metaphysical sources, the *porous self's* roots in creativity and compassion are often documented and have become part of folklore. The lines that divide matter and spirit, idea and form take on a fluid space in this self. In understanding the nature of this self and its consciousness,

- Can we reframe creativity to encompass nature consciousness?
- Can a framework/ methodology of practice, aesthetics, ecological consciousness be evolved building inquiries for eco-art practice and education?

A personal methodological framework for *porous* practices of being, aesthetic perception and artistic practice will be evolved as a guideline for others choosing to work with the arts, aesthetics and creativity as the entry points to ecological consciousness.

The notion of the *porous self,* entwined with my own practice as its roots often moves through these contentious debates with questions that stem from practice. For instance, through the practice of the *porous self*, questions that value scientific understanding of the natural world and mystical engagement are juxtaposed with each other. Observing nature in interiority and as an external observer is also juxtaposed with each other. The varied possibilities and dimensions of the *porous self* are studied in unraveling it often through otherwise contradictory positions. Socio-political questions are meshed with mystical-metaphysical experiences as the cultivated ecological self, deepens its understanding of the environment as a whole. The diverse fields as well as contentious debates seamlessly integrate in practice.

Questions that enrich practice include but are not limited to -

- Is a scientific understanding required for aesthetic appreciation, does it take away, does it add?
- Is a mystical experience to be discussed and debated?

- Are the experiences that see nature as the other, and those that see human as nature, contradictory to each other, or is it natural to the way we perceive the world at different points of time?
- Can these and other questions that arise be resolved in and through one's creative practice?
- Is a distinct position required to take action or does it help to move through diverse positions to deepen our relationship to the natural world and respond with situational awareness of context?
- Is this idealistic nonsense or does it purport sense in terms of allowing for a more responsive, seamless state of consciousness that is free from definitions?
- Are cultural frameworks essential or non-essential in constructing our selves?

These are debates between incommensurate knowledge systems and ontological positions and the challenge lies in finding transdisciplinary dialogues across these diverse positions.

The simple premise of this research is that the physical form of the human body in its gross or subtle states; physical body or mind, is not its boundary in relationship to self or life in all its other forms.

The self is not limited to the notion of 'I' consciousness or the mind that projects this notion of identity. So the subtle body with its physical form as mind or 'I' consciousness is also not the boundary of the self in relationship with life in all its other forms. The self that emerges out of negation of all other selves, by careful witnessing of thoughts that arise within the bounded 'I' leads to quieting of the self

and cessation of thoughts. In this process, an unbounded Self emerges, that is linked to the creative root of all life.



Fig 5: The thousand petal lotus is a metaphor and symbol of inner unfurling. A metaphorical sketch that looks at the flower as a flame that shows the intensifying of the inner sky into the outer. Drawing from the symbolism of Natarāja and Tamiḻ Śaivism, this sketch helped me in the early evolution of my thesis to articulate seemingly paradoxical processes, watercolour and ink on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2016.

In Tamiḻ *Śaivism*, this is seen as a meeting of the *cirruḷḷam* and *pēruḷḷam* - this inner heart-self and the cosmic heart-self. This negation of selves in their gross and subtle bodies then leads to a state of being which arises from the functions of the heart, a *porous* permeating function. This is unlike the nature of the thought and intellect that arise from the functions of the brain. This is a metaphorical comparison in some ways, but there is also physicality to this metaphor in the nature of the Self-knowingness, Beingness, *aṟivu* that emerges in this space. This state of being, the *uḷḷam* or the inner self, then finds a new reality in which relationships happen

from a space of compassion. *Uḷḷam,* a Tamiḻ word indicates heart, self, mind, consciousness and being in a unified notion. The nature of these relationships are functions of the *porous*, they lead us to *porosity*.

Negation of self creates void, void that is space, and there is both *pūrṇa* (fullness) and *śūnya* (emptiness) that happen simultaneously. It is this void, this space, which creates the conditions for compassion and love - *aṉpu and nēcam, irakkam, tayai, karuṇai.* In this state of compassion and love, *śānti* and *śṛṅgāra rasās*, the self becomes *porous*. This nature, *taṉmai* of the self is freedom, *āṉantam* or *sat-cit-ānanda.* These two feelings, *śānti* and *śṛṅgāra,* are not to be limited within the framework of emotions, but need to be reframed as states of being. In Indian aesthetics, they are framed within the category of *rasās*, essence or flavor. The practice of performing or engaging with any of the nine emotion-states and their sub-states are for deeper inquiry into one's own consciousness and the artist does this from a place of equilibrium, at a time when the heart is at rest; *hṛdayaviśrānti* (Vatsyayan 1977, 6; Nor 2005, 95-102). In and through the arts, one becomes very intimate with these states of being, by 1) practicing to observe this emotion/ beingness of *porousness*, *nekiḻcci (melting)* from within as well as from outside as a witness; and 2) through choosing to express the narratives of many others both human and more-than-human.

Emptying the inner self completes the cosmic self and *pūrṇa* and *śūnya* flow within each other, creating fertile ground for a *porous* experience.

The *porous self* becomes capable of permeation, melting, transfer, transmutation, flowering, elasticity, mellowing, ripening. It has the capacity, function and properties to intersperse, interweave, intermingle, fuse, blend, combine, amalgamate, assimilate, blend, combine, commingle, embody, fuse, incorporate, integrate, merge, insert, intermingle, mingle, mix, lace, thread and weave.

6.3 *Porosity* in Action

Porosity is the natural state of the self, its *svarūpam*. One can see it as a state of being, or a function, a principle that unfolds. In this research, it is used as a function, a principle to engage with one's own ecological consciousness.

So far in most available literature, this nature/ principle of consciousness, this transcendence and transformation are spoken of in the mystical framework and in religious contexts. The approach to this notion of self is rooted in ideas of liberation, *mokṣa*, interpreted as freedom from illusion. It remains in the esoteric domain of mystics or spiritual gurus. Conflicting, confusing, seemingly unattainable, these ideas become entwined in theology in theory rather than in practice for the larger populace. Moreover, the self becomes defined within 'human' liberation and gets limited to the identity of the 'human' self. Ecological roots and cosmic order, the purpose of dissolving the limited self to find relationship with all life, is lost in this very human quest of spirituality.

This work revisits the traditional notions of dissolving the self, through the frame of ecological consciousness and artistic practice, to emerge its meanings in simple mundane everyday living in relationship with all life. It draws from personal practice

and also traditional wisdom, the permeation of which is across everyday language and culture, reminding us that the greater transitions of consciousness as one conceives of them are often simple practice and daily ritual. One is left confounded by the pleasure of this simplicity, this play, and this artistry.

The *porous self*, *uḷḷam*, then emerges through and expresses itself in five simple actionable principles for me –

a. **Play:** *Līlā* – the lovely play of life.

b. **Love and Compassion:** *Śṛṅgāra, Nēcam, Aṉpu, Śānti , Karuṇai* – root of all relationship.

c. **Artistic Practice:** *Sādhanā* – Meditations of celebration.

d. **Righteous action:** *Svadharma* - Reflective intrinsic action

e. **Time:** *Kāla* – Reflections on living and dying

As my reflections deepen, I realize that my work continues to delve in the spaces between environmental ethics and Indian philosophy while staying rooted in artistic practice and aesthetic philosophy. My ruminations on life seem to be strongly veering towards engagement with kindness, empathy and compassion as central to any action. There is a desire to deepen these quieter spaces of being to find meaningful actions. In encountering trauma in many of its forms in one's own life as well as those of others close to me and in the natural world, I ponder about the need to work on being and presence as action and that brings with it a strange simplicity that I enjoy.

The nature of *porosity* allows one to respond with context-sensitivity to socio-political, cultural, metaphysical and philosophical questions as articulated earlier in

the section. It enables one to not respond with intellectual arguments and construction of ideas, but a highly engaged consciousness state that considers ethical, aesthetic, social, political and creative questions in a state of relationship. In bringing diverse questions and contentious viewpoints together in inquiring into self, a transdisciplinary inquiry through creative practices is emerged.

7. Practice through the *Porous* Framework – A Postulation

This thesis focuses on developing a methodological framework for Eco-art practice and crafting of ecological consciousness through the lens and principle of the *porous self*. In order to achieve this, a comprehensive set of ten non-linear methods that would work as a layered experiential and creative process is postulated.

i. Investigate mysticism/ different perception possibilities in relationships with the natural world

Rooted in the *porous self,* as its foundational idea, mysticism and ineffable experiences form the basis of the methods. The methods to comprehend and work with mysticism include acknowledging, cognizing, documenting, articulating and translating these experiences.

ii. Be a Naturalist

Developing an informed understanding of the natural world, place, species, biodiversity and ecosystem to situate and contextualize mystical experiences and develop language for articulation of diverse relationships that one forms with the natural world.



Fig 6: Green bee eater, watercolour and pen on watercolour paper, 5 in X 7 in, 2017.

iii. Trace Cultural Roots

Locating cultural intuitions that influence and impact the experiences of *porosity.* Map the mystical, metaphysical, philosophical and aesthetic positions that help to locate the cultural roots, practices of consciousness and body, language and craft of creative art practices in resonance with the *porous self.*

iv. Re-interpret Nature

How we experience the natural world is bound by how we define 'nature'. When cultural positions collide with ecological language, new meanings of nature emerge at the meeting point. Tracing these become critical to build new art practices. This could include socio-political, context sensitive experiences of 'nature' as well as those dependedent on livelihoods and professions.

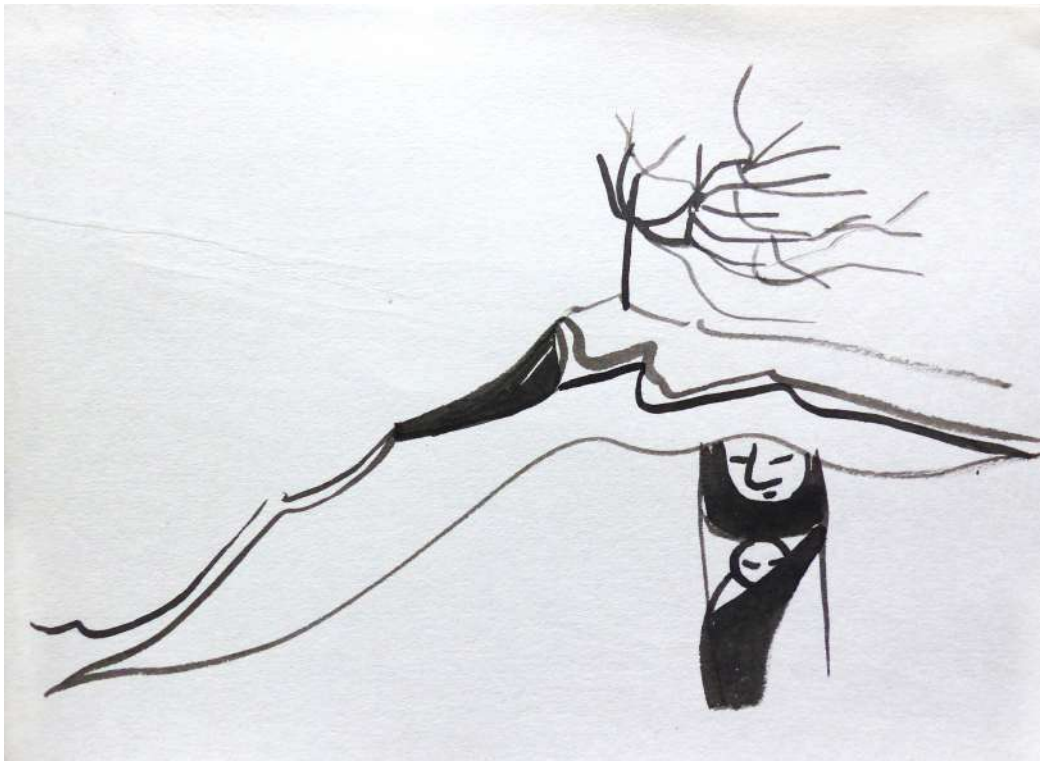


Fig 7. Living in the hills. Becoming a part of the landscape, where livelihood, language and emotions flow seamlessly from human life to other life forms and the place itself, Chinese ink on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2019.

v. Manifest and Translate in the Arts

Developing new artistic inquiries to build eco-art practices, artistic processes, technical skills and craft in the framework of the *porous self.*

vi. Develop Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness as and through Artistic Practice

Developing an integrated methodology of practice that emerges from crafting consciousness alongside technical skill and creative outcomes.

vii. Develop Emotional range

Developing a relationship with the natural world requires us to build an emotional range and *rasās* (states of being) towards the natural world.

viii. Co-evolve

Historically, human beings have co-evolved with nature and other beings. Return to questions and actions that involve co-evolution as an active engagement with the natural world.



Fig 8. Fisherman and his birds, Chinese ink, watercolours and photocolours on watercolour paper, 13.5 in X 9.25 in, 2019.

ix. Stay *Porous*

Leave the conceptual frameworks in a state of meditative flow to allow for the intangible otherness of *porous* experiences

x. Evolve new conceptual and emotional vocabulary

Essential to developing a culture of relationships with the natural world is developing and evolving the vocabulary – verbal, visual, oral; as well as conceptual and emotional, that we need to create to articulate both to ourselves and others, and also to deepen the nature of the relationship that we build.

8. Inquiring into *Porosity* as a Principle of Consciousness – Building a Theoretical Framework

I start out by building three sets of questions to deepen my inquiry into *porosity.* These questions guide the evolution of the theoretical framework as well as the practitioner's framework of the thesis. Here, I lay them out to show the generative possibilities of inquiring into *porosity* as a principle of consciousness and what it would imply in application in everyday life, particularly through the arts. The questions are as follows:

Set 1 – Consciousness based questions

i. What is *the porous self* as a state of ecological consciousness and how does one arrive at this state of consciousness?
ii. What are methodological processes for arriving at the state of consciousness?
iii. Provided one places it within an aesthetic ecological conscious state what are the properties and methodologies of a *porous* consciousness?
iv. Is *porosity* the shift in consciousness or the principle that leads to the shift in consciousness?

Set 2 - Aesthetics, creativity and practice questions

i. What is creativity/ aesthetics at the juncture of the *porous* state of consciousness?
ii. Why is environmental aesthetics or eco-creativity essential to ecological consciousness?
iii. What are the implications of any form that arises out of this state of consciousness?

iv. What are creative / aesthetic methodological processes in each of the forms?

v. What are techniques of art that could evolve from a *porous* consciousness?

Set 3 – Axial questions

i. What is the relevance of this *porous* state in social/ personal dilemmas of value and action?

ii. Where and how do consciousness, creativity and ethics meet?

9. The Experience of *Porosity*

A philosophical questioning with openness provides a framework to connect the disciplines; fields of inquiry and conceptual structures at play in the thesis. For this I borrow the approach of creative openness to question and extend Indian philosophy from philosopher Daya Krishna's work.

As discussed earlier, *Porosity* can be defined in multiple layers – the physical, psychical and the metaphysical. *Porosity* can be seen in the physical realm as the act of breathing and exchange of breath across life forms. It can be unraveled psychically in the many encounters that people narrate of a sense of understanding another being or landscape intuitively. It can also be metaphysical in a realm that allows a transformation of consciousness, and a state of oneness that appreciates duality and multiplicity of forms. *Porosity* as a framework is an amalgamation of looking at -

- *Porosity* as encounter
- *Porosity* as symbol
- *Porosity* as a state and principle of consciousness
- *Porosity* as aesthetic state of transformation

- *Porosity* as state of being
- *Porosity* as a state of action
- *Porosity* as self
- *Porosity* as paradox
- *Porosity* as cultural intuition

While Indian notions of ecological consciousness have guided us in the past, the onslaught of a changing world with new conceptual paradigms, and consumerist attitudes render these notions unusable, crippled or simply forgotten. In my work as an artist, poet and dancer there is an attempt to draw out the essences of these ideas, to recognize their influence in the intuitive outpouring in my work, to make a conscious application and in otherways, extend them into contemporary practice while making the conceptual structures as well as principles of practice visible and open for discussion and debate. At a time when individuals feel an overwhelming sense of emotional paralysis at the complexity and stark difficulty of finding ways to meaningful act towards the ecological crisis, I inquire into our individual relationships with nature, in our solitary wandering to find emotional paradigms where movement from paralysis will become possible.

The second aspect of my work lies in an active drawing out of nature in both categories in which it is discussed in Indian thought – 1) nature in its phenomenal reality both gross and subtle, and 2) nature in its transcendent category. The purpose of these actions is to draw out our experiential relationship with nature in the layers of personal transformation and transmutation; to reveal the *porous self* in its capacities of interacting with both categories of nature. And it is in this light that *porosity* is

discussed within framework of the self and artistic practice is deliberated upon as an approach to crafting an intrinsic ecological consciousness.

The approach to uncover the varied dimensions of the *porous self* attempts articulating from an experiential embodied realm which includes both writing in a state of flow and writing from memory as a slow constructive process. Both processes involves finding appropriate vocabulary to suggest the nuances of the experiences. Intuition and imagination are used to expand and extrapolate the ideas. Lastly, there is a cognitive, intellectual and philosophical inquiry in order to position *porosity* as a framework. This slow unraveling of *porosity* through distinct practices allows different facets of it to be revealed.



Fig 9: Girl weaves herself into the brahmaptura river and reeds, Illustration from my novella Brahmaputra, Ink wash on watercolour paper, 8.27 in X 11. 69 in, 2013.

Criticality is brought to bear upon the inquiry by asking, **When is *Porosity*?** *Porosity* is a phenomena that happens in time and space. Temporality and spatiality are critical to the inquiry. *Porosity* can happen at a certain time, or in a certain space, in a certain season, and the shades and tones as well as intensities of experiences may be related to time and space in different ways. *Porosity* can also happen when one's own emotional and mental states are conducive to this experience. However, *porosity* is not completely left to chance, as there is a preparation of self in physical, intellectual and emotional layers that can lead to creating the right conditions for *porosity* to occur. Thus time-space as a unit is very important to the experience of *porosity* as is the transcending of both time and space in the immediacy of the experience. Questions on 'When is *Porosity*?' are an inquiry into what constitutes a *porous* experience – and what are the states of awareness that lead us to recognizing a phenomena/ event/ encounter as a *porous* experience.

The experiences of *porosity* start with encounters with other beings. Encounter is a moment of intersubjective experience, it is also a moment of dissolution of individual ego/ self. Fleeting and yet pregnant with essence there is a transfer of 'beingness' from one to the other, a direct perception where internally, we experience the world through the presence and being of the other (Harding 2017; Fleming and Chamberlin 2016). These encounters may happen with other human beings, large landscapes, entire biomes, or individual creatures as well as artistic productions that carry the flavor of these experiences. The instance in which the experience happens is often unexpected and feels like a suspended notion of reality. However as these experiences repeat over time or intensify, they become alternative experiences of reality that emerge when we are in a particular state of consciousness ourselves.

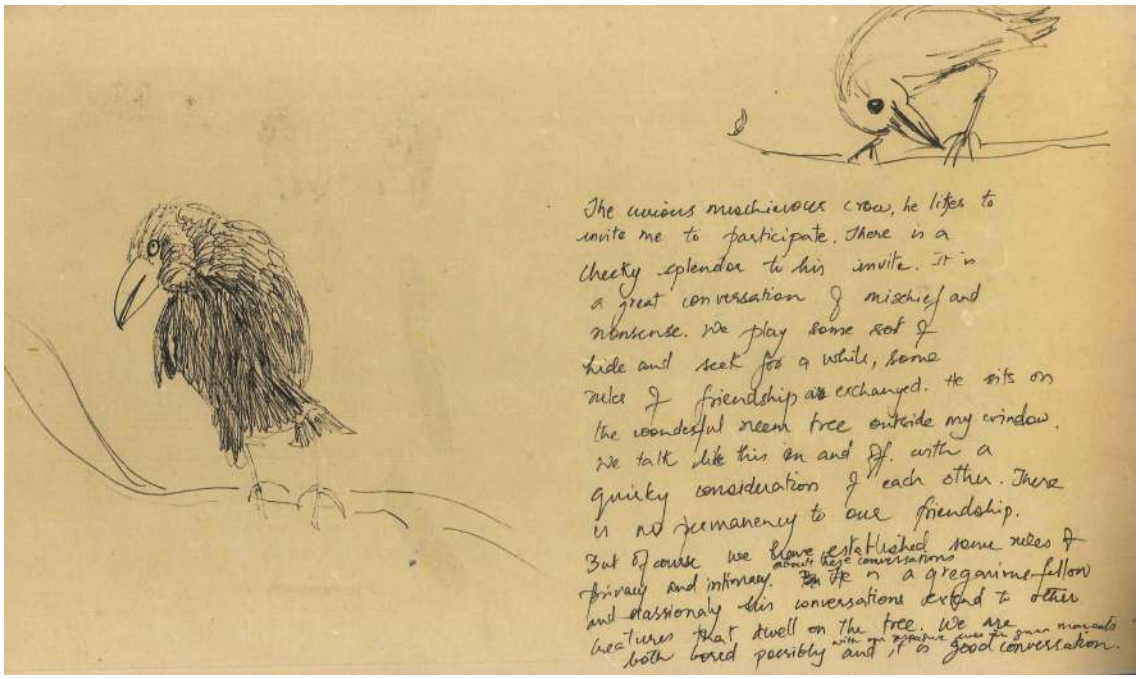


Fig 10: Encounters with the crow, Pen and Ink on hand made paper. 12 in X 7 in, 2016-17

William Glassley, a geologist describes a moment of great beauty where he witnessed a deer on the seashore experiencing the world in moonlight. He states

> "Our social structures, our creativity and economies, many argue, prove our elevated stature in the world, defining an immense gulf between us and the other living things with whom we share this planet. That moment with the deer, along with other experiences in places where wild animals can be found, have led me to believe that such views reflect a profound ignorance that feeds an inflated and unjustified sense of who we are. We exist in near complete isolation from Nature—we live not knowing what the lives of other beings naturally are. We do not swim or speak with whales or dolphins, we do not walk through tundra with barren ground caribou, we do not fly with migrating falcons from the tropics to the Arctic, we do not stand on beaches at night with deer, we do not forage for seeds with ants. We know almost nothing of the

lives and experiences of wild animals, so we manufacture, through an inadequate and impoverished imagination, what it is we believe they must experience, always assuring ourselves we are more intelligent about the experience of place than they are, and always claiming such feelings as wonder and awe for ourselves. (Glassley 2019)"

He goes on to wonder what really the experience of the deer might have been at that moment and wonders if it was joy or calm, or if her deeper sensitivities gave her access to much more. He wonders if she was unaware of his presence of if she accepted it or if she chose to ignore it. He has no answers, except an awareness of how profound the experience was and how it transformed him.

10. *Porosity* as a Principle of Consciousness - A Hypothesis

I start out my hypothesis with two aspects, drawing on the basis of the literature review and the encounters described by different people, as well as the ideas drawn from Indian thought traditions.

1. *Porosity* in itself is a state of being/ consciousness.
2. However, it is also the principle that can lead to the shift/ transformation in consciousness in conscious awareness. Here awareness, time and space are brought into discussion.

In order to develop the nuances of *Porosity* as a principle of consciousness, *Porosity* is placed for discussion within five Indian categories that can mutually move between

each other - a state of Being/ Self/ Mind /Intellect /Consciousness. What is the element that makes it possible for movement between these categories?

In these five categories, I discuss it within the notions/ Indian categories of

Ātman / Uḷḷam – Self

Sat, Bhāva – Being and Becoming

Cit, Vimarśa – Intellect, self –reflection

Ciṟṟuḷḷam and *Pēruḷḷam, Ṛta, Ānanda, Rasa* – Consciousness

One of the first challenges to communicating the experience of *porosity* is that it seems ineffable. Finding ways to describe and articulate often fall short of the experience itself or on the other hand appear to be completely imaginary. When there is a *porous experience* and a subsequent awareness of this experience, does transformation of consciousness occur through different pathways/ levels?

The first question framed broadly as philosophical inquiry is – How do we inquire into the ineffable experience of *porosity*?

i. What is awareness and how do we become aware?
ii. And what is its impact on consciousness?

Philosophical discussions that look at recognition, transformation, reflection of ineffable experiences define the temperament of the thesis throughout.

The second question framed broadly in action and everyday beingness is – How/when does such an experience transform consciousness?

i. How do we become aware of the transformation?

ii. Are there any observable characteristics/measure- visible/invisible to self/other?

iii. How do space and time act on consciousness when it is *porous*?

To inquire into this, the investigations of self delve into

a. Love and compassion as emotional states that allow for reflective and relational aspects of *porosity*
b. The nature and properties of a *porous* state of consciousness
c. *Porosity* as function and action of a *porous* state of consciousness

The third question framed broadly in building creative practice is - How do we describe or transfer the ineffable experience? What devices do we use in text, image and movement? This question is critical to building new creative practice.

i. Matilal in his essay suggests three possible methods that have been used by traditional mystics and poets (Matilal, 1990, 142-155)
    a. Metaphor/Poetic Language
    b. Paradox and Negation
    c. Creative practice/ Building conceptual and creative vocabulary

The fourth question framed broadly for building a method/ framework/ pedagogy is - Is it possible to repeat the experience, if so how? The following practices are considered for the same.

3. *Sādhanā, Yoga, Saṃvād*

4. Re-setting boundaries of self and other.

5. Training as a *sahṛdaya*

In the first question we are interested in understanding *porosity* as a state of consciousness. In the second question, we are looking at *porosity* both as consciousness and principle of consciousness. In the third, we try to find ways to use *porosity* as a principle to trigger new action; describe *porosity* as a state of being to transfer the experience to a *sahṛdaya*. In the fourth, we are interested in understanding *porosity* as a principle.

Consciousness as a category is a paradox in itself. Drawing from Indian traditions, I further the intersections of *porosity* with consciousness through different positions of consciousness as recognized in the tradition. These are further investigated and expanded in Chapter 4.

i. Pure Consciousness

   - *Ātman, Brahman, Puruṣa:* Undifferentiated consciousness*, Turīyā* - Unchanging pure consciousness, *Ṛta, Cit, Caitanya, Uṇarvu, Aṟivu*

ii. Consciousness as perceptual awareness, language

   - *Vāc*: Word, Language; *Rūpa*: Form - verbal/ non-verbal and gestural/ visual, senses, *Prajñā* – Discerning intellect, wisdom, *Jāgṛti* (wakeful), *Uṇarvu, Aṟivu*

iii. Consciousness as paradox

   - *Līlā* - Play, *Māyā* – Illusive, paradoxical play*, Sākṣi*: Witness element; *Svapna* Dream state

iv. Consciousness as mystic experience/ transformative, transcendental awareness

- *Ānanda* - Ecstasy, Bliss; *Kaivalya – Transcendent pure consciousness; Samādhi* - A state of complete absorption; *Sthitaprajña* - A state of wisdom and stability; *Aṉpu, Tayai* - Love and compassion

v. Consciousness as aesthetic transformation and experience

- *Rasa, Rasānubhūti, Rasānubhava, Sahṛdayatva*

vi. Consciousness as embodied being/ practice/transformation

- *Sādhana/ Yajña, Yoga, Prakṛti*, *Jīva* (unity consciousness), *Suṣupti* (sleep)

vii. *Consciousness as witness*

- *Sākṣin* – Witnessing self, *Vimarśa* – Reflective Consciousness

viii. Consciousness as socio-political engagement and relationship embedded in everyday reality

- *Camūka Uṇarvu, Bandhu, Uṟavu, Svadharma*

While the questions are both ambitious and complex, inorder to develop both a theoretical and practitioner's framework they are inevitable. Further, the Indian thought traditions rest on a complex set of interrelated systems and the questions lead us to discover these systems as well as their possible counterparts for today's world. The following chapter outlines the methodology and provides the methods that will be used to pursue these questions at greater depth. The actual unfolding happens in further chapters.

11. Contributions

This thesis looks at how artistic processes can unravel a deep primordial self, embedded in nature consciousness as integral to creativity in our contemporary world. In that, it looks to redefine – art, artist, artistry, artistic process, aesthetics and

creativity in the realm of a dynamic, integral and *porous* ecological consciousness. By working closely with nature, communities and self, I unravel artistic processes and methodologies that probe into how connecting with nature through the *porosity* principle informs our sense of creativity and identity.

This research seeks to extend the fields of eco-aesthetics, ecological ethics and eco-philosophy by looking at the intersections of personal artistic practice and ecological consciousness. By connecting creativity and ecological consciousness in an artistic-philosophical frame through Eastern aesthetics and contemplative traditions, the proposed research adds a critical dimension to the conversations on ethics of art, design and ecology. It also allows for unflattening of ecological perspectives by adding rich cultural world-views to the dialogues. Within the realm of art, aesthetics and artistry, it questions our current paradigms of creativity and calls for a thoughtful and contemplative mode of creating in sync with the cosmic order of the natural world.

In this thesis, the idea of ecological consciousness is evolved from a multitude of positions within the contemporary frameworks of ecophilosophy, ecosophy and deep ecology as well as eco art and eco-aesthetics. However it is rooted in traditional Indian frameworks of art, aesthetics and philosophy as its primary source and draws richly from other ancient cultures to expound as well as embellish. Juxtaposition of incommensurate epistemologies and ontologies, while finding transdisciplinary methods to work through the dilemmas and challenges is one contribution of this work.

The second more obvious contribution is the perspectives of a contemporary artist framing her work within the tradition Indian aesthetic philosophy, and the cultural-spiritual intersection of subjective practice placed in close interpretation of traditional philosophies in juxtaposition with other contemporary frameworks. Using the lens of *porosity*, this study of my own work evolves six aspects.

i. Nature of self as *porous*- *porosity* as function of *porous*. Bringing awareness of *porosity* back to self and thereby to investigating materiality, consciousness and creativity in a framework of resonance
ii. Evolving a transdisciplinary framework to study *porosity* looking at cross-cultural concepts, categories and challenges
iii. Theoretical frameworks of *porosity* as a principle of consciousness
iv. Indian frameworks – aesthetic, mystic, philosophical and their intersections with ecological consciousness in a contemporary[16] framework
v. Practitioners framework of *porosity*– Not a critique/ commentator's framework, but an immersive inquiry into the traditional as well as contemporary models of practice informed by intuition as well as contemporary application and artistic research
vi. Redefining creativity in an ecological yet universal frame through *porosity* as a principle

[16] Contemporary is used as relevant to our times and not in terms of contemporary theory.

Chapter 2

Mapping Positions: Personal-Political, Artistic and Environmental

The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are our biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity—then we will treat each one with greater respect. That is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.

(Suzuki, 2003, 11)

"Much recent design has satisfied only evanescent wants and desires, while the genuine needs of man have often been neglected. The economic, psychological, spiritual, social, technological, and intellectual needs of a human being are usually more difficult and less profitable to satisfy than the carefully engineered and manipulated "wants" inculcated by fad and fashion"

(Papanek 1985, 15)

Sections

i. Positionality

- The 'Traditional' world view: Critiques and personal positions
- Challenges and Arguments

ii. Background

- Separation of man and nature
- A fertile environment for change: Survey of Ideas

iii. Developing an ecological self and consciousness: Discussion on Gaps

    - Perception and Worldmaking
    - The Limits of Form: Self and body
    - Language and Expression
    - Aesthetics, Creativity and Making

iv. Addressing the gaps through the category of *porosity*

In ***Chapter 2: Mapping Positions: Personal-Political, Artistic and Environmental,*** starting with a positionality statement, the author's positions on tradition, socio-political aspects of environment and conservation, plurality and choices of textual traditions, cultural positions of epistemology and ontology are discussed. This chapter sets the context to understand the separation of human and natural worlds, and the need for a relational approach to understand the nuances of the environmental crisis at large. A short survey of changing ideas across several disciplines provides a glimpse into how 'relationship' has emerged as a key lens for engaging in environmental actions. The need for crafting an ecological self and creating a different understanding of human relationships with the natural world through an approach of multicentrism, pluralism, and cultural worldviews is emphasized.

Crafting new relationships and an ecological self as well as ecological consciousness would require attitudes, methods and lenses that transform our current understanding of relationships with the natural world. Keeping the position of an artist-practitioner, the gaps that need to be addressed while crafting an ecological self and the corresponding consciousness are structured through four key areas

i. Reflection and contemplation on - Perception and Worldmaking,
ii. Personal transformations by reframing - The Limits of Form: Self and body,
iii. Articulation through finding appropriate - Language and Expression,
iv. Creative expression/ action through practice - Aesthetics, Creativity and Making

This chapter leads onto the third chapter on methodology

1. Positionality

Porosity as defined within the thesis is only considered for artistic practice, and as a framework for aesthetic ecological consciousness that emerges through artistic practice. It is not meant for broad application or extension into other actions, practices, policy work or disciplinary considerations even as the author suggests that the framework of *porosity* could be expanded to other areas, by other researchers or herself. Hence the thesis must be reviewed within the limitations that the author cognizes and acknowledges. The author uses only poetry, visual art and movement to make her case and the styles of her personal work as showcased and discussed in the thesis are bound within specific criteria. Given the vast possibilities of how artistic practice can be defined by individual practitioners, and particularly eco-art practitioners, the author offers discussions on what *porosity* as a framework could offer practitioners by opening her practice for deliberation.

The second argument is related to developing the conceptual vocabulary for theorizing *Porosity* and developing methodological frameworks for *porosity*. This is more complex as there are several positions/categories/ lens that are used in order to evolve the vocabulary. The author thus articulates these and then clarifies the varied challenges these lenses offer. It is in valuing plurality that a transdisciplinary approach has been attempted to find vocabulary that would emerge at the intersections of these positions as well as the individual lenses themselves.

i. Mystic- Theological - Philosophical positions from the Traditional Hindu-Vedic, the six classical systems of philosophy – broadly *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika,*

Yoga- Sāṃkhya, Vedānta- Mīmāṃsā, Bhakti traditions, *Śaivaite* traditions from across the country.

ii. Aesthetic-Philosophical – Classical traditions and deliberations on Indian aesthetics as well as select contemporary practitioners that include the tribal and the folk classifications together with the high classical traditions; alongside these, influences of other western artistic movements are also discussed

iii. Socio-political frameworks are hinted upon, but left to be handled with context sensitivity by practitioners in the contexts of fieldwork. The issues are discussed in relation to ecological aesthetics as well as ecological consciousness as emergent fields. Issues of conservation, displacement, gender based ecological issues, environmental education, tribal knowledge systems and several other contexts require careful study for artists to choose and work with these areas as their subject matter. This work is beyond the scope of the current thesis. However a broad discussion of what *Porosity* and alterity/otherness can offer to each other is discussed.

iv. Ecological fields – Diverse emerging fields related to the environmental studies that have the eco-prefix are considered in relation to current crisis as well as older cultural worldviews. Ecological Consciousness, Eco-Aesthetics, Eco-Philosophy, Eco-Psychology, Ecological Ethics among others are reflected upon deeply.

v. Relationship and Multicentrism – are two categories that are introduced to hold together these multiple positions, as well as transcend them.

1.1. The 'Traditional' Worldview: Critiques and Personal Positions

The 'Traditional' world view as constructed during the colonial and nationalist periods have been problematized for valorizing and glorifying the *Vedic* era and select privileged Sanskrit and high classical texts. Coomaraswamy's work and the work of other traditional scholars have also been critiqued for over emphasizing and framing Indian art and aesthetics within spiritual, mystical and metaphysical paradigms without substantially acknowledging non-spiritual, secular and socio-political frameworks which are equally critical to Indian aesthetics. Oral traditions, folk and tribal narratives, while acknowledged by some scholars, have not been given equal importance and subsumed within the larger 'Hindu' tradition bringing a certain elitism into these works.

The revivalist movements also favoured classical traditions and knowledge systems, thereby privileging certain forms of arts and crafts over others. Particularly in dance traditions, the *devadāsīs,* temple courtesans considered the original inheritors of the tradition lost their status when the *Devadāsī* system was abolished by the British. The revivalist movements reconstructed the dance forms for the privileged upper classes of society, while the original dancers languished slowly losing their status as well as their practice (Soneji 2012).

Overlaid with a nationalist agenda to rediscover identity and pride in a historic glorious past, narratives of a monolithic religious identity have also been constructed, without providing due recognition for plurality amongst diverse peoples who identify themselves as Hindu or who follow a tribal faith. In the vein of nationalist movements that evoked patriotic sentiment calling to common Hindu mythologies,

gods and goddesses and shared worldviews across the country, a politicizing of the religion has continued to evolve. Today, the idea of the 'political religion', termed *hindutva* seeks to homogenize the plurality of the cultures, disrupting the flourishing, co-existing or co-evolving of other traditions, faiths and religions.

The issue of caste and the challenges faced by lower castes due to oppression by upper castes is also at the heart of a very strong voice of critique against the traditional frameworks, as the lower castes over a period of time were denied access to these knowledge frameworks or even the sacred places of worship.

In the current global climate, as several practices long recognized within the Hindu tradition have been adapted across cultures, there is a political promotion of Yoga as well. There are strong critiques within India to classical traditional knowledge frameworks, aesthetics, particularly in how a unified idea of the past has been constructed out of them in the nationalist and revivalist periods as well as part of the political religion's ideologies, discarding plurality in their conceptions.

Each of these positions require a longer immersion to engage with, to acknowledge as well as counter, debate and discuss and it is beyond the scope of the current dissertation.

I provide a short discussion for my choice of working with the traditional framework as a cultural practitioner from within the living tradition, articulating my acknowledgements as well as the challenges of writing from this frame.

In Venkat Rao's article (2009), "Anachronistic Reflections: Of Critical Humanities", he critiques the limitations of the postcolonial framework, particularly its caste interpretations, raising the need to re-investigate the framework, from within Indian conceptions of *varṇa* and *jāti* as "multiple singularities". He points out how the current framework denies, distances and differentiates the supposed 'beneficiary' from his/her 'cultural genealogies'. Interestingly, this post-colonial position of caste, as he reads it, remains entrenched in colonial categories. His argument is invaluable to break new ground in both caste studies and traditional and classical Hindu studies.

Mohanty (2013) in his essay "Polemics of Decolonisation: The Art Criticism of Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy" points out that the postcolonial narratives by critics such as “Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Aizaz Ahmed, and others” while focusing on secular and cultural material positions, have omitted earier narratives of decolonisation that focused on religious or spiritual traditions. He also asserts that " Modern systems of thought have not paid adequate attention to the question of faith and the notion of the sacred (Mohanty 2013).” He acknowledges that the reason for this could be the “upsurge in relious fundamentalism worldwide.” However he emphasizes that there is a need for an alternative theory as postcolonial critiques as they stand now have **“**ignored a vital world view and a significant part of the cultural history of South Asia (Mohanty 2013).”

In the vein of Mohanty's argument, I suggest that the “traditionalist” approach be re-cast within its voice as offering early narratives of decolonisation as well as vital to understanding epistemologies and ontologies within the cultural framework that includes concepts of the sacred.

1.2 Challenges and Arguments

One of the challenges is the double bind of defining *porosity* – when one draws out consciousness frameworks from certain cultural positions and the epistemology and ontology of these, in order to develop a conceptual vocabulary of *porosity*, the challenge remains, that positions of alterity, and vocabularies rising from the 'other' may not be considered within this framework. However, the notion of this inquiry as subjective research is also to create an open-ended methodological framework that allows others to use the framework of *porosity* with reference and relation to their own cultural voices, while only providing ways to navigate one's own intuitions, epistemic and ontic relationships with the natural world in order to develop one's own ecological consciousness through artistic practice.

The second challenge lies in how we look at knowledge frameworks from within their own positions. If one were to very definitively draw boundaries between mystic-theological-philosophical, socio-political, and aesthetic-philosophical kinds of positions, then each of them may be relevant to different dimensions of human life and hence require much more elaborate study in order to develop a more robust vocabulary based on debates and discussions that arise in trying to create a transdisciplinary framework across context-sensitive situations. Enlightenment/ spirituality, survival and livelihood, aesthetic pleasure and ethical living can sometimes be in a single frame, and at many others they maybe very different aspects or even moments of experience in everyday live, leading to individual inner growth and education in each of these over time. This dimensionality of each of the three categories of positions must be considered in how *porosity* could be defined within each and in relation to each other as well.

Third consideration, in cases where there is a more fused possibility in the voice as the *vacana* traditions or some *Bhakti* traditions have come up with, if there can be more universal- ethical positions that inform the vocabulary, these again would require extensive study. However, in these ethical positions, one must still consider broader economic, social and political conditions and it would not be easily resolved with just the philosophical and ethical intentions of these voices.

This thesis acknowledges these limitations and hence emphasizes its position as self-reflective of the author's cultural framework, lived practice and intuition, while considering diverse positions. The suggestion is that, individual practitioners would have to expand debates, discussions and conceptual vocabularies that are context sensitive, when adapting or critiquing this framework of *porosity* with reference to their own practice. The categories of 'relationship' and 'multicentrism' offer opportunities for plurality, while at the same time valuing context-sensitive as well as cultural positions.

Plurality brings with it, its inherent binary of individual voice. Many individual voices build a field of plurality. Respect for these individual voices and how listening intently to them would impact living conditions, dignity and identity are part of a larger human social and ethical consciousness for all of us to ponder upon. Therefore, any singular voice that emerges brings with it a voice of and for plurality. While there is value to being critical of 'What' the voice says, the more crucial questions at this juncture where older power structures have been broken to yield newer ones, to perhaps ask are -Whose voice is heard? By whom? And When? And how are we going to learn to listen to different voices?

At the edge of the core forest, in the buffer zone of Bandipur, Karnataka live plural communities – farmers, tribals and villagers with different professions, the forest department, ecologists and conservationists, and people who run resorts. The diversity of cultures, socio-economic strata, political viewpoints that are in constant dynamic relationships in this space are rich and complex. Any policy decisions, conservation ideologies, livelihood options, acknowledgement and creating space of plural faiths and the ritual practices impact each community differently. The tigers or elephants, wild boars or wild dogs do not distinguish one community from another when their conflicts with human life affect crops, cattle or even humans themselves in random clashes. The socio-economic relationship to survival, livelihood and functional engagement with wildlife here are layered systems. Our contexts at a time of ecological crisis are more complex in our relationships with nature where plurality of voice takes a whole new meaning, as we begin to include the voices of other beings.



Fig 1: Wolf and woman sheltering from night winds and loneliness. Nomadic shepherd communities in Southern and Central India, farmers in some parts of North Karnataka share a long history of relationship with wolves, coexisting with them. Watercolours on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2019.

As a practitioner and particularly as an educator, the author's engagements take on a position of deep perception, unbounded systems thinking and context-sensitive engagement along with self-reflexivity keeping in mind diverse social, cultural, economic, ecological and political points of view. These positions and the possibilities of work that can emerge from within them are however beyond the scope of this particular inquiry. In this thesis, the engagement is to unravel a position that is more strongly mystical-ecological-aesthetic-philosophical and rooted within the author's own lived cultural practices and the intuitions that she associates with the same.

For instance in a specific situation of human-animal conflict where a family loses one of their own to perhaps conflict with an elephant in a tea-estate or a farmland at the boundary of the forest around an elephant corridor, how is an artist to grapple with depictions of *porosity*? – is it the moment of loss, or the moments of grieving that the artist would choose to unravel. Would she invoke the long-standing tradition and acceptance of the elephant god to the anguish of the family, or will she hope to cultivate a grim acceptance while still being protective of the elephant, it's habitat and the larger habitat loss that has often led to this moment of conflict? There are varied moments to pick and choose from for an artist considering using the lens of *porosity* in this context.



Fig 2: Living by the forest. Watercolours and Chinese ink on cartridge paper, 16.25 in X 11.75 in, 2019.



Fig 3: Mother elephant with calf. Watercolours and Chinese ink on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2019.

The author's grandmother in her moments of grief while her family went through personal trials and tribulations would write *nintaṉai veṉpā*, (poetic verse that would both beseech, lament and be angry retorts to her *iśta devatā* Muruga for not taking care of her family) She would work her way through both anger and grief in this manner. Would it be possible for such poetry to be created for this context with *Lord Ganeśa* as the recipient? Can one invoke in such poetry the gravity of the sharp habitat loss, the greed and power hunger of human life that has left in its wake such personal tragedy for one family? The physical line is *porous* between the forest land and that of a tea estate perhaps, the mythical- and spiritual lines of conversation too are *porous*, the lines of grief too are shared by man and elephant, each making do in response to a much larger devastation. Can one bring to such grief, the compassionate consciousness that is possible in a state of *porosity*, when creating aesthetic emotion in artistic work?

It is at this point that while one holds the language and vocabulary of a culture, its peculiarities and ontic positions, one can still transcend these in the creation of new work that emerge in relationship and multicentrism. For another community that might not share *Ganeśa* as a deity or all the ontic and epistemic possibilities that a relationship with an elephant-headed god offers as well as presupposes, there would be another artistic representation, a different way to engage with aesthetic emotion.

Lament to Ganeśa



Fig 4: Lord Ganeśa, Bhoganandeeswara Temple, Near Bangalore, Karnataka, January 2016.

Ganeśa, You who created boundary

between forest and farm!

Come and stand before me in this no-man's land

of my grief and your neck

so we can argue the reasons for the death of my son.

You who took on the head of the elephant,

what were you doing when the tusker

tossed him aside;

When he trampled our farms

sprayed with the blood of my son?

Whose land is this anyway?

Does it belong to your head or

your body?

Have you not reconciled

one with the other?

You drew an arbitrary line between

contentment and greed,

As your human head long severed,

draws one between forest and farm.

The forest recedes further away,

and cars anger the solitary tusker

as he crosses over to our farm.

The memory of my son's laughter

ridicules our paddy field

echoing the vibrations of power lines.

The clever tusker snapped many of those

and relished the taste of tamarind.

Last year, we rejoiced together.

Elsewhere another arbitrary line

drawn by your human head

separates village and town, rural and urban.

My lamenting cries and the laughter of wild hyenas

echo into the money my tired husband

counts from the sale of chillies.

Elephant-headed god, what am I to do?

Am I to kill you with all my grief and anger?

Human-bodied god, what am I to do;

Beseech to the elephant or the man in you?

Upon whom should I bring my wrath?

Tears, tears, tears- they pour out of me

to mix with blood and soil.

I pray to you and I poison you.

I draw an arbitrary line between

man and god in no-man's land.

Farm-forest; Grief-neck; Contentment-greed

Town-village; Money-poverty;

Tears-blood; Human-animal; Urban-rural

Man-god; You-me, Life-death

and all the arbitrary lines of division…

Will they bring my son back?

Elephant-headed-man-god!

Will you survive any longer

in this world where

there is neither space for man nor for elephant?

Or will you just go on being greedy to

draw some more arbitrary lines?

The second argument for positionality that the thesis has is that the author has considered the 'traditional' worldview (Which includes *Vedic and Āgamic, Bhakti* and a combination of other systems that include the aesthetic traditions) from the lived practice and living heritage frames in relation to the author's own upbringing and experience. Within this frame, this voice is also one of the many voices that have been impacted by the colonial frameworks and further by the socio-political arguments, where the epistemology and ontology questions that arise within these traditions are devalued or countered. The thesis takes the position that these traditions that are continuous living heritages for many people, are in themselves also native voices and one of the voices of plurality that must be considered for their epistemic and ontic

value as knowledge traditions and not always/ only in relation to the socio-political critique.

Narratives of power, privilege, supremacy, appropriation and injustice are integral to the very human condition and diverse cultural groups and religions/ subsects of religions at all points of time in history. The author acknowledges the importance of reading *Vedic and Āgamic* texts through the lens of privilege, however is cautious in defining the entire body of work evolved over millennia only through such a lens, as diverse people have contributed to many of these texts. Also, the socio-political lens of privilege, takes away the possibilities of reading the text through the lens of the mystic-philosophical, where distinctly different meanings emerge.

While the author acknowledges the critiques, and alternative readings of the traditional texts cited through the thesis, she also brings out the alterity of the 'traditional voice' from the perspective that is internal to the lived practice and has the interiority of the lived practice (This interiority includes mystical insights as well philosophical, theological and aesthetic engagement with text, lived practice and conversations with other practitioners of the tradition at large.) Even within the 'traditional voice' are multiple voices, constantly in debate and discussion, deliberating upon their own respective ontology and epistemology. Therefore the author, finds it rather presumptuous to club all these multiple voices under the larger umbrella of a singular 'traditional' frame and therefore stays true to tracing her own positions through both her intuitions and her exposure to lived practice, acknowledging the limitations of the same, while also pointing out that, it allows for hearing one more voice adding to plurality, not detracting from it.

The third argument for positionality that the author takes is that of artistic research and subjectivity and autobiographical work as a key frame of research. The basic question that the thesis attempts to unravel is -

What would it mean to turn inward to resolve our relationship with the earth and the cosmos through unraveling our shared bond of creativity?

The artist-author-researcher chooses to turn inward through her own practice to unravel nuances that emerge in the intimacy of one's own thoughts, journeys and consciousness, with the particular nuance of *porosity* as the principle of her consciousness state.

Professors of Psychology, Dan McAdams, Northwestern University, along with Erika Manczak, University of Denver, in a chapter for the APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology (2015) write on the nuances and complexities of autobiographical reasoning,

> "It's hardly a simple undertaking. People contain multitudes, and by multitudes, I mean libraries. Someone might have an overarching narrative for her whole life, and different narratives for different realms of her life—career, romance, family, faith. She might have narratives within each realm that intersect, diverge, or contradict each other, all of them filled with the micro-stories of specific events. And to truly make a life story, she'll need to do what researchers call "autobiographical reasoning" about the events—"identifying lessons learned or insights gained in life experiences, marking development or growth through sequences of scenes, and showing how specific life episodes illustrate enduring truths about the self."

It is through this autobiographical reasoning of both past events and present experiences that the author develops a conceptual vocabulary partially, through embodied, contemplative and reflective practices and expands these through both cultural intuition and theoretical research. It may become possible to research other artists through the lens of *porosity* as an extension of this work by the author herself or by others. However, at this point, developing such a vocabulary itself is the primary work, which would have been impossible to emerge without taking the author's subjective as well as intersubjective experiences.

The fourth argument is around using an East - West dichotomy framework. The East-West differences in ontology and epistemology are not straightforward distinctions as across the world there are several melting points, or local cultures that are enmeshed, or have different worldviews from the dominant paradigm. Hence it is a complex layer to reveal. Here, the Western frameworks discussed are mostly those that arise from a Cartesian worldview and the differences/ similarities in ontologies and epistemologies of dominant paradigms in both East, (particularly India with reference to the thesis) and West.

2. Background

2.1 Separation of Man and Nature

The human sense of self has become fractured, artificial and isolated from the natural world as we perceive ourselves as distinct from it. The worldviews that separate humans from nature project that the earth belongs to humans to use and is anthropocentric and hierarchical with humans at the apex of power. Human beings in many parts of the urban world remain largely unconnected from other life forms and

the land except as resource materials or as part of the food chain process or for an enjoyment of landscape. The impact of this does not confine itself to the urban only, but escalates and expands in the larger globally interconnected economic and cultural practices as well as the flow of growth and development. Notions of growth and development are driven by materialistic consumption patterns to serve human needs and entertainment. Often the mapping and understanding of these needs are themselves driven by a shortsighted understanding of welfare. This approach to creating a developed world can exist only in the paradigm that emerges from seeing the human and the non-human as separate. Within this anthropocentric worldview there is a refusal to acknowledge the interconnectedness of beings. Imagination that emerges from this paradigm is limited, myopic and dangerous. As Ernst F. Schumacher (2014) phrases it, "Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side."

The consumerist worldview has placed man in the centre. Even as these worldviews are also being questioned within the scientific community and a more systems based view and relational viewpoints have emerged, a large part of training and thinking in our schools as well as common forums remains within the separation paradigm. Inquiries through the sciences or the humanities bring their inherent philosophical and methodological approaches to meaning making. The notion of a human self that is distinct from nature and capable of objectively investigating about natural phenomena through empirical processes such as induction, deduction, concept formation, hypothesis testing by experimentation and reproducibility has been the paradigm of

scientific exploration. In the humanities, the anthropocentric view continues into critical, comparative and speculative methods of making moral, spiritual and intellectual sense of the world we live in and yet fails to integrate the natural world into meaning making in a larger more holistic sense. However, these notions have been long contested and Berleant (1992) enunciates how at one level they have been discarded and yet how they continue to persist both in academia and everyday practice. “Indeed, the concept of environment as outside, external to the human organism, is a comforting notion now utterly discarded both by ecological studies and post-Cartesian philosophy” (Berleant 1992, 4-5). Berleant points out challenges posed by the anthropocentric attitude in our conception of the environment and how its separatist approach allows for the idea of “domination and exploitation (Berleant 1992, 4-5). He points out that even a century after the the idea that environment is separate from/ hostile to human interests has been discarded in theory, acceptance needed for a conceptual shift in how we perceive the environment is “slow and painful” (Berleant 1992, 4-5).

In separating human from the natural world by differentiating ourselves as sentient beings endowed with unique intelligence, we have led ourselves to a place where there is no common thread that can tie us to the rest of the earth and its life forms. A shared ontology that enframes the human and the non-human together in a culture allows for fluid and *porous* symbols of experience. However, when the dominant paradigm rests in anthropocentricity, reality is limited to a worldview emerging from man at the centre of the universe. In this reality, there is anthropomorphizing of the other, rather than a language that emerges out of a shared ontology of being and an appreciation in the plurality of beings that share an interconnected world. The

anthropocentric approach driven by the Cartesian duality also blinds possibilities of reading other symbolic worlds where different experiences are possible. Language and all literary works that result from this fractured worldview as applied to selfhood preclude the shared ontology of all life in their diverse forms. Such languages shaped by anthropocentric and Cartesian worldviews also remain impermeable between human and more-than-human worlds.

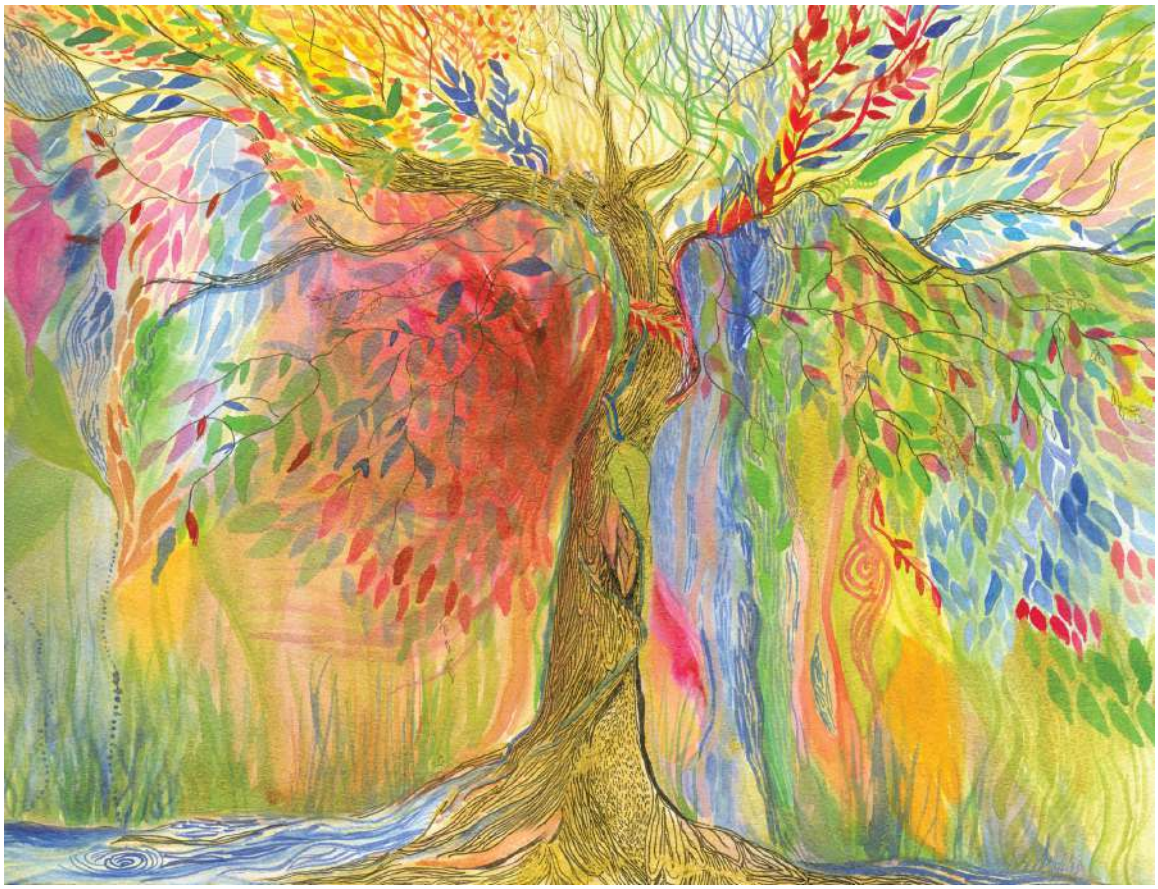


Fig 5: Entwined. In the rainforest, water, trees and life are interwoven into a whole, and that rainforest is a long thread, woven into our everyday lives faraway in the city. This richness of relationship that keeps life and breath flowing in us is at the heart of an ecological consciousness. Watercolours, Photocolours and pen and ink on watercolour paper, 17 in X 12 in approx., 2013.

We have created distinct boundaries that do not allow us to perceive the relationships that allow life to exist on this planet. The result is disconnect, a "separation

consciousness" that is fuelled by education, modern technologies and the aftermath of industrial and Cartesian worldviews (Uhl and Stuchul 2011, 4). When we begin to doubt this separation worldview and patiently observe life around us, reality unfolds rather differently. A *porous* world emerges and with it the possibilities of a "relational consciousness." (Uhl and Stuchul 2011, 5). The fact that we have spent over four hundred years in the belief of nature as separate from human, our educational and livelihood practices evolving from this belief put us as a civilization in a time and space where we must invest in self-reflexivity.

At the same time, as we increasingly observe, almost every region of the planet has been impacted in some significant way by human activity. This challenges the traditional distinctions between nature and culture and nature and artificial, pushing us to break these boundaries between nature and human (Berleant and Carlson 2007, 15). Moral and legal boundaries are also being challenged through philosophical positions as well as environmental issues an concerns in different parts of the world (Berleant and Carlson 2007, 15).



Fig 6: Painted storks and pelicans nesting in the village of Kokkarebellur, Mandya District, Karnataka. Kokkarebellur has been declared a community reserve in 2007 under the wildlife protection act of India. It is a beautiful example of birds and humans co-existing, where the villagers see the nesting birds as their own daughters coming home to give birth. June 2018.



Fig 7 and 8: Painted Stork Juvenile walking in the backyard and rooftops of a house in the village in Kokkarebellur, June 2018.



Fig 9: Pelican nesting in Kokkarebellur, June 2018.





Fig 10: Buffalo and painted stork in the backyard of a house in the village, Kokkarebellur, June 2018.



Fig 11: Juvenile Painted Stork eating fish on the farm, Kokkarebellur, June 2018.

Distinct steps are being made across the world to redress the balance of perception, imagination and epistemology in what we define as a nature, how we relate with it, how we act towards it and with it. 'Nature', 'environment', 'landscape' and 'ecological' are words that have multiple meanings and can be contentious. Social theories, philosophical positions, cultural ontologies and epistemologies, ecological definitions, scientific positions are increasingly varied. The need to transcend the 'separation consciousness' and move towards a 'relational consciousness' requires a transdisciplinary approach that can help us work with cross-cultural ontologies and epistemologies. The focus of this thesis therefore draws upon notions of ecological consciousness, eco-philosophy/ecosophy, eco-psychology, environmental ethics and environmental aesthetics, eco-art and environmental art alongside positions of EcoJustice and environmental (ethics) education. In chapters 3 and 4, I will elaborate the transdisciplinary framework within which each of these disciplines integrates in my work on *porosity*.

Ramon Grosfoguel (2013), in his article "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities" inspired by Enrique Dussel's work on Cartesian philosophy emphasizes how Westernized universities continue to carry the legacy of Cartesian philosophy "as a criteria for validity of science and knowledge production." He traces Cartesian philosophy through four major Genocides/Epistemicides of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and positions the need to reverse the knowledge frameworks of Westernized universities that are based on epistemicides. He alternatively borrows from Dussel's framework of 'trans-modernity' that recognizes 'epistemic diversity without epistemic relativism' and extends it to a framework of modernity (Grosfoguel 2013, 88). He calls for "epistemic pluriversality" that can look at diverse cultural

solutions and responses to problems that are universal or similar (Grosfoguel 2013, 88). Dussel and Grosfoguel's works push the boundary of how other epistemological traditions need to considered to create a "pluriverse future global philosophy" and a "pluriversal world" (Grosfoguel 2013, 88-89).

Anthony Weston's crucial argument for environmental ethics and philosophy asking for us to evolve "environmental etiquette", rests in his positioning relationship at the forefront of both theorizing and action (2009). He writes of the critical and nuanced difference between knowledge and relationship in how we connect with the world. Jim Cheney and Weston emphasize in their chapter on "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette" that it is essential for us to "relate to things, not what things are in themselves (Weston 2009, 11)." They both reiterate that "The great task is not knowledge but relationship" (Weston 2009, 11).

Emphasizing on *relationship*, disciplinary boundaries, epistemological frameworks and ontological notions become supportive tools for the artist – practitioner whose fundamental inquiry lies in transcending the man-nature separation to find new frames of practice, action and daily living.

2.2 A fertile environment for change: Survey of Ideas

Environmental awareness is on the rise as access to information on environmental crisis is more accessible with the internet and information revolution (Vandrick 2011; Cohen 2014). Across fields, the intricate network and interdependence of life on the planet have become the key lens through which practices as well as theoretical frameworks are being re-defined. The lens of interdependence has also led to

conflicting questions of self, identity and human relationship to nature. One of the biggest challenges of perception of the environment in a globalized world is that plurality of ideas is often forsaken for a common definition.

2.2.1. Native and traditional voices

Cultural voices, aboriginal voices, poetic voices, philosophies and practices that perceive the natural world as spiritual, mythical or mystical argue for a perception of the natural world as an integral part of the human, allowing a flow, exchange and coalescing of human and more-than-human worlds. The mental-linguistic structures in many of these cultural languages and voices have a shared ontology that connects the human world with more-than-human worlds.

> "This capacity to share one consciousness, to feel what the others are feeling in the chest and the belly goes far beyond the family and the clan. It extends to every aspect of the environment within which the people live, to the rocks and the winds. Such a perspective rests, I believe, on the pervasive experience and concept of the primal value of relatedness. To be successfully human, both individually and communally, is "to plunge purposefully deeper into the relatedness of all things," as Dorothy Lee writes in her essay "Responsibility Among the Dakota" (Lee, 61)." (as cited in Dunsmore 1997, 13; Lee, 1959, 61)

This shared consciousness, once common across many cultures pre-renaissance is now once again an evolving goal in our contemporary world, as ideas are beginning to be drawn across disciplines and cultures to find a language of relatedness. Vatsyayan (1992) in her essay on *Ecology and Indian myth* delineates how the pivot of Indian

mythology is a holistic ecological balance. She emphasizes how all the philosophical systems as well as the arts manifest this central idea of ecological balance with depth and lucidity (Vatsyayan 1992). She draws out how relevant these ideas are to the present.



Fig 12: Vrishabavahana - Shiva and Nandi Bantering. Dry pastels on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.

All early civilizations and cultures have been consciously aware of the fact that life depends on the five elements. “Myths of the origin of the universe, creation, cosmology and cosmogony, have been developed on the concept of the elements which are four or five (Saraswathi and Vatsyayan, 1995, 3).” Deciphering these languages, this shared ontology, and shared consciousness by drawing deeper into both our intuitions and research into traditional knowledge systems offers a richer vision of the natural world at large and alternative visions of how we can perceive ourselves as human beings.

2.2.2. Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Inter, Multi and Transdisciplinarity at the Fore

The need for new relational language, definitions, methods and practices are challenging all disciplines of study. The following survey provides a sketch for this fertile time of ideas that challenge our definitions of being human, the human self as isolated and in its rich relationships with the natural world and our languages of perception of the natural world. Drawing from diverse positions, disciplines, and perspectives, the intention of this survey is to connect dots across seemingly unconnected ideas, instances, events and fields, to draw pertinent questions regarding environmental ethics, ecological consciousness and the human self.

The United Nations Development Program has developed sustainable goals that take into account the health of the planet along with social development looking at a more whole system approach to understand the complex problems of both people and envionment (Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP.org. Accessed Oct 22, 2019). Development as growth has strong criticism as it is becoming clear that this approach is unsustainble, with clear ideas emerging in 'planetary boundaries', and 'limits to growth'(Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, and Acosta 2019). Post development movements that focus on solidarity, empathy for human and non-human beings and social transformation have become the new voices of a transitioning world (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, and Acosta 2019, xvi). Environmental Philosophy and comparative environmental philosophy are fields that have evolved from the first East-West Philosophy conference in 1939 in the University of Hawaii organized by Charles A. Moore, who later founded the *Philosophy East and West Journal* (Callicott and McRae 2015, xv-xvi). These have enriched cross-cultural perspectives on how the environment is perceived and how best practices across cultures could inform current

lifestyles, attitudes towards environment and ethical positions. Political movements such as feminism, social justice and environmental justice have further broadened and deepened the debates and conversations in environmental philosophy, ethics and conservation practices as well as Green Party policies with ecological ideologies (Callicott and McRae, 2015, xv-xvi; Lowes 2013,110).

Environmental education programs are being seriously considered across the world. While approaches to environmental education are varied and there are debates to consider cultural epistemologies, critical thinking approaches versus ideology based ones, EcoJustice approaches, creative and art based approaches, there is a nuanced engagement with environmental education in private as well as public education models (Palmer 2009; Foster, Mäkelä, and Martusewicz 2019; Aikenhead and Ogawa 2007). Environmental ethics in education has also evolved to shape our psychical, emotional and moral responsibilities. Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods* put forth the concept of *Nature-deficit disorder* and how children today are deprived of nature resulting in a host of emotional, and psychological issues (Louv 2005). This has led to the emergence of *No Child Left Inside* act and movements across the US seeking to encourage and provide funding for environmental education and redefine how children engage with nature (H.R.882 - No Child Left Inside Act of 2015, 114th Congress (2015-2016)[1]

In the West, starting with Aldo Leopold's 'Land Ethic', a responsibility of community towards the ecosystem was emphasized, leading the way for the field of modern Western environmental ethics (Baker, Grundy, Junmookda et.al. 2019, 7).

[1] https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/882**).**

Scientist and ecologist, Rachel Carson's work evoked critical questions on how deeply our lives are entwined with the environment and how our responsibilities needed to arise from this vision. Carson, who was instrumental in teaching us to see the complex network of life and the impact of pollution provides us with the ability to reconnect with nature through a perception of beauty and a sense of wonder (Carson and Pratt, 1965). Further still, her writings have a lyrical quality to them while staying true to rigorous scientific research providing a thoughtful, reflective and exacting paradigm of creative and scientific writing that is aesthetic and poetic. Her work has had far reaching consequences helping to inspire many environmental movements.

William Beebe's (1906, 18) words succinctly capture our responsibility to non-human species and point to a crucial and fundamental need for wildlife conservation efforts.

> "Let us beware of needlessly destroying even one of the lives so sublimely crowning the ages upon ages of evolving; and let us put forth all our efforts to save a threatened species from extinction; to give hearty aid to the last few individuals pitifully struggling to avoid absolute annihilation.
>
> The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet again inspire the composer; but when the last individual of a race of living beings breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again."

2.2.3. Conservation Movements and Ideologies: Complexity of Voices

Across the world, there is much hopeful work being done on wildlife and habitat conservation, bringing different species from the brink of extinction and arresting the destruction of natural ecosystems as well as rewilding devastated landscapes. However, some of the methods used in these cases are often morally contentious, be it captive breeding programs, or creation of national parks that dispossess locals of their historic and cultural connection to landscapes.[2] While moral responsibility and even the continued survival of the human species are a few of the many reasons to want to protect wildlife and their habitats, there is sometimes a simpler wild love for the life around us, a bond that calls out across the boundaries of our 'forms' to simply cherish all beings and ecosystems. Sometimes we care to protect what is around us because we are moved by the natural world that surrounds us. To me even the memories of the gentleness of walking among deodar trees, and filling my lungs with crisp fresh mountain air in a quiet hill station like Dhanaulti at the foothills of Garhwal Himalayan range, or feeling uplifted in the quiet watchful yet teeming silence that fills a forest like Bandipur, that hides shy gaurs in its bamboo thickets, teak and sandalwood forests evokes deep love for the natural world.

Deeply moved by the distress of animals, Jadav Payeng born in the indigenous *Mising* tribe, chose to restore a sandbar of the river Brahmaputra turning it into a forest reserve. The forest is located near Kokilamukh of Jorhat, Assam, and covers an area of about 1,360 acres and is called after his name as Mulai Kathoni. Payeng's work emerges from a deep love for other beings (Yashwant 2012).

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[2] Note: Detailed discussions of the debates of conservation are beyond the scope of this chapter/ thesis.

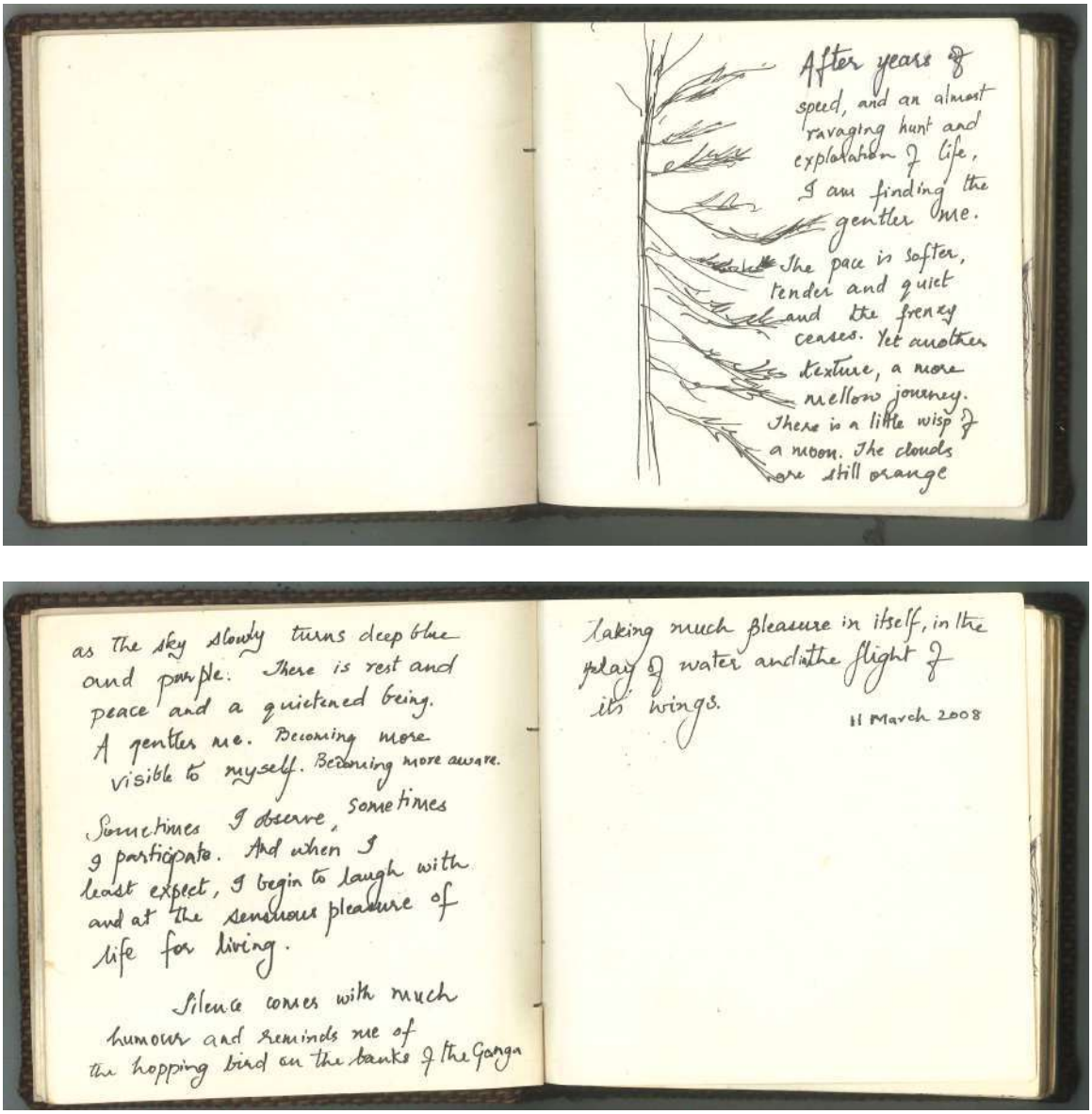


Fig 13 and 14: Walking among the deodars – Pages from a journal, Dehradun and Dhanaulti, Journal size -5 in X 5 in, March 2008.

Conservation ideologies are diverse across time and geographical regions as well as political standpoints. World conservation history is checkered with contentious viewpoints, where conservation laws and policies have been used to dispossess aboriginal, native and tribal cultures of land and rights to their practices and lifestyles. Race and class based practices of settler colonialism have continually dispossessed marginal, native or, local cultures using languages and practices of conservation (Griffin, Jones and Robertson 2019, 4).

A specialist in environmental, borderlands, and Native American history, Karl Jacoby's framework of *moral ecology* helps raise critical questions on what constitutes the relationships between human and nature and what nature is and how it is perceived or used (Jacoby 2014, 3). He points out that in framing history through an elitist approach, where the appreciation of nature was considered to have been an experience that emerged from sophisticated Americans, something incapable of by common folk, the moral complexity of the history of conservation has been reduced to a single triumphant narrative of conservationists against their opponents (Jacoby 2014, 3-5). We find in aboriginal and native cultures and tribes across the world, strong notions of co-existence and preservation, much of which have contributed to conservation of species, biodiversity, global food security and conservation of threatened landscapes today.

According to environmentalist Ashish Kothari, ICCAs (Indigenous peoples and local community conserved territories and areas are "biocultural sites where nature and culture are integrated" and link the two "articifically separated" aspects of human life (Kothari et al. 2012).

Ashoka's edicts from 270 B.C. indicate a precursor to modern ideas of conservation in India. According to environmental historian Ramachandra Guha (2008), modern Indian environmentalism began with the Chipko Andolan started through the protests of rural communities and tribals, where peasants of the Himalaya successfully stopped loggers from destroying public forests in the 1970's. Following this movement, tribals across Chotanagpur Plateau, artisanal fisherfolk in the Kerala coast and tribals in Gandhamardhan in Orissa launched their defence of local ecology and

traditional lifestyles (Guha 2008). In the US, Native American tribes continue to be leaders in wildlife restoration, raising the importance of ontologies and epistemologies that celebrate nature and human as entwined wholes (Hance 2018). Hundreds of environmental organizations are scattered across the world, providing local voice and direction to conservation.

2.2.4. Environmental Aesthetics, Art and Design: Thought Frameworks

Aesthetics has long been seen with suspicion by political ecologists, as aesthetic frameworks of nature have been used as arguments for pristine nature and to set up national parks in the US and across the world over time, destroying tribal and aboriginal cultures in their wake. However, environmental aesthetics as a field, takes up more critical inquiries into aesthetics in/of human relationship with the environment as an important aspect of how we can reconfigure a strong, meaningful relationship with the environment, on the basis of our engagement through the lens of aesthetic experience in all its complexity. Depending on individual orientation, cultural background, disciplinary training, artists may engage in aesthetic perception of different kinds. This makes it complex to find overarching definitions or methods of study to understand artwork that is environmentally bound. The ecological consciousness that one may associate in the creation of, participation with, appreciation of art also takes these diverse positions.

In Indian traditional thought, "The sustenance of the ecological balance was Man's first and last duty for only then the moral order of the world, *ṛta* as also *dharma* in their fundamental connotation, could be or would be sustained. The emphasis was both on the notion of purity and non-pollution as also on ecological balance

(Vatsyayan 1992).” This framework provided a holistic worldview of ecological balance and became the ground for the myths, art and ritual, science, religion and philosophy in India. Many artists and designers in India, both contemporary and traditional are richly influenced by these traditional ideas, myths, practices, consciously or unconsciously.

Similar to the idea of *ṛta* and the cosmic order in Indian thought, articulations of ecological design extend the idea of creating in line with the laws of the natural world.

> “Ecological design, in other words, is the careful meshing of human purposes with the larger patterns and flows of the natural world and the study of those patterns and flows to inform human actions.” (Orr 2002,104)

Design schools across the world have begun to engage with a stronger focus on substainability. Artists and designers contribute to the conversation on ecology, conservation and the environmental crisis in multiple ways. Their voices lend to raising questions on the politics of ecology, social and environmental justice, economics, media and materials. From being discarded as romantic and irrational voices, artistic dialogues on nature have found their way into communication, deep ecology movements, education and transformative action and also restorative means to heal nature. The possibilities of artistic methods, approaches and perspectives in advancing ecological discourse are emerging as powerful alternatives or extensions to scientific, cultural and political discourses on ecology (Demos 2013). Artistic production in the form of films, documentaries, websites, installations, books, traditional and contemporary forms of visual and performing arts are opening “critical forms of environmental thinking and action” (Demos, 2013). The artist holds a

powerful and influential voice within society. While there are multiple kinds of artists, this research is specifically concerned with those artists who seek to add their voice to the ecological crisis.

EcoArt, Ecological Art and Environmental Art have been around for over fifty years, the range of work wide, as practitioners abandon disciplinary boundaries and are informed by principles, theories and collaboration with scientists, social scientists, engineers, architects, local craftsman and artisans and many others to create work that is relevant to environmental contexts and issues (Carruthers 2009). "Ecological Art, or EcoART, is not simply art about, or in, the environment, but is work that addresses the well being of ecosystems, the impacts humans have within ecosystems, the kind of relationships we have with the places where we dwell, and the other species with whom we share these places (Carruthers 2006; Carruthers 2009)."

2.2.5. Emotional Affinities and Questions of Sentience

E.O.Wilson's articulation of 'Biophilia' gives a new frame of ecological thinking that is located within the scientific realm and allows for scientific thought that while resident in rationality allows for articulating emotional connections to nature (1984). David Abram's works which transcend the scientific realm of ecology and move into *porous* relationships and experiences with nature allow for a phenomenological approach to experiencing nature and bring together the world of traditional shamans and a modern ecologist (1996).

David Suzuki *(2008, 7)* writes in his revised introduction to the book *The Sacred Balance* that the web of living things are integral to cleansing and renewing the

elements of life like air, water, soil and sunlight. Alongside the web, he refers to the fact that we are "social and spiritual creatures" and "love and spirit" are therefore key to building sustainable futures (Suzuki *2008, 7)*. He intuits back to the philosophies that connect four/ five sacred elements as the fundamental substances that support all life and reaffirms the ideas with current scientific understanding.

Steven Wise (2002), an animal protection lawyer has been working in the area of animal rights for twenty years and in his book *Drawing the Line,* he argues for the sentience of living beings, the questions of what do we morally consider as sentience and to which beings we can accord it is a careful discussion that arises out of how we can define sentience scientifically, looking at elements of intelligence, cognition and emotion. He looks at obstacles to ending non-human animal slavery by looking at issues through physical, economic, political, religious, historic, legal and psychological obstacles.



Fig 15. A family of Langurs at Doddaladamara, Ramnagara, Karnataka, June 2017



Fig 16: Langurs at the Biligirirangaswamy Temple at B.R.Hills, Karnataka, January 2018.

For instance, the question of according sentience to other life forms is an active part of the debates of animal rights as well as legal frameworks. Recent legal victories for three rivers, one in New Zealand and two in India showcases a point where cultural ontologies are being reconsidered in the ecological crisis of our times (O'Donnell and Talbot-Jones 2017).

Only New Zealand has passed recently 'The Animal Welfare Amendment Bill', which states that animals, like humans, are "sentient" beings (Carson 2015). Vertosick (2002) in his book *The Genius Within: Discovering the Intelligence of Every Living Thing* articulates the intelligence of life in all its forms foraying into the microbial world of bacteria and cancer cells providing a new scientific vision to look beyond human intelligence into other forms of intelligence bringing the question of ethics into sharp focus. However, these decisions of legality are complex and required careful thought regarding their enforcement.



Fig 17: Feisty Ganga in her compassionate, meditative form embracing her children in the caress of flowing water, Photocolours and Watercolours on Water Colour paper, 17 in X 12 in approx., 2013

2.2.6. Life Style choices, Food sovereignty, War and Economy: The Crisis of Imagination and Philosophy

Slow food movements and a strong focus on ethical practices in farming have led to people considering where their food comes from and how to minimize ecological costs, as well as the need to critique genetically modified crops, patenting of seeds and capitalist control of agriculture. Navdanya, an organization started by Vandana

Shiva has pioneered the movement for protection of native seeds in response to the agricultural biodiversity crisis. According to Shiva (2012), seed sovereignty "includes the farmer's rights to save, breed and exchange seeds, to have access to diverse open source seeds which can be saved – and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by emerging seed giants. It is based on reclaiming seeds and biodiversity as commons and public good. It is based on reclaiming seeds and biodiversity as commons and public good."

The carbon footprint, another idea that has caught public imagination, has helped in individuals building self-reflexive practices of consumption. Active questions against fast fashion, over consumption, oil based resources, the insurmountable problem of trash, need for local food movements to ensure food security have increased awareness and lifestyle choices that promote more conscious everyday actions for individuals. Ecological economics as a field is critiquing many aspects of the market economy, particularly its need for perpetual growth against the reality of declining non-renewable resources.

The ecological cost of war is also becoming an important question in understanding large-scale devastation of the environment and the need for laws that will protect the biosphere in times of conflict. The possible role of military in supporting and working towards environmental protection and restoration is also being discussed. In the Indian context, Eustace D'Souza (n.d, accessed April 13, 2020), retired major-general of the Indian Army, discusses how the military can be trained and become a valuable resource pool towards environmental protection. For example, in Bhuj, the military forces are actively engaged in afforestation.

Arne Naess's work on deep ecology as a philosophy has led to rise of several deep ecology movements across the world. While each of these movements have different nuances and approaches, they have risen sharp questions that cover diverse fields from humanities to sciences calling for action that stems from a philosophical, emotional, spiritual relationship we share with the natural world.

One of the key insights that drives personal lifestyle change in environmental movements across the world is people recognizing the challenges of the consumerist world and the urban notions of development, progress and materialism. In Schumacher's words, "An attitude to life which seeks fulfilment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth - in short, materialism - does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited" (Schumacher 1973, 23).

Suzuki (2003, 10) writes "People often ask me, What is the most urgent environmental issue confronting us?" and while he points out that there are several issues to consider, he brings to the forefront the issue of the urban human mind. In his words, "I believe the overarching crisis resides in the modern, urban human mind, in the values and beliefs that are driving much of our destructiveness (Suzuki 2003, 10)." In order to comprehend as well as find meaningful action that emerges from recognizing the need to change ourselves, we need to redefine the crux of the problem and how we perceive the problem itself.

Once again, Schumacher's (1973) insight provides direction to resituate how we perceive the ecological crisis at large - "The real problems of our planet are not

economic or technical, they are philosophical. The philosophy of unbridled materialism is being challenged by events." By firmly situating the problem in the 'philosophical' space, Schumacher's words make us rethink the paradigm in which we must consider our responses and actions today.

2.2.7. Reshaping Ethics and Action: Possibilities of Reimagining

While all of these seem to be disparate ideas pointing to change in attitudes and understanding of the interwoven aspects of nature and culture, it is important to see that this is a time of environmental movements across the world that are reshaping our beliefs, ethics and actions. In academia, as frameworks of decolonizing expand in the humanities, and with the pressure brought to bear on how we perceive objectivity as well as knowledge systems through postmodern critiques (Duignan 2019), and critical theories, valuable space to rethink cultural ontologies and epistemologies have arisen. Space for artistic research and auto-ethnography, phenomenological understanding of the world in academic research today further allows us to inquire subjective and inter-subjective frameworks and notions of reality with rigor.

The interrelated fields of eco-ethics/ environmental ethics, eco-justice, eco-philosophy, ecological consciousness, eco-psychology and eco-aesthetics, eco-criticism and environmental education have begun to expand our understanding of human relationship with the natural world. Each of these fields have further evolved into multiple viewpoints and often contradictory positions within themselves. Eco-psychology as a field looks at our relationship with the environment to remedy our alienation from the environment, to look at positive behavior change towards the environment and for healing ourselves. Ecological consciousness defies a singular

definition and has been interpreted by different individuals and disciplines in a multitude of ways.

Different environmental movements and philosophies have differing notions of nature, reality, individual and social consciousness and self. According to these notions, interpretations of ecological consciousness change within framework, context, time and place. Extensive work in comparative environmental philosophy by J. Baird Calicott and others, diverse conservation / ecological movements that are driven by science, deep ecology, religious philosophies, artists and designers have laid a vast ground for new research. (Calicott 2009; Calicott and McRae 2015; Demos 2013; Berleant 1992)

The possibilities of inquiring into the relationship between human and nature have multiple directions today. There is space for cultural frameworks and different epistemologies and ontologies. Alongside the dominant worldview of anthropocentricity are other cultural and philosophical positions, indigenous and artisanal practices, and changing evolving paradigms in science and humanities that lend themselves to further research, learning and changing our behaviors and lifestyles.

In tracing human culture and history, one finds that human beings have shared a more meaningful, discerning and connected relationship with the non-human world. This is evident through myths, folktales, music and other performing arts, visual arts, philosophical and metaphysical notions, architecture, cultural and vernacular practices. Several movements that have risen to talk about ecology and ethics and

ecopsychology further enrich the western notions of nature consciousness that come closer to the ancient traditional ones. This has created an ideal and open environment for us to redefine our relationship with the natural world and address it from multiple possibilities of being and knowing. As Eco-philosopher Anthony Weston argues – we must start with ethics and not epistemology and open ourselves to the richness and possibilities of a world that is undefined rather than "respond to the world as already known" (Weston 2009, 10). He extends his argument with an idea of "*multi*centrism"

> "What I propose to call *multi*centrism thus envisions a world of irreducibly diverse and multiple centers of being and value—not one single moral realm, however expansive, but *many* realms, as particular as may be, partly overlapping, each with its own center. Human "circles," then, do not necessarily invite expansion or extension, but rather augmentation and addition." (Weston 2009, 12)

Weston extends ethical skills for a multiverse rather than a universe, into a much more actionable set of skills that are a combination of "improvisation and etiquette." In a world where etiquette is considered, he suggests that "collective understandings" can be negotiated rather than imposed by one group of people on another. Weston's position is rewarding to the inquiries of an eco-artist, particularly as the nature of these inquiries leads to abandoning disciplinary boundaries, engaging with "multiple centers of being and value" and towards evolving skills in improvisation, negotiation, and etiquette as he frames it (Weston 2009, 12).

While, all these diverse positions and open dialog exists today, what is continuing to lack is substantial public discourse that is intelligent, critical, well reasoned and

conversational. As David Fleming, regrets in the introduction of his book *Surviving the Future: Culture, Carnival and Capital in the Aftermath of the Market Economy*, he points out the waning in people's abilities to distinguish between "honest argument and fraud" and argues that at a time when 'systems-solutions' are to be thought through, "the first system to be aware of is the system of language, insight and self-deception that guides, or confuses, the way we think (Fleming and Chamberlin 2016)." To this end, I draw out the gaps discussed in Chapter 1.

3. Developing an Ecological Self and Consciousness: Discussion on Gaps

3.1 Perception and Worldmaking

- Philosophers, aestheticians, anthropologists, ecologists, artists as well as several thinkers across the world have contributed to breaking existing paradigms of how we perceive or construct the human self, the environment and the relationship between the two.
- The second aspect of perception is the secondary meaning of perception- idea or belief or worldview that a person holds. (Dictionary.com).
- The third aspect of perception are the qualities of intuition and discernment as in "immediate or intuitive recognition or appreciation, as of moral, psychological, or aesthetic qualities; insight; intuition; discernment" [3] (Dictionary.com).

All three aspects of perception require to be addressed in order for profound change in our relationship with the natural world. As discussed in the Positionality Section, lenses of Mystic-Theological-Philosophical, Aesthetic-Philosophical, Socio-political,

[3] (Dictionary.com)

emerging eco-centric fields, and the constructs of 'relationship' and 'multicentrism' pave way for different arguments and elaborations of perception, in plural cultural contexts.

Thinking about and constructing a relational self requires attitudes, lenses and methods of creative and cognitive practices that allow for play and openness, the roots of which start with our inquiries in perception and worldmaking.

- What is self and what is nature?
- What role does perception play in responding to this question?
- What are some of our assumptions about perception and how do we actively engage with these assumptions to open our engagement with the world around us?

In order to grasp the basic challenge of how we can address these questions, let us consider a central puzzle of perception, starting with a philosophical claim that Matilal (1986, 8-9) outlines,

> "Philosophical problems of perception lead to the discussion of theories of knowledge and ontological problems. In connection with perception, philosophers usually draw a distinction between the contents of our sense experience and the interpretations, which we put upon them. In the view of a school of philosophical sceptics, no objective validity can be attached to any one set of statements about perceived reality, since they are all deemed to be purely conventional, purpose-orientated, anthropocentric, and theory-laden. In this view, then, no strict verbal account of sensible experience would be possible even in ordinary language, for in making such judgements we simply

> take a step beyond what the actual sensory experience presents. Several Buddhists in the Indian context upheld such a position. It is however conceded that although a strict linguistic account of the sensory experience is impossible, it nevertheless amounts to a cognitive experience, which is non-conceptual and therefore indubitable."

A second puzzle as Matilal (1986, 23) puts forth is "The strong claim of some philosophers of classical India was that conception without perception is 'empty'. The counter-claim was that perception without conception is 'blind'."

Both these puzzles of perception are starting points to inquire into how we perceive the reality of the natural world and how we can posit epistemological and ontological foundations for a theory of perception that attempts to negotiate between and across direct realism, phenomenalism and representationalism, three of the main western theories considered when discussing problems of perception (Matilal 1986, 223). Further how does one account for mysticism and ineffable moments of perception in engaging with the natural world.

I argue against the separationist, anthropocentric worldview based on Cartesian duality and the scientific separatist worldviews, which have for a large part denied sentience and emotion to other biotic and abiotic worlds. This position then fundamentally questions definitions/ perceptions of relationship between nature and self and our own definitions of both. What do we perceive and why, what informs our perception and how does it impact the way we interact with the natural world, build

our relationships in and through it and how we navigate it are teased out to show the gaps in our perception of both self and environment.

Drawing from the work of non-Indian philosophers Ernst Cassirer, Nelson Goodman, Maxine Greene, environmental philosophers Arne Naess, Ricardo Rozzi, J.Baird Callicott, Christopher Uhl and anthropologists, Tim Ingold, Gregory Bateson and psychologist, James J. Gibson, Human geographer, Yi Fu Tuan and Indian thought traditions with philosophers and aestheticians Bimal Krishna Matilal, Daya Krishna, P. T. Raju, Kapila Vatsyayan, C.Sivaramamurti, J.Krishnamurti and others, challenges of understanding the complexity of human perception of environment are delineated. Ideas from Indian conservation activists, thinkers, historians and scientists, particularly Vandana Shiva, Ashish Kothari, Mahesh Rangarajan and Madhav Gadgil are also considered briefly [4].

These are some of the key thinkers whose ideas have helped in building attitudes towards a framework for perception conducive to *porosity*. All these philosophers deal with plurality, complexity and openness, as key aspects of their philosophy of perception or approach to it and this is what makes their work deeply relevant to this thesis. Their work also looks at the importance of cultural epistemologies and ontologies as well as the specificity of landscape, livelihood and bioregions allowing one to build a complex and rich tapestry of how we need to consider and think about questions of perception and worldmaking.

[4] All these authors and their thoughts are expanded in later chapters. A few are discussed here to establish the gaps in perception





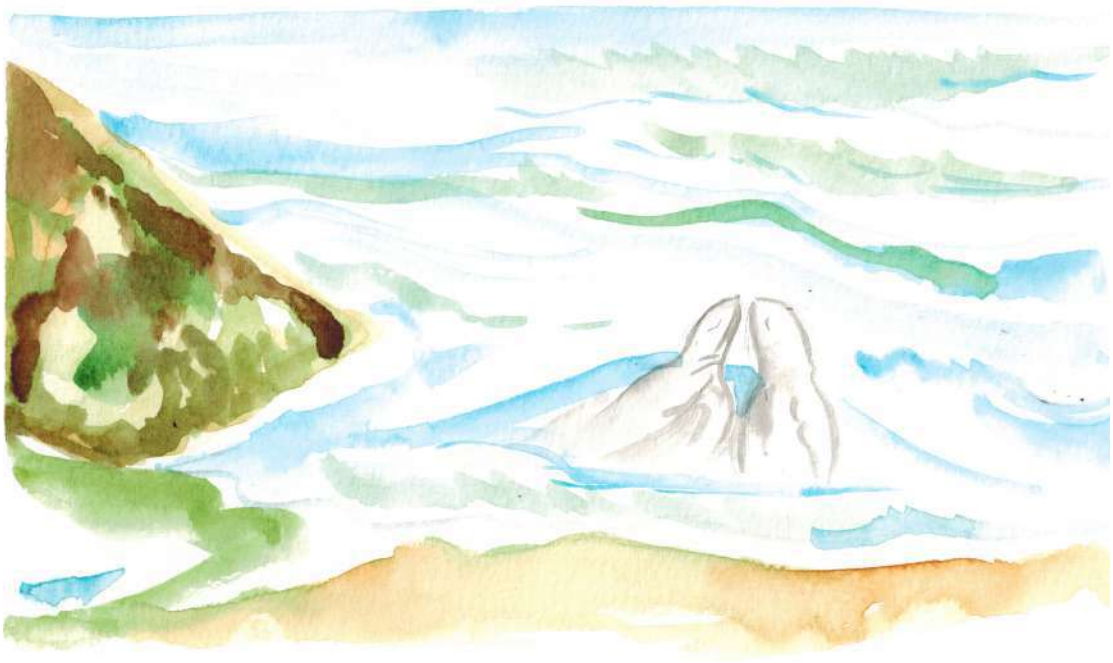




Fig 18, 19, 20 and 21: 'The Gift of Water' is a collection of paintings I made for my niece's 8th birthday, capturing her moments and experiences with water and the bond and love she shares with water, weaving a narrative of her connectedness with life and making it visible to her, 5 in X 7 in, 2017.

Cassirer's work in philosophy pays attention to epistemological issues in natural sciences, aesthetics and 'cultural sciences' and is unique in his ability to bridge these two worlds and also act bring together the two major traditions of twentieth century philosophy – 'the analytic' and 'the continental'. In the modern world, Cassirer posits the critical challenge that we have now no clear conception of man, as we have no particular frame of reference or even a general guiding principle (Cassirer 1956). Worldviews are driven by disciplinary boundaries, where one discipline cannot converse with another due to irreconcilable differences. Individual authors create a conception of man from their own viewpoints and evaluation happens from these siloised viewpoints. Cassirer points out that the 'antagonism of ideas' created by these disciplinary notions and individual temperaments are a threat to our ethical and cultural life (Cassirer 1956). He argues that empirical evidences for the cultural sciences too arise in the same realm as those of the natural sciences, however, the objects, rituals and performances are given a symbolic 'sense' or 'meaning', which is a different approach from the natural sciences (Cassirer 1942; Friedman, 2018).

In Cassirer's arguments natural sciences take their evidence from the sphere of "thing perception" whereas cultural sciences take them from "expressive perception" and he positions both forms of perception as equally legitimate (Friedman, 2018). He suggests that we look at man through the lens of symbolism and how humans live in an intricate web of a symbolic world to understand civilization as well as the human species (Friedman, 2018). Within this framework of man as a symbolic animal, where symbol extends, expands and subsumes rational, language can be seen in its diverse symbolic systems - scientific, emotional, poetic and conceptual (Cassirer 1956, 39-

41). His theory of symbolic forms attempts to unite scientific and non-scientific modes of thought.

Nelson Goodman's questions in his seminal book *Ways of Worldmaking* provide an attitude and direction for crafting a framework to how we can approach our relationship with the natural world. - "What are worlds made of? How are they made? What role do symbols play in the making? And how is worldmaking related to knowing?" (Goodman 1978, 1). Goodman asserts that "Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is remaking" (Goodman 1978, 6). Five of the ways of worldmaking that Goodman suggests are Composition and Decomposition, Weighting, Ordering, Deletion and Supplementation, Deformation (Goodman 1978, 6-17). While he does not see these as comprehensive or mandatory, using examples of artists and artworks, he showcases how worlds are made and re-made through these four processes. We can re-make our relationship with nature by deepening, expanding and re-crafting our understanding of both nature and self by using these processes as starting points. It is critical to grasp the attitudes to perception of reality and self that these processes help us question, and free ourselves from. Goodman's work is critical in his contribution for bringing a cognitive approach to the arts, both research and education as advanced in the work of Project Zero, situated within the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Goodman's theoretical positions as well as research directions has opened to thinking about how to foster aesthetic abilities and expanded the field of art education. Goodman's research approach provides directions to investigate artistic processes through cognition and psychology; break down the steps that occur in a creative moment and trace their pathways; negotiating and altering cognitive choices in creative moments and

building awareness to this process; allows for substantial openness to map, change, make and re-make artistic worlds while experimentally studying them with close observation.

> "We hear a good deal about how the aptitudes and training needed for the arts and for the sciences contrast or even conflict with one another. Earnest and elaborate efforts to devise and test means of finding and fostering aesthetic abilities are always being initiated. But none of this talk or these trials can come to much without an adequate conceptual framework for designing crucial experiments and interpreting their results. Once the arts and sciences are seen to involve working with-inventing, applying, reading, transforming, manipulating symbol systems that agree and differ in certain specific ways, we can perhaps undertake pointed psychological investigation of how the pertinent skills inhibit or enhance one another, and the outcome might well call for changes in educational technology." (Goodman 1978, 265)

Both these philosophers have brought into play the notion of symbolism to interpret human perception. The ability to decode our perception through the lens of symbolism helps build new and original ways of thinking about our relationship to the environment.

Cassirer argues that man is a "symbolic animal" who perceives the world not through immediate sense perceptions but through a world of symbolic meanings that he has created. Goodman's theory of symbols is grounded in aesthetics as contained in his book *Languages of Art.* According to Goodman, humans use symbols to perceive, comprehend as well as construct how we experience our worlds. He was also very

clear that both arts and sciences contribute equally to the enterprise of how we understand the world around us. The language of disciplines that we use continually limits us to frameworks that are defined and limited to particular epistemologies. A radical approach to perception requires a skeptical, quizzical and fundamentally creative quirky mind that can break rules of existing worlds, to create new ones under rigorous constraints; a mind that can catch with a certain irreverence the many truths of different worlds, and challenge the notion of a single truth of a single world. The idea of multiple worlds and multiple realities that both these philosophers offer as well as their strong understanding the realities of aesthetic worlds, distinct in their own ways, provides a fertile ground for challenging accepted versions of perception of ourselves and the worlds we live in/ create. "The movement is from unique truth and a world fixed and found to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions or worlds in the making" (Goodman 1978, X).

Psychologist Gibson (2015), one the important contributors to the field of visual perception argues against the Cartesian idea that perception is the act of mind in a body and discarding these divisions, he proposes that perception is the achievement of the whole organism in its environment as it explores and immerses in the world. Gregory Bateson too argues against Cartesian duality, "If we continue to operate in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter, we shall probably also continue to see the world in terms of God versus man; elite versus people; chosen race versus others; nation versus nation; and man versus environment. It is doubtful whether a species having both an advanced technology and this strange way of looking at its world can endure (Bateson 1972, 337)." He believed that the ambiguity and abundance of multiple meanings that art allows the society with a way to contemplate

rather than act and this he saw as a 'Self-correcting' function that art provided to society (Parks 2019). Ingold (2000, 4-7) theorizes a way to integrate the 'biological life of the organism in its environment and the cultural life of the mind in society' through and ecological approach to perception (Ingold 2000, 3). All these thinkers have paved the way for an ecological approach to perception.

In Indian speculative thought traditions, the consciousness that all things are interconnected and the cosmology is one of organic whole where mutual interdependence and interrelationships of systems is the essential feature of the universe (Vatsyayan 1997, 7). The relationship between the "macrocosm" at its "multiple levels of existence" and the limited "microcosm" of an individual human being has paved the way to an "integrated vision of artistic creation (Vatsyayan 1997, 7-8)."

Bharata positions the *Nāṭya Śāstra* as the fifth Veda and in the first two chapters articulates how he draws from the other four main Vedas to create this one. Artistic perception as Bharata has constructed "exhibits an integral, multi-disciplinary approach where the biological, physical, geographical, ecological and social realities were all fully comprehended in order to evolve a purely artistic superstructure" (Vatsyayan 1997, 42).

Drawing richly on socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts, Vandana Shiva argues for a feminist ecology and her position is that patriarchy and capitalism converge to create a separationist paradigm. She sees the separation of human from nature as well as the separation based on gender, class, religion and caste

as inherently violent leading to both environmental and social ruin. She positions the need for ecofeminism as a way to a perception that roots itself in care and wellbeing.[5]



Fig 22: Sahrudaya series 3, Acryclic and ink on canvas, 3ft by 2.75 ft, 2013-14.

Raped
Caged
Growing back!
Earthless economy
falls apart as
Golden Turtle
swims
seeking safe land…
Orange tree
dances
looking for leaves.

Men's souls
reaching out
find women in joyous solitude
merging into the waters.
Heart touching heart,
one sapling
teems with life.

[5] http://www.navdanya.org/site/eco-feminism)

Gadgil and Guha (2012) provide a resource-based framework that looks at "*technology*, *economy*, *social organization*, *ideology*, and the *ecological impact* of gathering, nomadic pastoralism, settled cultivation, and industry." The conflicts and interlinkages between different modes of production and their respective resource use, their colonial origins and continued post colonial debates are drawn out as the authors wonder, if it is possible for us to emerge newer belief systems and resource use at a time of environmental crisis that will hold the society together.

An informed understanding of environmental perceptions, and perceptions of human self that is transdisciplinary becomes the key to freeing oneself from the boundaries of perception we have gotten used to. An embodied, reflective experiential evolution of perception that speaks to one's own inner truths as well as cultural perceptions is another aspect of developing perception that is conducive to developing an ecological self and consciousness. Artistic/ aesthetic perception is an important aspect for humans to engage with and provides alternatives to other forms of perception. These are four crucial gaps -informed understanding, experiential evolution and cultural positions (ontology and epistemology) of perception and aesthetic/ artistic perception that will be addressed through the thesis.

3.2 The Limits of Form: Self and Body

Our relationship with everything around us including ourselves is based on our perception and understanding of 'self.' Each culture, and time in history have their

own notions of self [6] and intricate and nuanced understanding of relationships of this self with experiences and beings that it encounters. In the contemporary global world with an increasing focus on materiality, notions of self are highly individualistic and do not take an integrated view of 'self' into account. 'Self' in this contemporary world is often homogenized without cultural boundaries and frameworks that allow for nuances of being and different epistemologies that define our relationships with the natural world. We are often left perplexed, devoid of the notions of self that has held us together across time.

On the other hand, culture can also become a crippling factor, when notions of self remain static, and adaptation and evolution to suit the contemporary world are discouraged within a culture. The human self remains elusive, bound in both cultural paradigms and societal definitions of a global consumerist world and the need to find ways to unpack and transform it to find an ecological self are a critical need of the hour. In their response to the ecological crisis, people individually choose a stance/ bias in order to move from a place of inaction or paralysis to action. The gap at which this inquiry positions itself is its questions to our approach to the self. The gap of articulation lies in the nature of the self that we are inquiring into and how can we inquire into the material (cultural, global, philosophical, psychological, social, political, physical, ecological) of the self that is attempting to resolve ecological crisis defined within the limits of human notions of time-space.

Who/What is self? - Is it identity, individuality, boundary, the overall construction of personhood that includes our understanding of ourselves from the lives we have lived,

[6] Self may indicate selfhood, personhood, identity.

memories, or the narratives that helps us bring together the diversity and multiplicity of selves that inhabit us bound together by certain social, moral, cultural or other values and beliefs? Is it a sense of belonging, of being held together, of being loved? Is it something that ensures survival of the organism, a conglomerate of different organisms? Is it an extension of all that we dream and desire? Is it an extension of our imagination, fed by time in its past, present and future? Is self today, also extended by technology?



Fig 23: Descending into the Night, Chinese Ink, Photocolours and Watercolours on Watercolour paper, 17 in X 6.5 in, 2019.

How does one even interrogate the substance of the self? If we are to step aside from Cartesian duality even briefly and leave ourselves with the conundrum of the self, where will it lead us? What alternative positions of self might be conducive or meaningful for us to use as a beginning to reconstruct, transform or even transcend our notions of self?

Yi Fu Tuan, describes the condition of the modern man and how modern consciousness has become a burden. He points out that a home or a suburb provides a seemingly harmonious world in the image of the self to a fractured ego, but however, it ends up being limiting as it is inadequate to hold the complexities of life (Tuan 1982, 10). He elaborates on the loneliness and isolation of people today,

> "Modern man's longing for community or nature is a longing to lose consciousness and self in a greater whole. It is the often-noted desire to return to the womb or Eden. Segmentation, which began well in the early stages of man's creative endeavor has gone too far. Particularization has gone too far. Consciousness and with it an intensifying awareness of self has become excessively isolating and painful. (Tuan 1982,10)."

J. Krishnamurti (1991), philosopher, provides a deepening framework that is watchful of human loneliness and fragmentation. His approach is to encounter loneliness with solitude, to be free of the limitations of thought and its construct to find a world where communion and relationship is possible.

> "We are lonely, but we do not know what it is to be alone…We are afraid of solitude, for it opens the door to our insufficiency, the poverty of our own being; but it is solitude that heals the deepening wound of loneliness. To walk alone, unimpeded by thought, by the trail of our desires, is to go beyond the reaches of the mind. It is the mind that isolates, separates and cuts off communion."

This is a crucial gap to understand and reflect upon to even gather our meaning-making of what constitutes the self. Only when we can grasp the segmentation, fragmentation and isolation of the self, can we begin to ask what it might take to transform such a self and how. Such transformation of self will require diligent and persistent self-inquiry along with rigorous practice and evolving selfhood, ethical frameworks and frameworks of action. It also requires playfulness and a childlike wonder and inquisitiveness to observe oneself and a willingness to change above all.

Charles Taylor speaks of the pre-modern self as *porous* and in a continuous fluid exchange with the world around it, a world that he frames as 'enchanted'. In this world, he finds that it was easier to cross *porous* boundaries across forces, shaping both physical and psychichal lives. This self, he positions in contrast with the 'buffered self' of the now where we have a firmer boundary established between the self and the other.

Vulnerability is a concept that requires careful unpacking in how our modern selves are constructed. The edge/ precipice of each one of the vulnerabilities that we encounter is a point of opening into another world. But vulnerability is often seen in our cultures today as a weakness, rather than its possibilities as strength. Protecting ourselves from vulnerabilities requires closed boundaries, however, in being open to emotional/ physical vulnerabilities also allow for *porous* exchanges. Epidemics, accidents, heartbreaks, the breaking of trust in relationship, ecological disasters, friendships and relationships, romantic love, love and compassion, emotional ups and downs, are all moments of great vulnerability. But the more we cordon off each moment or experience of vulnerability, the greater the limit of both self and body. In philosopher J.Krishnamurti's words, "To be vulnerable is to live, and to withdraw is to die"(1991).

The notion of self in Indian thought draws from that which is one with the universe, where the universe itself is a multiverse and the one is also the many; a finely drawn paradox. It is a story of the one being who sacrificed himself in order to become many, and the many who seek to transcend back into the one. The *Vedic* myth of *Prajāpati*, the primordial man, being, god who sacrificed himself is one of paradox

and a continuous engagement with a dynamic conceptualization of both self and universe. They dance in tandem with each other, sometimes in fiery desire, procreating, expanding, multiplying; at other times in stillness, at the heart of being, going back into oneness, with the hum of the uncreated universe, into nothingness. This dance between void and fullness, with time that is infinite and transcendent, and time that is immediate, dynamic, constantly giving birth to past, present and future; this dance is the dance of the self and in the course of history, it also extends into the concept of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, the dance of *Naṭarāja,* the *lāsya* and *tāṇḍava* of *Śiva* and *Śakti*, the *ajapa naṭaṉam* in Tiruvarur, where *Śiva* dances in the heart of *Viṣṇu*, a dance of stillness, *Kāḷi's* dance of destruction as well as abundance.

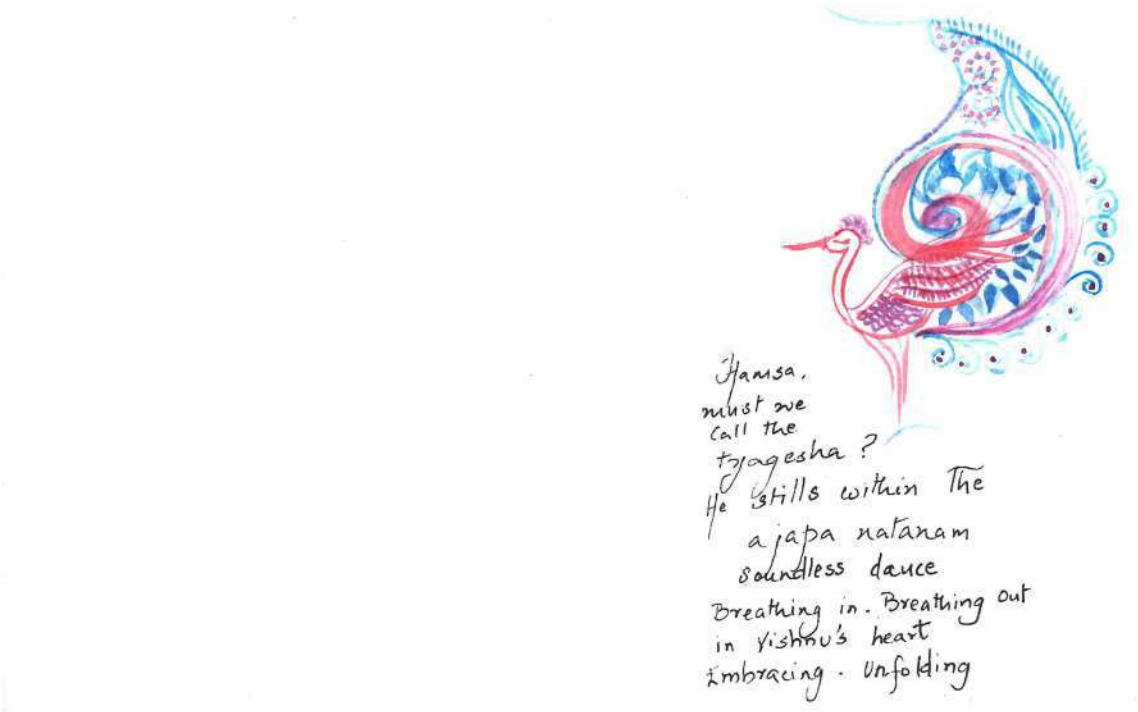


Fig 24: The hamsa is a symbol of inbreath and outbreath. Drawing parallels between the form of hamsa and the ajapa naṭaṉam of Śiva in Viṣṇu's heart at Tiruvarur, a metaphorical image drawn to make sense and meaning of many thoughts. Watercolours on watercolourpaper, 5 in X 7 in, 2016.

Dance and sacrifice are both the symbols, and the metaphors of a self that is constantly in creation, in a performance and in a *yajña* that simultaneously creates, destroys, balances, protects, and shows the way to fullness and emptiness, to a world beyond dualities; and in resonance with the *pañcakṛtyas* (five-fold activities of *Śiva*). Oneness, duality and multiplicity are concepts of play, *līlā* in this conception of self, a divine play, at the same time, a mundane one. This conception of self is not possible to conceive without the language of symbols, complex metaphors, and a capacity to revel in paradox and it is in contrast with the linearity that the Cartesian model offers. Because of the complexity that can rise from a turning, transforming, non-linear, cyclical notion of self, it is multidimensional. It offers a space for infinite elastic creativity in designing, reframing, dissolving, constructing, shapeshifting the many selves of a self. And play, *līlā* becomes the most efficient tool, yet another symbol that can support such a dynamic paradoxical activity of creation and dissolution of selves, in resonance with the rhythm of the universe. But whose will can guide such an activity? The symbol of the charioteer, then leads the way into the five fold activities of a non-linear, cyclical self, capable of regenerating and balancing itself. In order to comprehend the outer world and its phenomena, the universe and its rhythms and the inner world of man as a single ecological system, two paradigms have evolved in the Indian philosophical systems (Vatsyayan (n.d.) 21 March 2020). The paradigm of *(Puruṣa*), is a complex inter-related and interdependent whole of the physical and the metaphysical, and the body is then seen as a microcosm representing the macrocosm (Vatsyayan (n.d.) 21 March 2020). The second paradigm uses the chariot wheel as a metaphor, where the centre symbolises a life reflection, introspection, *nirvāṇa, mokṣa*; the spokes and the periphery symbolize a life of action that are harnessed and tethered to the still centre (Vatsyayan (n.d.) 21 March 2020).

The relationship between the inner still formless centre and the outer movement that offers multiplicity and plurality still contained by the boundaries of the circle are a perfect balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces in juxtaposition (Vatsyayan (n.d.) 21 March 2020). “Time was cyclic, the beginning was the end and beginning.” (Vatsyayan (n.d.) 21 March 2020).

This cyclical self, in its cultural, socio-political everyday life emerges through rituals, routines, practices and identities that are constructed as a way of life. The seamless integration of the philosophical self and everyday life has been explored and tested, evolved over centuries to create localized cultures, with plural practices that have great diversity, while at the same time having a loose framework of paradox, relationship, cyclical time, rhythm and resonance with the universe. Interconnectedness and harmony with the cosmos, structured around the concept of *ṛta,* transforms into truth, *satya*, principles and perceptions for a way of life and *dharma*, righteous action that is evolved out of being in tune with *ṛta*. Continuous invasions over the centuries, assimilations with other cultures, exchange of ideas and practices across cultures, colonialism, globalization have contributed in extending identities in some ways, and rupturing the cultural fabric in others. Modernization has brought with it the challenge of a worldview that is reductive in comparison to the holistic, a completely different way of viewing the world. And the self has been placed in popular culture and in intellectual circles within the dichotomy of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ narrowing the possibilities of meaningful conversation on ontology and epistemology.

This narrow framework has made it challenging to bring a *saṃvād*, a dialog that offers transdisciplinary inquiry into assimilations, contradictions, dual/ plural layering of everyday life and practice, and the politics and philosophy of constructing new selves. The narrow reconstruction of Hinduism as 'religion' has also affected a dialog that crosses boundaries between secular, spiritual, political and philosophical construction of the identity and actions of a self in flux, making sense of and navigating worldviews that are incommensurate.



Fig 25: Sketch of Śiva and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār dancing to the beats of the universe. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār is said to have willingly exchanged her beauty and youth for a ghoul's body and lived in a skeletal frame celebrating Śiva and keeping time and rhythm by playing the cymbals for Śiva's dance. Her poetry is special as it is often set in the graveyards and draws upon imagery of death to revel in the beauty of Śiva, Dry pastels on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.

Yet another paradigm that is critical to interrogating the self, is the centrality of 'death' in human life. How we think of disintegration, dissolution, passing away, grieving, death rites are all a critical part of how our selves are defined, bounded, and then released into the unknown. In eastern cultures, the concept of rebirth, into many different beings across lifetimes, allows for a self that is fluid at the boundary of death as well as form. Many death rituals be it cremating, burying, sky-burial- all look at returning the body back to its elements, reintegrating it with the natural world.

Using self-reflexivity and contemplative artistic practices from Indian tradition at the heart of my inquiry with a strong focus on embodied and mystical experiences, I focus on the interrogation of a self that is tuned to the natural world, in resonance with it and capable of relating to it through a dynamic exchange of emotions and intangible experiences. I reframe my questions for building practice and evolving an ecological self in relationship and *multi*centrism.

3.2 Language and Expression

The language through which we articulate our relationship to the environment has evolved over aeons in response to the landscapes we live, cultural beliefs and values and embodied experiences. However, as David Orr succintly frames the challenge that we face globally with loss of languages to homogenization in his chapter on "Verbicide". He points out that of the 6500 languages that are currently spoken on the planet, only 150 may survive by the year 2100. He outlines the relationship between global economy and language and points out that homogenization of languages is relation to the narrow necessities of the information age. He highlights how a huge nuanced and deeper meanings that emerge in cultural knowledge are lost in this

process, thereby reducing our abilities to understand our place in the world. He further highlights the power issues that emerge as language is monopolized by a few people who run the industrial and technological worlds (Orr 2011).

Language further establishes the ontology of the things that we come in contact with. What do we believe to be an essence of something? How do we understand its presence or absence, what meaning does it transpire in us? These are often defined by cultural epistemologies and ontologies. In Indian thought, the accordance of sentience to all beings for instance creates a layer of meaning where the other is never 'just' an object and there is always constant moral and ethical questions surrounding any action, interaction or relationship.

The theory of *karma*, as well as many myths provide a frame where one being can become another in a different lifetime, a perpetual cycle of becoming different beings; once again allowing for transitions and transformations in understanding the other. When correspondences between elements, beings and the human self define the cosmology of a culture, then language too reflects these interrelationships, allowing for newer meanings to be constructed. Language begins to transfer meanings of embodiment when the ontology of a culture allows for it. In India visual language as well as poetry have a multitude of creative expressions that emerge from a language of interconnectedness and interrelationship, place and geography.

Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry is structured within five different landscapes – Forest, Field, Ocean, Mountain and Desert, and against this setting, interwoven with language of the landscapes, shifting seasons, and beings which share the world with us, intimate stories of human experience are shared, particularly of love and war. *Vāc,* the *Vedic*

Goddess of word, and creative spirit, later considered to be transformed into Goddess Saraswathi is also considered as the consort of *Prajāpati*, the father of creatures. In the *Yajurveda*, *vāc* is seen as essential to creation of all beings, "*Prajāpati* was there; *Vāc* was his companion. He united with her. Then she parted from him and bore all these creatures. Afterwards she came back into *Prajāpati* (Padoux, 1990,10)." *Vāc* is also identified with *Brahman*, sometimes as subordinate to consciousness, and at other times as consciousness itself (Padoux1990, 8). "In hymn 10.114.8 (of the *Ṛg Veda*), *vāc* appears as as co-extensive with it (*Brahman*): *yāvad brahma viṣṭhitaṃ tāvatī vāk*, "as much as *Brahman* did expand, as large is the Word (Padoux 1990, 8)."

In Indian thought traditions, word *akṣara* is considered sacred and considered to be born from the cosmic order of *ṛta* along with the sacrificial fire (Padoux 1990,14).

> "… this clearly shows why priests and poets could sense power in the sacrificial, poetical, and creative word, foundation of the universal order (even though it also appears as born thereof) or helping to maintain it; one can understand why the syllabic element, which measures the Word and that to which it can be reduced, may be considered as the phonetic or metric seed of the cosmos." (Padoux 1990,14).

The syllable *Om* is considered the primordial sound, "to which all mantras as well as any form of speech can be reduced, as the very source of the Word(Padoux 1990,14)."

In parallel with the concepts of how the individual and the cosmos; the inner and the outer are interconnected and in fluid relationship with each other in Indian thought traditions, language itself with its cosmic origins, is deeply connected to the cosmic law of harmony and born out of the interiority and intimacy of the cosmic and natural worlds.

Meaning making in Indian languages often emerges in the paradox of how we interpret the cosmology of relationships defined by a broader Indian philosophical framework. *Śabda* and *artha*, the twin concepts that relate to word and meaning are fundamental to Indian theories of linguistics. *Sphoṭa* (Theory of symbols), *Lakṣaṇā* (metaphor), *Dhvani* and *Vyañjanā* (Theories of suggestion) are integral to meaning making in Sanskrit (Raja 2000). The relationship between word and meaning can be direct or indirect. "The word or the sentence…considered as a single meaningful symbol is called *sphoṭa* (Raja 2000, 97)." The term symbol is used by Kunjunni Raja in the sense of a linguistic sign. According to Bhartṛhari, who developed and systematized this theory, "speech and thought are only two aspects of the same speech-principle. A sentence is to be considered as 'a single undivided utterance' and its meaning is 'an instantaneous flash of insight' (*pratibhā*). (Raja 2000, 99)." The nature of *sphoṭa* is debated among the diverse Indian traditions. In the context of *porosity,* the question of meaning making through *pratibhā* allows for an embodied experiential relationship with the natural world, in how a sentence allows for deeper insightful meaning to emerge. It is integral to the consciousness-based questions and the aesthetics, creativity and practice-based questions articulated in Chapter 1.

In order to develop a conceptual vocabulary for *porosity*, and articulation in visual, performative and linguistic aspects, an inquiry into how meaning would be constructed and comprehended from the sentences is part of the process. Metaphor and suggestion are integral elements in the articulation of intangible human experiences. One of the challenges of the modern world is its division of field of sciences and humanities, where science has come to imply rationality and truth, and humanities have come to be considered emotional, irrational and not primary to the

human condition. The fight for the arts to take an equal place in academia and practice is a long drawn one. This is another reason that has led to the collapse of sensitive and nuanced meaning making. Denis Donoghue (1985, 129), writes of this suppression of nuanced feelings and emotions by placing arts on the margins. In his words,

> "the arts are on the margin, and it doesn't bother me to say they are marginal... I want to say that the margin is the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for, and mostly seems to suppress."

Yi Fu Tuan (1991) argues that language is integral to making of place. Yi Fu Tuan unravels how language helps find ways to represent, hold onto, and intensify experience and feeling. In his book *Space and Place*, he showcases how geography, body, sense of self and language are closely interconnected in many languages as words used to describe parts of the body and those that are used to describe geographical space are often one and the same. Moreover, he draws us to consider the paradox of how language supports a reflective experience bring the past to an immediate present. He emphasises on how culture is central to our range of awareness and how visual art and rituals offer different kinds of language to articulate varied areas of our experiences. He points out how art makes "images of feeling" and therefore make our feelings accessible to contemplation, thought and savouring of memories that can otherwise vanish without trace (Tuan 2018, 148).

"Here is a seeming paradox: thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence" (Tuan

2018, 148). And it is in this ability to reflect through the arts, in finding languages for thoughtful reflection and contemplation that we are able to weave time together in our lives to make meaning.



Fig 26: Playing with sea, sand, late afternoon, shells, and self. At Kappad beach, Kerala, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.



Fig 27: Clandestine meetings in Kurinji (Mountains) and Mullai (Forests), Chinese ink, photocolours and watercolours on watercolour paper, 16.5 in X 8.5 in, 2019.

Sthapati in his translation of some verses of *(Sthapati 2001, 92) Tolkappiyam*, a foundational book of Tamil grammar articulates that Tamil is considered as *iyalmoli, or* 'language of nature' and this he associates with the idea that nature speaks Tamil, and Tamil is spiritual because of this, occurring in the very rhythms and sounds of nature and ordered by the inherent grammar of nature.

Uyiruṭaṉ uṭampuvantu oṉṟuvatu iyalpē (Sthapati 2001, 92)

A verse from Tolkappiyum translates as - it is natural for the spirit to come and fuse with the body, where the spirit (*uyir*) indicates vowels and the body (*mey*) indicates consonants. Energy and Matter are seen as twin aspects of a letter. *(Sthapati 2001, 92).* Nature based metaphors, and construction of artwork based on natural landscapes remains prevalent even today in Tamil culture, particular popular culture. A more detailed discussion on Nature in Tamil conception is discussed in chapter 8.

When our languages lose their connection with the natural world, and our vocabularies are stripped bare of other beings, we lose the bridge that helps us stay connected. In a fast paced urban world, where technology and human-centred needs have become pivotal, these nuances of place, local flora and fauna have disappeared from common parlance. Re-learning language is key to re-discovering place and our relationship with the natural world. Textual as well as visual languages are both equally important as they provide us with our tools of imagination, communication and expression.

- How closely do we look at the languages we use today?
- On an average day, how many times do we encounter the non/more-than-human world in our language?

- How often do we experience language as evocative of experiences in the natural world and not merely an intellectual construct of concepts?
- How often do we experience meaning not only through conceptual understanding of words, but the quality, rhythms and vibrations of sound? Do these vibrations bring to us visceral experiences from the natural world?

The gaps of our ability to experience as well as communicate lie in language that is no more rooted in local ecology or a cosmic one.

3.4 Aesthetics, Creativity and Making

Artistic and aesthetic consciousness of the connoisseur as well as the artist/ designer, are an important paradigm in our understanding of both culture and self. The environment as perceived, shared and experienced by the artist and aesthete are critical to our constructions of both ecological self and ecological consciousness. "Creativity, as we define it in our contemporary times, has become synonymous with loud, neurotic self-expression that pays little attention to the more-than-human world or our interrelationship with life (Trungpa, Lief, & Trungpa 2008). Sold in the marketplace, creativity has become yet another commodity of education, expression, and consumerism" (Kalyanasundaram 2019, 152-165).

"Why must creativity have any impact on our ecological crisis ? - I argue that in creativity lies the crucial bond between the universe and us, and in comprehending our creative essence, we can reframe our consciousness to be ecologically inclusive and intrinsic (Kalyanasundaram 2019, 152-165)." At the same time, the human need to be creative is one of the core problems of the ecological crisis, particularly a need that is not tempered by discipline, ethics or ecological limits. For instance, the

packaging designer's creativity is framed free of the ethics of what happens to the plastic waste that her intelligent packaging generates, and how it contributes to the deaths of innumerable life forms.

Likewise materials used by artists, and the lifecycle of these materials are not studied and considered for their impact on the environment. Even as green packaging has become an important focus today, the artists' needs for self-expression are freed again of the ethics of how they interact with a community of people. Intellect takes precedence over emotion or vice versa. In divorcing creativity from ethics, freedom has lost its counterforce to balance its floodgates and possibilities. In a culture where we are enthralled in possibilities, we have forgotten possibilities must be framed with their complementary balancing force of restraint.

- Why is there such a need for creativity within a framework of novelty and unique expressions that place extreme stress on individuals for originality?
- Why do we subscribe to these notions of creativity and lose ourselves in the forms that it takes?
- Where does our increasing need for entertainment and filling our lives with technology, social media and personal creative expression in as many forums as possible stem from?
- How is entertainment and creativity linked today to novelty and 'originality'?
- Who or what is the invisible hand that links this to our education and profession, back to growth and development and imagination for a world in which this nature of creativity can unfold?
- What is the counter to our current notions of creativity and in which selves must it reside?

- How can we open an inquiry into these alternative notions of self thereby opening our arguments of how to define creativity with freshness?

To these questions of self, creativity and ecological consciousness, this inquiry blends a cultural investigation with creative practice of the self as its key approach. The discussions invite openness for other selves to interrogate their own materiality of being from which can stem their notion of creativity and aesthetics. Berleaunt extends the idea that aesthetics cross the pure and the applied, the theoretical and the practical and becomes a part of our everyday life, permeating into everything we do and everything we are.

> "An interest in the aesthetics of environment is part of the broader response to environmental problems, to national and international environmental policies, and to public awareness and action on environmental issues, and it reflects the growing recognition of aesthetic values in environment. Environmental aesthetics belongs, then, to the intellectual and cultural evolution of our time. It is a discipline with its own concepts, its own subject matter and problems, and most important, its own contribution to make (Berleant 1992, Preface, xii)."

The challenges of environmental aesthetics, how we even define what constitutes the environment, and how do we then respond to it with aesthetics or its application remain open-ended even as the field evolves. Our understanding and experiences of aesthetics and creativity are bound together.

Maxine Greene (1968) elaborates on the aesthetic experience and how encountering art, can transform consciousness,

> "A work of art, when attended to for its qualities, for what it does, can release a reader into his own subjectivity, his own inner world. In fact, it must release him if the work is to be encountered as art. Released this way, jolted, perhaps shocked into self-confrontation, the reader will find himself breaking with comfortable, habitual ways of seeing and thinking. He will break with stereotypes and mechanical routines, at least for a time. Under the guidance of the work of art, he will find himself forming some aspect of his consciousness as never before."

Oftentimes, this aspect of the arts in the industrial and technological eras have been sidelined and the field of arts and humanities have been relegated to a secondary or even tertiary place; to the margins. However, in order to deepen dialogues on the ethics of ecological creativity, it is important that our aesthetic engagements are contemplative and consider their impact on consciousness.

The Rasa theory frames the poet, the work of art and the *sahṛdaya* (aesthete) in a single continuum. The *sahṛdaya* is one who is in complete resonance with the heart of the artist. Aesthetic appreciation in *rasa* theory has non-duality or the principle of *advaita* at its core (Dehejia 1996; Sundarrajan and Raina 2016).

> "Aesthetic experience "is viewed as that state of joy where differentiations cease … All duality of subject and object is lost, distinctions of physical time and space are eschewed, the finite and infinite merge" (Vatsyayan 1998, 167–168).

How the artist perceives the natural world, and how the work of art captures the essence of this relationship is eventually transferred and recreated in the mind of the aesthete who is one at heart with the artist. This mutuality of experience is critical to why the arts offer an incredibly important pathway to self-transformation towards ecological consciousness.

The tenth century Sanskrit poet and critic Rājaśekhara, claims that the poet as well as the aesthete, *sahṛdaya* have the same sense of poetic imagination and intuition, though it is "genuninely creative (*kārayitrī*)," in the poet and "imaginatively recreative (*bhāvayitrī*)" in the aesthete.

> "One might say that a *kāvya* (poem) is twice born: first, on the poet's level when his creative imagination conceives it and then, on the level of the connoisseur who, in this capacity, is known as *bhāvaka*, the same poem is brought to life by his power of imagination, his *pratibhā bhāvayitrī*'" (as cited in Lienhard, 1984, p. 41) (As cited in Sundarrajan and Raina, 2016).

In our current global culture, particularly in urban contexts, training the aesthete forms one crucial gap, approaching the artists, the artwork and aesthete as a singular unit forms another crucial gap. Heightened sensitivity to experience, emotion and the natural world are lacking in our aesthetic abilities and perception today as we become more and more removed from experiences in the natural world that bind us to it.



Fig 28: Sketch of woman dreaming with the Great blue heron. The flight, form, wingspan, and stillness in the body of the great blue heron simmer in the immediate conscious after a sighting, and slowly permeates into the inner world of dreams and flight within the inner sky, Watercolours and photocolours on cartridge paper, 8.27 in X 11.69 in, 2019.

The third gap lies in how we approach the problem of creativity. Sundarrajan and Raina (2015) argue for the differences in Eastern and Western conceptions of creativity and point out details that are missed out in cross-cultural studies of the psychology of creativity, particularly the "ecological context of creativity in non-Western cultures." According to Sundarrajan and Raina(2015) and Gigerenzer, Fiedler, and Olsson (2012, 82), an ecological analysis of any culturally observed behavior would have to consider the "structure of the mind" and its cognitive processes and representations along with the environmental structure.

Our inquiries into creativity need to move beyond the materiality or content of the final output of forms, to the form of the consciousness itself. We need to focus on the crafting of consciousness in an intrinsically ecological frame before we work with the

outputs of any consciousness. This reframing of creativity is the heart of this inquiry. However the approach is not to study the object of art, but the consciousness of the maker as the heart of creativity. This helps us redefine both form and maker. Through this the primary question that the thesis tries to interrogate is the nature of the self and its relationship to the notions of creativity, aesthetics and creative practice and how these are rooted in ecological consciousness of a given space and time. A clever mind in awe of its own ability to make is often unwilling to be bound by responsibilities and ecological limits. Such a mind needs tempering perhaps with the traditional notion of stillness, balance, and harmony with natural order so as to create in wisdom. Building such a creative practice consciously would require deeper understanding and inquiry to engage with the underlying consciousness at play during any creative process.

Sundarrajan and Raina (2015) use the frames of 'creation' and 'discovery' as two different narratives of creativity that Western and Asian cultures privilege differently. They see 'creation' as novelty and intellect based and 'discovery' as surprise, aha experience, satori and consciousness-based. The fundamental difference as they position it is that

> "The creation narrative concerns the acquisition and construction of knowledge; the discovery narrative consciousness-based self-transformation and self transcendence" (Sundararajan and Raina 2015).

They go on to discuss the differences between revolutionary creativity as conceptualized in West and Asian cultures,

> "Another difference between intellect-based and consciousness-based creativity lies in the scope of breakthroughs. Intellect-based creativity focuses on breakthroughs in the knowledge domain, whereas new vision or wisdom entails a breakthrough much broader in scope and more thorough in methodology" (Sundararajan and Raina 2015).

They also point out that in the concepts of creation, dissolution and balance, fundamental to Hinduism, creation is not privileged over dissolution and destruction, and balance holds the fine centre. Further they expand on the relational aspects of creativity in the Asian traditions and how the indivisibility from nature is central to creativity discourses in these traditions.

> "… whereas the Western discourse on creativity foregrounds the individualistic role of the creator as hero, Asian notions of creativity capitalize on the relational nature of consciousness as cocreator with Nature. As Horan (2007) points out, "In these [Asian] traditions, creativity is a spontaneous manifestation of man's deeper awareness of his indivisibility from nature" (p. 179)" (Sundararajan and Raina 2015).

The other point, they make is how the Western sampling of studying creativity excludes the hermits, and sages and the creative productions that come out of their work. They position Asian notions of revolutionary creativity, in a "more radical form of rejecting conventions, namely self-transformation or self-transcendence." This reframes how creativity is perceived not as a way finding 'breakthroughs in the domian of knowledge' but as finding them in oneself. "…the last frontier to conquer is not the world so much as the self. This radical, revolutionary transformation in

consciousness has been considered essential for creativity in both China and India" (Sundararajan and Raina 2015).

Spariosu (2004, 5) also suggests that solution to problems of the world we face today may lie in transformation in consciousness and that we need to move from the idea of material development as a measure of human progress to human self-development as a means to solve practical social problems.

Older Cultures are entwined with their landscapes, and their notions of creativity often reside within the paradigms of the landscapes they inhabit. There is a localization of



Fig 29: Reflections on the interior landscape. Akam- Mullai (Union with the forests), Chinese Ink and Watercolours on cartridge paper, 16.25 X 11.75 in, 2019.

creativity, but a universalization of its spirit. In traditional Indian concepts and theories, creativity resides in resonance with cosmic order *ṛta* rather than individual expressions of a fragmented self.

In traditional understanding of creativity and making, ritual practice to integrate the self and find resonance with the cosmic order was an essential step towards and before any creative practice can be undertaken. Making was thus, not only technical skill and craftsmanship, but also a preparation of consciousness to cross boundaries from the personal to the universal; from duality or multiplicity back into oneness and drawing out forms from the oneness back into the many. Practice is *sādhanā*, a meditation and *yajña*, a sacrifice similar to the sacrifice of *Prajāpati*, creating the many out of sacrificing oneself. For the artist, it is creating the image of the universe in the likeness of his own image, *sādṛśya*. As Ganapati Sthapati, master architect and sculptor frames it, the artist becomes the art (Sthapati 2005, 104). Making is bound by ecological limits sketched out of ideas of sacredness.

- In contemporary world, how does one reconceive ritual practices, ecological limits and resonance with the natural world in making?
- What kind of practices would enable making with ecological thoughtfulness and awareness?

These questions too hint at gaps, possibilities of adapting, and reinterpreting traditional theories and constructs and reimagining them for the current time.

4. Addressing the Gaps through the Category/Lens of *Porosity*

There are multiple responses to the ecological crisis by diverse communities of people- scientists, governments, religions, leaders, designers, activists, artists and others. There are diverse approaches to action, and different philosophies that people believe in and use as a guiding principle to act. In all these different approaches, beliefs, systems of thinking – different 'selves' are invited to participate. However, in

each of these, the selves reach resonance or conflicts with the philosophies and ideologies. There are philosophies and action methods that call out to fix the exterior and conservation approaches that rise within this frame. There are the other methods that call out to fix the interior and ask to redefine conservation from these frameworks. People at large are left to their own devices to comprehend these philosophies from their respective selves, which they do not interrogate at length – for often their time is spent on interrogating the method or aspects of the worldview they have subscribed to.

However, metaphysical, mystical, contemplative practices and some philosophical inquiry provides yet another open framework which is outside the boundaries of 'frameworks' and 'concepts'. These can be equally confusing and paradoxical, as much of these inquiries/ encounters are pathless experiences. These traditions of thought across many cultures, provide a direction to experiencing the world without human concepts, and define consciousness as arising from this freedom of human conceptual limitations.

They also see transformation of the outer is not possible without transformation of the inner, and self-transformation and transformation of one's own consciousness becomes integral to change in the real world, social, cultural or political. In J. Krishnamurti's work there is an articulation of 'otherness', 'immensity' and the 'immeasurable' and access to the whole of 'consciousness' that arises out of 'freedom', a freedom that is experiential, rather than intellectual.

> "Meditation is the breaking of all bondage; it is a state of freedom, but not from anything. Freedom from something is only the cultivation of resistance.

> To be conscious of being free is not freedom. Consciousness is the experiencing of freedom or of bondage, and that consciousness is the experiencer, the maker of effort. Meditation is the breaking down of the experiencer, which cannot be done consciously. If the experiencer is broken down consciously, then there is a strengthening of the will, which is also a part of consciousness. Our problem, then, is concerned with the whole process of consciousness, and not with one part of it, small or great, dominant or subservient." (Krishnamurti, 1991b)

I introduce *Porosity* as a category/ lens and artistic practice as my fundamental method, through which I will approach the gaps. As discussed in chapter 1, *porosity* is a principle of consciousness and allows for intangible experiences in the human realm. Addressing the gaps through this lens, then offers a fresh perspective to how we can engage with the ecological crisis on one end and how we can rebuild our relationship with the natural world on the other. However, the intention is not to make *porosity* a goal to be achieved, but encounters to be pondered about. It is a contemplation of a certain state of consciousness and being. In thoughtfully examining the interiority of one's own self through the four gaps and approaching the four areas that the gaps discuss through the fluid possibilities of *porosity*, a richer dialogue between humans and the natural world can emerge.

The challenge of this thesis is that the practice of *porosity* arises from an inquiry into freedom that is free of intellectual boundaries and conceptual frameworks. At the same time, the academic framework binds it with the intellectual and conceptual frameworks that can only lead a person to a point of vulnerability. However, to break

into the immensity of consciousness is not a methodological or intellectual possibility that can be contained in academic frameworks. The experience and actions of such a consciousness are however outside the boundary of the academic framework. Hence the research and writing remain contemplative rather than prescriptive. There is also navigation between the academic and the metaphysical/ mystical, creating a circular logic, and non-linear dialog across the chapters.

The investigation and approach of this thesis takes one cultural transect (in itself comprising much plurality), of the many that are possible. I localize my symbols of *porosity* from the boundaries of my upbringing, experience and exposure. But in the spirit of art, *ātma-vicāraṇā* (self-inquiry) and Arne Naess's philosophy of the self, each of us may go on our own journeys bound by our experiences, the landscapes that we call home, and the relationships that have shaped us. Our lives open up possibilities, directions, paradoxes and diverse approaches to interrogation and encounters with our own ecological selves and how me way use our vocation in the service of balance and harmony. Someone who chooses another cultural transect, true to their boundary of experiences may come upon methods that are radically different.

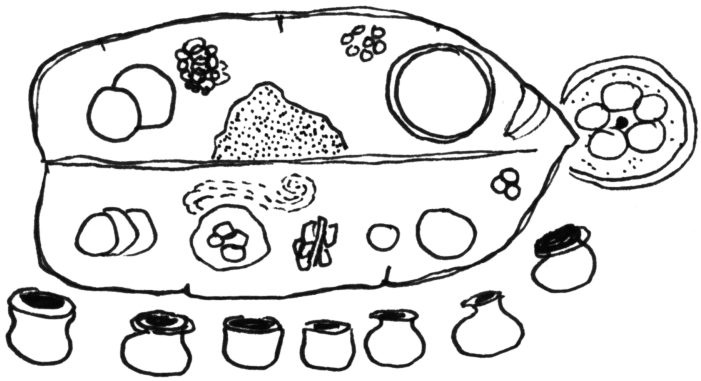


Fig 30. A south Indian elai sapadu, Feast on a plaintain leaf, Pen and ink on paper, 5.5 in X 3.5 in, 2013.

Part II

Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3

Methods and Methodology

"To engage with a work of art is always to make a new beginning. It is to break with prediction and estimated probability. Nothing can be further removed from the idea of predefined objectives and a predetermined world. "A beginning must be thought possible/" says Edward Said, "it must be taken to be possible . . ." (Said, 1978). Nothing allows for the penetration of possibility as much as do informed engagements with the arts." (Greene 1980)

Sections

1. Deliberations
2. Discussion of Methods
    2.1. Transdisciplinarity
        2.1.1. Kapila Vatsyayan's Approaches to Transdisciplinarity
        2.1.2. Extending Vatsyayan's Work to Personal Practice
3. Tracing Lineage
4. Practice and Artistic Research: Personal Practice as Research in the Arts
    4.1. The Relationship between Art and Academia
    4.2. The Discipline of 'Artistic research': Survey of Existing Notions
    4.3. Acknowledging the Validity of Personal Practice in Artistic Research
    4.4. Reading Art and Artistic Research
    4.5. Artistic Practice as Research Methodology: The Practitioner's Frame
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5. Artistic Research through Personal Practice
        5.1.1. Self as a Subject of Research
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        5.1.3. The *Porous Self* as an Artistic Research into Symbol
6. Unpacking Artistic Research
7. Frameworks of Practice as Research, Documentation and Analysis
    7.1. Methodology
    7.2. Practice
        7.2.1. Questions of Practice
        7.2.2. Methods of Practice
        7.2.3. Documentation of Practice

7.2.4. Analysis of Practice

8. Dilemmas and Discussions on Artistic Research

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology discusses three methods used to unravel different aspects of a methodological framework of *porosity*. They are as below.

1. Transdisciplinary studies
   i. Integrated study of diverse disciplines of an essentially trandisciplinary practice
      - This section develops a transdisciplinary argument for positioning *porosity* at the intersection of ecological consciousness, environmental aesthetics, artistic practice, environmental ethics and philosophy and juxtaposes Indian cultural paradigms with western epistemologies to evolve positions of research and practice.
   ii. Using Kapila Vatsyayan's methods of study and applying them to personal practice.
      - This section uses Vatsyayan's methods of understanding Indian art in an interdisciplinary and integrated manner. By using Indian philosophical and aesthetic frameworks that are pervasive and enjoy a (relatively) continuous tradition of practice, insights are drawn from understanding relationships between environment and creativity in Indian thought. These insights are then applied to develop as well as analyze personal practice.
2. Tracing lineage
   i. Working with intuition
   ii. Study of poetry, literature, visual art, yoga and movement practices in India
3. Practice and artistic research
   i. Field studies and journaling
   ii. Reflective documentation and annotated practice

1. Deliberations

A possibly hypothesis for practice as well as *porosity* as a principle of consciousness have been discussed in the first chapter. Theory and practice work hand in hand, each informing the other at different points of time. As discussed in the first chapter on *porosity*, my experiences, encounters and the artistic practice that emerged from these have been intuitive over the years. A lot of it also was strengthened by my study of world and Indian art history, Indian aesthetics and philosophy providing confidence and direction to the evolution of my work.

In order to choose methods that would successfully support the complexity of the thesis, I first clarify the steps that drive the choice of methods

- Turn inward to resolve relationship with earth.
- Fix our perceptions of nature and consciousness instead of externalizing problems.
- Question fractured relationships with natural world.
- Emerge *porosity* as a principle of consciousness.
- Trace lineage to emerge *porosity* as principle of consciousness and practice.
- Build practice and use it to support as well as evolve theoretical frameworks.
- Continue to remain in states of flow, that are outside intellectual frameworks and the movement of the mind to allow for intangible experiences.

A basic approach defined to bring the diverse threads of this thesis together considers that the

- Theoretical frame establishes *porosity* as a fundamental principle of consciousness and creative practice. As extension, 'self' is redefined in alternative frameworks drawing broadly from Hindu traditional thought.
- Method proves how art can be used to deepen, inquire into and engage with a *porous* consciousness
- Approach to *porous* consciousness uses general philosophical and aesthetic principles of Indian and art and thought, while also drawing from other traditions and contemporary eco-disciplines.
- In crafting form, artists craft consciousness and perception. Study through annotated documentation of form explorations of personal practice allows for an intimate and depth study of my encounters of *porosity*.

Once again, I raise questions of practice that inform the quest for appropriate methods to provide me with a guiding framework. The questions in each section/ chapter are layered upon each other building a complex yet unbounded systems approach to practice. What might eventually be a single line in a canvas, hides conceptual, experiential and practical considerations by the artist that are often not visible. The intention of the thesis is to unravel these layers of thought, intuition, imagination and baffling unexpected moments of creativity as closely as possible. The following guiding questions emerged:

1. What is the nature and sense of being of a *porous* consciousness?
2. How do art making and aesthetics influence the nature of *porosity* in consciousness?

3. By making art consciously in *porous* states of being, in order to inquire into *porosity*, what are the kinds of work – (Language and Literature, Art and Visualization, Movement and Stillness) that could emerge in my practice?
4. What are the tools that art can provide that allow investigation of *porosity*?
5. How does one translate this sense of *porosity* to another (a viewer)? What will be the exhibition/ material produced used to engage the audience?
6. How will audience interactions and the understanding/ reflections of *porosity* be documented?
7. What are the transitions in consciousness in self as artist and interacting audience in experiencing *porosity*? (Note: questions 5, 6, 7 are not dealt with in detail through the thesis and form a small section of the conclusion and future possibilities)
8. How do we articulate methodology/ methodologies for a practice of *porosity* through the arts?

1. Discussion of Methods

1.1 Transdisciplinarity

A transdisciplinary framework of *porosity* weaves together culturally different epistemologies and ontologies to look at the ecological crisis. Woven carefully are strands of experiential moments of mysticism, conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of consciousness in Indian thought, current understanding of environmental aesthetics, philosophy, ethics and psychology, creativity, socio-political –cultural understanding of the ecological crisis, traditional Indian notions of practice, creative process, aesthetics and their relevance in contemporary art, artistic

research and its challenges, evolving notions of eco-art, and diverse methods that lead to a consolidated creative practice.

Conceptual categories from each of these disciplines/ schools of thought are discussed to find appropriate connecting strands and establish a transdisciplinary framework rooted in *porosity* below. Transdisciplinary thinking helps challenge the inherent biases, assumptions, theories and methodologies of different disciplines and helps in working with ideas of interconnectedness, complexity of living systems and the ecological crisis. It helps in drawing connections between and across holistic and reductionist, crosscultural frameworks to find meaningful responses in different contexts as well as helps build non-linear complex narratives. Transdisciplinary engagement with a concept or context emerges diverse ethical viewpoints on how we engage with the natural world and our relationship within and through it. It also helps question dominant paradigms and their impact on local knowledge systems. Basarab Nicolescu (2012) sees transdisciplinarity as a cosmic system that connects several levels of "Reality."

> "What could be really sustainable today: environment, economy, society, education, politics, religion, spirituality, future, nation, world order? No one can be sustainable in itself, because all of them are inter-related. Transdisciplinarity argues that the only sustainable system is the cosmic system, in all its dimensions, from the quantum particle till the most distant galaxy, going through the human being: every level of Reality sustains every other level of Reality." (Nicolescu, 2012)

There are diverse approaches to transdisciplinarity and there isn't a consensus of beliefs, philosophies, approaches or methods at this point. Two key approaches today are looked at as Nicolescuean and Zurich schools of thought in transdisciplinarity. "Nicolescu's writing led to a new way of thinking about knowledge and inquiry that has included writing from ethical, metaphysical, and even mystical perspectives (see Nicolescu 2008; de Mello 2008; Voss 2008)", while the Zurich school has led to work aimed at designing and implementing tangible solutions to "real world" problems (Segalàs & Tejedor 2013; Bernstein 2015). Some of the key ideas of transdisciplinarity that have emerged so far include but are not limited to the following (Kalyanasundaram and Kalyanasundaram, 2019).

- "Transdisciplinarity challenges knowledge fragmentation and emphasizes production of knowledge in a reflexive non-linear format ready to respond to uncertainty and the local character.
- Transdisciplinarity enables inter-subjective and context-specific transaction of knowledge frameworks.
- Transdisciplinary research combines the individual's access and relationships within the social network to the constraints enmeshed within the social, natural and material contexts thereby requiring close collaboration during all phases of a research project.
- Transdisciplinarity is especially needed for theoretical analyses and interpretation of complex issues that interconnect the individual with the environment, economics, society, science and the arts.
- Much of the traditional paradigms of Asian and Far Eastern approaches and wisdom traditions rest on transdisciplinarity as well and there is a potential to reflect and adapt many of these paradigms into current approaches and

conversations." (Kalyanasundaram and Kalyanasundaram, 2019)

According to Darshan Shankar, Vice Chancellor and one of the founders of University of Trans-disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU),

> "When we bring two different knowledge frameworks, epistemologies and ontologies from two different cultural worldviews, perspectives, a new space is created for combining at a functional level. Transdisciplinarity allows for this space of exploration. It allows the bringing together of holistic perspectives with reductionist perspectives. While the two may be incommensurate in terms of their origin, epistemologies and ontologies, they allow for functional inquiries and meaningful solutions at the ground level.[1]"

He elaborates on the importance of looking closely at the dilemmas that emerge in transdisciplinary research as critical aspects of research outcomes. He emphasizes that

> "Transdisciplinarity in such juxtapositions and attempts to combine two incommensurate worldviews, cultural knowledge frameworks leads to dilemmas and these dilemmas are critical to be expressed as research outcomes. [2]"

According to Nicolescu, "Transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines. Its goal is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the unity of

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[1] (In conversation with Darshan Shankar, Founder and Member, Board of Governors, University of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU), Sept 1, 2018)
[2] (In conversation with Darshan Shankar, Founder and Member, Board of Governors, University of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU), Sept 1, 2018)

knowledge (Nicolescu and Voss (Tr.) 2002).” Unity of Knowledge is a complex idea, as the perception of the world by different cultures are different. The interesting aspect of transdisciplinarity as a field of study is to make these differences visible even as a possible unity is constructed. The inherent challenge of complexity and plurality is an essential aspect of the theoretical constructs of transdisciplinarity as an evolving field.

Some of the principles of transdisciplinarity that are considered in building effective research methods for both a theoretical and practitioner’s framework include:

- Openness
- Diversity and Plurality
- Nested modules and units
- Context-sensitivity
- Blurring boundaries, Working at intersections
- Conversations across Multi, Inter, In, trans and/ disciplinarity
- Immersive engagement and embodied practices
- Cultural ways of knowing
- Enhanced empathy
- Develop a highly reflective practice
- Immerse in one media/ skill to engage in deep creative reflection
- Working with diverse media and range of outputs

As there are no defined methods to evolve a transdisciplinary research design, following possibilities have been considered along with institutional support from The University of Trans-disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU) and Srishti

Institute of Art, Design and Technology[3] in creating an exploratory set of methods for this thesis.

- Openness for exploration
- Engaging with dilemmas as possible outcomes of research
- Allowing for experimentation in non-traditional ways and engaging with international research frameworks to open new views on research and practice
- Allowing for practice-based and practice-led research to shift paradigms and open up

  disciplinary boundaries
- Understand the value that arts/design engagements bring to perception, cognition, embodied action, notions of reality and challenging of the status quo
- Provide space to emerge new structures and frameworks in which transdisciplinarity can evolve and find expression
- Invest in time and space for research and inquiry into transdisciplinarity in art, design and educational practices, research, craft and problem solving
- Invest in understanding the cognitive differences in transdisciplinary ways of meaning making and therefore the possible transformations in individuals and their ways of engaging with the world
- Trust that holds researchers and practitioners accountable to evolving pictures of practice, frameworks for engagement, tools for learning and action, research to establish and expand ideas around transdisciplinarity

[3] Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology is now Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology

Some of the challenges to keep in mind while evolving a transdisciplinary research design have included the following:

- Transdisciplinarity opens the ability for heightened sensitivity, and a capacity to appreciate diverse layers of complexity and paradox, this however creates a very ambitious project/ research space.
- The development of such a nature of intelligence can leave researchers appear like they are dabbling in everything and without high skills or focus
- It can also challenge how assessment for depth and quality can be designed as well as the nature of processes that emerge in trandisciplinary thinking
- There are several key points / parameters that are critical to define and this may take time to evolve and understand within the framework of transdisciplinarity chosen

1.2 Kapila Vatsyayan's Approaches of Transdisciplinarity

The art history approach is drawn from the works of scholars A.K.Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch and others with a strong focus on the metaphysical and spiritual, on inner meaning and significance interpretational and aesthetic approach, and not on the historical, or socio-political aspects of reading the works. This approach unfolds through perceiving art as critical reflections of states of being (*bhāva*).

Analysis of literature, visual art and performance will look at categories of consciousness, mysticism, aesthetics and relationships with nature. The complexity of this framework of textual analysis will be worked out carefully establishing the various inter- and transdisciplinary understanding of concepts in the framework of *porosity.*

i. Integral Vision

Kapila Vatsyayan key insights lie in understanding that Indian art, philosophy and everyday life are to be explored as "integral vision in life style of cohesive communities and through the oral traditions. The textual and the oral, the prescriptive and performative, the *Śāstra* and *Prayoga* were complementary (Vatsyayan 1997, 3)." Her work has showcased how the Indian tradition can be perceived as an "organic whole" and how "all dimensions of life" work through the principles of interconnectedness, interdependence and overlayering (Vatsyayan 1997, 3). Her vision demanded several research methodologies that would allow the study of Indian arts from multiple points of view, to explore and investigate "totality" in its diverse layers and dimensions (Vatsyayan 1997, 3). Her method then uses systematic analysis to connect metaphysical concepts with artistic theory and practice. She draws upon textual, archaeological and living traditions to establish these connections. A great part of her vision has been expanded and investigated through the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts that Vatsyayan set up, and by exemplary scholars in the field (Vatsyayan 1997, 160-163). Her further work over the years ensured that textual traditions were further investigated through living traditions and performances, festivals and fairs that were connected to annual calendars in 'small cohesive societies' as recommended by different scholars (Vatsyayan 1997, 160-163). The *Kalātattvakośha* project, a lexicon of fundamental concepts in the arts is built on the need to break away from disciplinary understanding of key terms to a layered and integrated understanding of how the terms are interpreted across different disciplines and how rich textured meanings of artistic terms are essential in interpreting works of art.

> "Insularity of disciplines from each other in recent scholarship has been recognized by most serious scholars, many attempts have been made to cross boundaries. In the Indian context, the specific disciplines evolved from a unified vision and manifested themselves in a multiplicity which was contained within the periphery of a circle. The disciplines and specific concerns were thus segments of a circle, emerging from a centre and bonded by a circumference.
>
> What is true of the emergence of specific disciplines: *Āyurveda, Vyākaraṇa, Jyotiṣā, Gaṇita, Darśana, Itihāsa, Purāṇa, Vāstu, Śilpa, Saṅgīta and Nāṭya*, is also true of the key concepts and terms selected for the *Kalātattvakośha* project."

ii. Interrelationship Between the Arts

The second critical aspect of her method lies in drawing out the interrelationship between the Indian arts – Architecture, Dance, Theatre, Painting, Sculpture and Music (Vatsyayan 1977, 5). This provides an important framework, where seamless organic connections are drawn across art forms to elucidate key beliefs, worldviews, cosmologies and principles of practice. In her seminal work, *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, Vatsyayan, positions dance at the centre of her inquiry into the interrelationship between the arts and says,

> "It is hoped that this analytical study will give the reader a clear picture of the inter-relationship of the Indian art forms and of their common theoretical basis, and help him to recognise the true character of the Indian dance as the highest artistic integration of the forms and ideals of literary as well as audio-visual arts. (Vatsyayan 1977, xxiii)"

iii. Body and Senses

The third most important aspect of Vatsyayan's work lies in her perception of body and senses in Indian art as she mentions in her book, *The Square and the Circle of the Indian arts*. Her work is "an enquiry into the part played by the body and the senses in [Indian] speculative thought and how this gives rise to a cohesive and integrated vision of artistic creation" (Vatsyayan 1983, 7)

iv. Space and Time

Her intuitive as well as meticulously research approach to dimensions of space and layers of time are another important aspect of her method. These have come together in the conference publications – *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern (1991), and Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern (1996)*. In her editorial note on space, Vatsyayan writes that the multidisciplinary inquiry into space through the conference focused on inquiring into the space, one of the five elements, as a dialog between 'the inner and the outer, the parts and the 'whole', the fragments and the 'totality''.

v. Plurality

The next key idea in her method is her treatment of plurality of forms and thereby techniques. She is able to use the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to observe plurality and diversity of art forms, while still seeing the invisible net that connects them to the larger cultural ethos. (Vatsyayan 2006)

vi. *Rasa* as State of Being

Mohd Anis Nor (2000) points out, “Vatsyayan opened new frontiers in the understanding of *rasa* theory beyond its convention as mood and evocation. She explicated the notion of *rasa* as a state of being and aesthetic theories of dance along with the study of literature, sculpture, painting, music and theater (Nor, 2000).” In interpreting *rasa* as a state of being, we can begin to engage with *rasa* theory as aesthetic theories of being and consciousness.

vii. Cosmology as Template for Arts

Quoting Erdman, Vatsyayan’s work, “opens our path not only into Indian cosmology, but also into the idea of cosmology as a template for dance and the idea of "world view" and "cultural ethos" as relevant to dance studies (Erdman 2000).” Vatsyayan’s work in cosmology and cultural ethos is critical to study of all Indian arts across time, providing a framework that allows us to understand the arts from their psychical, metaphysical and conceptual boundaries and drawing the connection between form and technique in their interrelationship to cosmology and culture.

viii. Between Theory and Praxis

Janet O’Shea (2000) points out the important of Vatsyayan’s work in creating a seamless flow of knowledge and research between theory and praxis.

> “Vatsyayan's endeavor bridges a perceived discontinuity between "theory" and "content," a common perception that scholarship need be divided into "theoretical" projects, meaning those that engage in a methodological discussion, and "content-based" studies that provide specific information. A prevalent understanding is that one of these endeavors must happen at the expense of the other: those works concerned with content forgo theoretical

investigations while "theory," which closely examines academic approaches, neglects factual material." (Shea 2007)

Jyoti Sabharwal (2015) in her biography of Vatsyayan, elaborates on Kapila's dance training with the great masters of the Indian living tradition, Guru Achan Maharaj in Kathak, Guru Ojha Amubi in Manipuri, Guru Surendranath Jena in Odyssey, and draws out how the essence of practice guided her understanding and theorizing of dance.

ix. Indigenous Scholarship

According to Joan Erdman (2000), "What Vatsyayan had recognized and written about became the scholarly touchstone for our twentieth-century understanding of India's dance and cultural heritage." Mohd Anis Nor (2000) points out how Kapila Vatsyayan's work "has opened up new vistas in understanding Asian dance aesthetics and the philosophies of performance." He also emphasizes that she has offered self-confidence to Asian Dance scholars by exemplifying the "strength and rigor of indigenous scholarship beyond the traditional oriental-occidental dichotomy(Nor 2000)."

Uttara Asha Coorlawala in reflecting the work of Erdman, Nor and O'Shea, concludes in her introduction to honorary papers on Kapila Vatsyayan,

> "Erdman, Nor, and O'Shea have each demonstrated clearly and forcefully how her (Vatsyayan's) writings have moved well beyond the Orientalist legacy from which they emerged, and elevated the status of what might have been an esoteric, remote subject to a place of honor within American academia and world dance studies (Coorlawala, 2000)."

As noted above, different scholars have chosen different aspects of Kapila Vatsyayan's methodology to extend their own work.

x. Beyond the Intellectual Tradition

In her biography by Jyoti Sabharwal, Vatsyayan reflects on her conversation with dance Guru Meenakshisundaram Pillai of the Pandanallur tradition. She brings out in these reflections of his words to her, the essence of tradition that seeps and flows through like the tide of the sea, the need to wait, go through with the *sādhanā* (praxis) and wait for the moment of benediction, which is beyond the intellectual tradition. This sensibility of respecting intuition, benediction and traditional wisdom is an essential part of her scholarship (Sabharwal 2015).

xi. Transdisciplinarity and Practice

While Vatsyayan positions her work in inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity, her work also stretches into transdisciplinarity as she draws from wide sources of diverse disciplines and cultures to build a cohesive whole in her perceptions, arguments and expositions of Indian aesthetic thought and practice. Her notions of living traditions of practice draw richly from these diverse disciplines, allowing for new practice to emerge, while also loosely connecting to traditional frameworks.

1.2.1. Extending Vatsyayan's Work to Personal Practice

I draw from these various methods described above to find these connections to my own practice in larger part and to the notions of environment in Indian aesthetic and philosophical traditions as an intuitive legacy in my work. With a Bachelors and Masters that had a strong component of art history along with visual art and design

practices, my exposure to Indian art and craft traditions, historical sites, museums was a rich aspect of my training. I deliberated upon the close relationship between myth, consciousness and the arts in Indian classical, folk and tribal art across architecture, sculpture and painting for my Master's thesis. I studied the visual formal elements of diverse art forms in relation to the mythology or the state of consciousness they represented as referred to in symbolism, iconography, textual, philosophical or metaphysical sources (Kalyanasundaram 2004). This allowed me to inquire deeply into states of artistic consciousness that allowed for a seamless flow of thought across dimensions of space and time.

Vatsyayan's methodology of studying the interrelationship between the arts through textual, archaeological and living traditions has thus been a continuing approach in my work. In my case, my theoretical research led to expanding my practice in the last sixteen years since the submission of my Master's thesis, which allowed for many of Vatsyayan's methods of research, an ongoing element of my creative practice. Hence a detailed discussion of her methodology and various aspect of her methodology is to lay the ground to discuss my own work in the light of adapting her methods to practice, apart from using it to study the practice of other works of art/ practitioners.

3. Tracing Lineage

My work draws upon traditional Indian aesthetic frameworks that have evolved over the centuries, delving both into artistic and aesthetic consciousness as well as techniques and processes of practice. The methods of study are evolved using interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches with their premise drawn from the work of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan. As a practitioner, the other aspect of tracing lineage

lies in observing and acknowledging cultural intuitions. Often, long before I have a theoretical understanding or research, a whisper in my mind of a word or an image triggers a cultural consciousness. Often my early work with a concept is driven and guided by this intuition. Sometimes the whole work emerges as a paradox or a symbol, leaving me to solve riddles and conundrums that take me to theoretical research. So tracing lineage looks at intuition as one of its methods and documenting the intuition, followed by substantiating or exploring such intuition through theoretical reading or research, and study of the work and methods of master craftsmen.

"The artist in India is synonymous with *Prajāpati* (the creator) (Kalyanasundaram 2019, 159). " Within the Indian tradition there is a philosophical acceptance that art creation is 'sacrosanct' and the focus of inquiries has largely been in relation to aesthetic experience rather than the artistic process itself. "The essence of creativity or artistic inspiration is termed *pratibhā* and 'signifies a burst of enlightenment. The *Kāśmīr Śaivite* literature articulates human creativity as an act born of bliss in re-enacting the nature of the universal consciousness" (Dehejia 2000, 4; Kalyanasundaram 2019,159). This idea is echoed in the words of Ganapathi Sthapathi- the architect-sculptor *(Śilpi)* who traces his lineage back to the tenthcentury architects of the *Bṛhadīśvara* temple (Kailasam 2004).

Irrespective of profession or disciplinary boundary, creativity is an integral element of consciousness. Consciousness is individual at one level, universal at another, but what interests me is the layer in which it is *porous*. It is in *porosity* that consciousness allows for new relationships to emerge between the human and the more-than-human

worlds. And in the acting of the *porous* principle, creativity is enacted as performance.

- But what are the ethical boundaries of creativity in the context of the natural world?
- What is its expanse within freedom and responsibility?
- What is its essence within the realm of human compassion in relationship?
- How does it bind us in this overarching layer of a shared cosmic ecology?

"The Vedic conceptualization of the divine being lies in the concept of *ṛta*, or cosmic order, which is seen as the organizing principle of life at three levels – the natural, the social-moral and the spiritual (Khanna (Ed.) 2004; Panikkar 1977; Sivaramamurti 1969). Further in the conceptualization of *Puruṣa* as a universal being as interpreted in the *Puruṣa Sūktam* (Hymn 10.90 of the *Ṛgveda*) (Swami Krishnananda, 59-65), the encompassing view of all life as one integral being takes shape.

Puruṣa Sūktam is not without problems, however. Ambedkar, one of India's constitution builders and part of the historically lower-caste category of untouchables (*Dalits*), has been a key leader in fighting against injustice and inequality of this community by other upper castes. He critiques verse 12 of *Puruṣa Sūktam* as a religious sanction of the caste system in India (Ambedkar 1970). This remains a key socio-political critique of the text. However, several other researchers, while acknowledging the historical injustice meted out to Dalits, point out issues with this

reading of the *Sūktam* (Nadkarni 2003; Venkataraman 2016; Hardikar & Dhar 2016)."[4]

The encompassing view of life is further extrapolated in the following verse from the *Kaivalya Upaniṣad*:

> *Sarva- bhūtastham ātmānam… By seeing the self in all beings and all beings in the self, one goes to Brahman, not by any other cause. – (Kaivalya Upaniṣad 10)* Translation by S. Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan 2012, 929)

The interwoven physical and metaphysical relationship between man and other beings is continuously emphasized in spiritual literature.

"The translation of these cosmic laws into artistic traditions in terms of form, technique, experience and aesthetics is of critical importance to understand the integral vision of an ecologically grounded consciousness that pervades the Indian cultural and aesthetic ethos. Further, it provides us with an alternative worldview to construct ideas of creativity, its roots, and its practice as embedded within larger laws or path- dharma. The philosophic dictum *Sarvaṃ Sarvātmakam* (*Yoga Sūtra Bhāṣya III.14*) meaning 'everything is related to the totality' is a central idea in Indian culture (Vatsyayan & Baumer (Ed.) 1996, Vol III, xi). The idea extended by the Tamiḻ saints (*cittars), aṇṭamē piṇṭam piṇṭamē aṅṭam,* furthers the concept that the universe is the individual body and the individual body is the universe.

[4] This section has been published in Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

> "Modern physics has shown the idea that the subject is forever apart from what it surveys to be wrong. The Vedic view goes further and claims that consciousness provides a means for subject and object to become one, a process in which the cognitive centers are transformed into doorways of holistic perception" (Kak 2000, 50-51)." [5]

"According to the 'Hindu' tradition, the creative process is viewed as a means of 'suggesting or recreating a vision, however fleeting, of a divine truth' and this is a *sādhanā*, a practice that opens the means to experiencing *ānanda* or transcendence. The tradition requires that the *rasikā* or the aesthete also be in a state of preparedness to respond and receive the nuanced vision of the artist, there by becoming a *sahṛdaya,* sharing oneness of spirit with the artist (Vatsyayan 1977, 3-7). The training and initiation of the spectator is considered equally critical as the training of the artist (Vatsyayan 1977, 3-7). In this exchange between artist, *rasikā* and the experience of transcendence by contemplating on the divine truth of oneness lies an alternative vision of creativity.

A balanced worldview located in the *pañcabhūtas* or five elements creates a deep awareness of the cosmic and earthly rhythms that impact human lives. An ecological understanding that emerges from these aspects of the traditional worldview could offer critical ways to build a harmonious interrelationship with nature in today's context. "The arts serve as a bridge between concepts, myths, ritual and life forms and

[5] This section has been published in Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

hence they particularly express and mediate on ecological consciousness" (Vatsyayan & Baumer (Ed.), 1996, Vol III, xvii).

While Indian philosophical thought traditions were grounded in a cosmic ecology, much of today's practices have become human centered religious rituals divorced from their ecological roots. The philosophical and spiritual basis bound in *ṛta* (Cosmic Natural law) has reduced to 'dialogues and debates around human salvation, abstracted and far removed from the ethical, social, and spiritual order that was woven around natural laws' (Kalyanasundaram 2019, 162)."[6] For instance the simple ritual act of drawing *kōlams* (ritual diagrams) on the ground with rice powder so that insects, primarily ants could feed on them is now replaced with chemical powders or plastic sticker sheets printed with *kōlam* designs. This complete aberration of the ecological principle of a simple daily ritual is only one of the many examples to show how divorced we are from responding to the natural order and the ethics of ecological balance. "Many of the traditional art practices have also become reductionist in their approaches, the ecological sensibility completely divorced from their framework (Kalyanasundaram 2019, 162)." While some of them are conscious and aware of the ecological sensibility, largely the divisiveness between art and nature plagues the traditional art world too.

Artists who are ecologically driven or environmentally conscious form a small segment of the conversation in India and the world at large. Their practices are diverse and they function as smaller collectives or individual artists engaged in

[6] This section has been published in Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram, 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', Journal for Artistic Research, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

environmental work. In depth studies of environmental art in India are yet to be undertaken and its possible impact on the art world as well as art education and policy are to be awaited. A closer investigation of environmental art in India today is undertaken in chapter 7.

4. Practice and Artistic Research: Personal Practice as Research in the Arts

Guiding questions to evolve personal practice as research in the arts

- What is artistic practice?
- Why must the practice be across text, image and movement?
- What is research in artistic practice?
- How is artistic practice a form of research?
- Who is an artist-philosopher?
- What is transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary artistic research?
- What is (are) the organizing principle(s) of such a research that draws its methodology from a diverse set of disciplines?

Based on the guiding questions, a thorough framework to engage with practice-based research in the arts is evolved with the following aspects to be investigated more closely.

i. The Relationship between Art and Academia

The need for meeting points between art and research, unraveling the relationship between art and academia

ii. The Discipline of 'Artistic research': Survey of Existing Notions

Practice based, Practice-led, Artistic research – broad survey of existing

notions of artistic research, positions and problems

iii. **Acknowledging the Validity of Personal Practice in Artistic Research**

Positioning artistic practice as research methodology – Mediating Research. Where do research and practice meet?

iv. **Reading Art and Artistic Research**

How do we develop our capacities to read artistic research? In what ways can we learn to read research differently?

v. **Artistic Practice as Research Methodology: The Practitioner's Frame**

Articulating the dilemmas of theoretical frameworks for analysis versus practitioner's frameworks – What are the nuances in perception and engagement?

vi. **Artistic Practice within Ecological Consciousness**

How does environment as a subject and ecological consciousness as a framework transform artistic practice? Emerging research criteria – Practice, analysis and aesthetic experience within this framework.

4.1 The Relationship between Art and Academia

Artists have traditionally not been recognized as researchers and neither have they pursued academic research as a goal. Art Practice has largely been a studio practice and not framed within the structures of academia. However in the last fifteen years, there has been a shift in this dialog between art and research, artist and researcher, studio/ art academy and university. As academic positions increasingly revolve around the politics of having a doctoral degree, artists have risen to the debates around it, by positioning themselves as researchers, allowing them to play diverse roles in both academia and practice. However, this shift in dialog and politics has led

to the new questions about research and an ongoing discussion about whether artistic practice can help us evolve new methodologies and allow for new models of research to enter academia for varied reasons that are discussed below. “Seldom challenged, the assumption is that whereas a good researcher focuses on the verbal, an experienced artist focuses on the nonverbal articulation of ideas (Elo 2009, 19).”

Many artist-researchers seek to challenge the long held bias of the artist as a non-researcher. The central debates around ‘artistic research’ rise from the need to articulate what constitutes research in the arts and why artistic research needs to be seen as parallel, integral or in contradiction to traditionally held notions of academic research. From these arise questions of approaches and methods, verbal and non-verbal models of research and the need to cultivate not only artist-researchers but also a sensitive audience of researchers in academia who comprehend the unique problems that the artist as researcher raises. Traditional recognition of master artists and craftsman had a code of cultural standards based on which artists were given titles. However across time, the artist rarely spoke of his/her process and art critics, historians and scholars took the role of speaking for the artist. The practitioner’s frame of art however allows the artist to articulate, make evident and clarify their artistic journeys or study these journeys of another artist with an internal understanding of processes.

In today’s academic world, particularly in India, there is a lack of substantial awareness of the need to engage in these critical questions woven around artistic research and the relationship between artist as practitioner and artist as researcher making self-inquiry, reflection and subjective research a realm of new academic

research. While artistic practice and personal research have gone hand in hand from the beginning of time, what is new is the emerging links between art practice and academic institution and therefore the need to define research as acceptable or debatable within long held academic beliefs as well as biases.

There are evolving ideas and fields that revolve around the relationship between art and research practices that have led to the rise of diverse terminologies that capture different methods, debates and approaches. These have largely risen out of the inquiry into research, conversations, discussions and debates around art and research in the European countries. Several authors such as Brady 1998; Kiljunen and Hannula 2002; Siukonen 2002; Balkema and Slager 2004; Makela and Routarinne 2006; Borgdorff 2006, 7-21 (As cited in Elo 2009) indicate that "artistic research", "art as research", "practice as research", "practice-led research", practice-based research" and "imaginary research" are some of the terms that have emerged.

4.2 The Discipline of 'Artistic research': Survey of Existing Notions

Within the limitations of this thesis, the research methods will only look at Artistic practice and the new emerging discipline of 'Artistic Research' (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005, 9). The reason for this choice of terminology is because my work spans across text, image and movement and the discipline-specificity of the term allows me to engage with specific concerns of the field of art and those of the artist as researcher.

Academic research in artistic and other *creative* fields is richly debated at two levels. At one level, there is displeasure at intellectualizing creative practices and bringing

them into the framework of academia. There are practitioners, who see this as a political move of homogenizing artistic research and hence knowledge about the arts. At another level, there are rising debates, call for alternative frameworks of research that will keep the open-ended nature of creative pursuits at the heart of the research methodologies for doctoral work in these fields (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005, 9). At both levels, practitioners and researchers alike bring forth diverse notions of artistic practice as well as research. A broad survey of these practices emerge these key ideas of research:

- Artistic research as something that allows for questions that are in the realm of paradoxical/ cannot be proven, that are different from those of scientific disciplines. (Koskinen 2009, 16)
- Research as something that makes visible the subjective inquiries, approaches and insights of the artist and opens it for critique using ethnomethodology and autoethnography as an approach (Mäkelä 2009, 29; Koskinen 2009, 12)
- Criticality and Self-reflexivity as key to openness.
- Keeping subjective inquiries within the realm of esoteric, indescribable and framed within the artist's personal interiority of viewing the world and those that caution against this approach seeing it as romanticism (Koskinen 2009, 11-13)
- Allowing for diverse experimental models of artistic research to allow for the discipline to develop, so that nuances in the field of artistic research as distinct from other disciplines can be allowed to emerge
    - Articulating nuanced issues of subjective, intuitive, flow and other

characteristic elements of creative processes as problems of research

- Questioning what is really being investigated in artistic research

- Paradox, incompleteness, inconclusiveness, experimentation, speculation – as critical to artistic research (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005, 13-15), (Koskinen 2009, 16), (Maffioletti, Hjelde and Bradfield 2009, 54)
- The artifact as research – Debating forms of research as verbal versus non-verbal, Creating space for both explicit and tacit knowledge in research (Niedderer 2009, 59)
- 'Close observation' and study of artistic process through 'careful description, learning and seeing' as an approach to artistic research without getting mired in romanticizing the subjective nature of art and 'painting partial picture of art through research' or restricting practice to a reflection of 'one's inner world' (Koskinen 2009, 13-16)
- Making visible the various steps and stages of the artist's creative process as the research
- Creating a dialogical inquiry between artist's creative process and artifact as the research
- Creating frameworks for aesthetic experience (Hermeneutical, phenomenological), to allow for a newer more nuanced reading of artistic research
- Questioning whether the 18th century notions of creating disciplines that distinguished art and science as valid to human knowledge
- "…Place philosophy or more accurately *thinking* – in the centre of the dialogic relationship between art and research (Elo 2009, 21) ."
- Encouraging alternative literacies for reading research. (Maffioletti, Hjelde

and Bradfield 2009, 54)

Several authors emphasize caution against the tendency to valorize these emerging research paradigms and clarify the need to observe that "traditional" forms of research also allow for self-reflexivity, creativity, speculation and imagination (McNamara 2012, 9-10), openness to review and scrutiny is laid as an emphasis across authors.

4.5 Acknowledging the Validity of Personal Practice in Artistic Research

What do Indian institutions need to consider?

i. Be thoughtful to what artistic research is investigating and therefore why it needs to evolve different methods and outcomes

Paradox, incompleteness, inconclusiveness, experimentation, speculation – as critical to artistic research (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005, 13-15; Koskinen 2009, 16; Maffioletti, Hjelde and Bradfield 2009, 54)

ii. Allow for diverse experimental models of artistic research to allow for the discipline to develop, so that nuances in the field of artistic research as distinct from other disciplines can be allowed to emerge

- Articulating nuanced issues of subjective, intuitive, flow and other characteristic elements of creative processes as problems of research
- Questioning what is really being investigated in artistic research

iii. Recognize what artistic research can offer as new knowledge

Artistic research as something that allows for questions that are in the realm of paradoxical/ cannot be proven, that are different from those of scientific

disciplines. (Koskinen 2009, 16)

iv. Develop approaches to guiding as well as assessment by acknowledge diverse forms of knowledge that emerge from the arts

    a. Institutions and individuals need to be open and tolerant and appreciate 'polypohony' to create opportunities for unique research (Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2005)

    b. Institutions need to be prepared for research that is 'committed and logical' and also 'communicates with objects of research' and allows for interaction with 'communities of practice' alongside research communities. (Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2005)

    c. Both institutions and individuals must have courage and boldness, "Otherwise artistic research will be threatened by a negative kind of normalization, the accumulating repetition of habits that deny the space and need for questioning and self-reflective inner challenges." (Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2005)

As Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden, rightly argue for flexibility and openness in instituions to foster healthy artistic research.

> "Artistic research must be given space and time to breathe and to develop, and this requires self-protection and self-definition. One must be able - even by bending the rules - to find or create courage for experimentation, for taking risks and, above all, for enjoying the uncertainty, detours and failures of research." (Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2005)

v. Acknowledge research in personal practice as a valid form of knowledge

making

- Research as something that makes visible the subjective inquiries, approaches and insights of the artist and opens it for critique using ethnomethodology and autoethnography as an approach (Mäkelä, 2009, 29; Koskinen 2009, 12)
- "…Place philosophy or more accurately *thinking* – in the centre of the dialogic relationship between art and research."(Elo 2009, 21)
- Keeping subjective inquiries within the realm of esoteric, indescribable and framed within the artist's personal interiority of viewing the world and those that caution against this approach seeing it as romanticism (Koskinen 2009,11-13)

vi. Develop new literacies for reading Artistic Research

- Encouraging alternative literacies for reading research. (Maffioletti, Hjelde and Bradfield 2009, 54)
- Consider the artifact as research – Debate forms of research as verbal versus non-verbal, Creating space for both explicit and tacit knowledge in research (Niedderer 2009, 59)
- Creating a dialogical inquiry between artist's creative process and artifact as the research (Koskinen 2009, 13-16)
- Creating frameworks for aesthetic experience (Hermeneutical, phenomenological), to allow for a newer more nuanced reading of artistic research

In his doctoral thesis "Unflattening", Nick Sousanis (2015), debates on why visual literacy and visual thinking needs to be given equal value as written words. His thesis defies conventional discourses of scholarship and is written in the form of a comic

book, pushing the boundaries of academia's narrow definitions of research. His work stands as a strong example of several of the points made about the need for institutional support as well as individual courage in pushing the frontiers of artistic research.

4.5 Reading Art and Artistic Research

The artist is endeavoring to create aesthetic experience. And each artist, within the frames of their background, cultural impulses, time and space have their own intentions of creating these experiences. How must artistic work and research be then read?

Marini positions a way to inquire into "seeing the invisible" in the arts by cultivating an

"obscure" way of seeing that allows us to linger with the thing we are seeing to absorb and perceive other intensities of meaning hidden within obscurities.

> This is the sense in which Aristotle says, "The eyes of owls are to the radiance of daylight like our mind is to reality. The meaning of this image lies in the fact that there is more to be seen than what meets the eye or, in other words, in my usual ways of seeing. This is not to say that my cognitive powers are defective in any way but rather to acknowledge that some aspects of reality will not simply adapt to me and thus will challenge me to leave the "eyes" of my mind ajar. It is precisely due to those objects that are invisible that the owl will develop an enhanced vision as the night falls. Put differently, not being able to look at the sun directly is an opportunity to learn how to see in the

shadows." (Marini 2016, 46-47)

Learning to see in the shadows, in the alternative notions of reality that artists inquire into is essential to broadening the scope of reading artistic research. It is in the question: what is truth in which notion of reality? that art and science often meet or diverge. In being open to the notion that there are multiple notions of reality and therefore multiple realities, changes our understanding of enduring truths. It allows for the true spirit of inquiry into self and its nature of perception and how these perceptions impact our interpretations of reality. It is in cultivating openness and new literacies at the juncture of the inter-subjectivity between artist and art work, aesthete and art work, researcher and artist, reader and art work, reader and research that artistic research can open new dimensions in knowledge frameworks of doctoral inquiries.

Deepa Ganesh's (2016) article in the Hindu on "A reading, between two modes" on how to read Shivaram Karanth's *Marali Mannige* makes an excellent case for reading it with the approach of Indian Poetics, as elaborated from the frameworks of David Shulman and Velcheru Narayana Rao.

> He (a friend) argued that if aesthetic experience continues to be the core of all art, then mustn't our readings also be guided by a different aesthetics?" We have to read it the *Kāvya* (Indian Poetics) way, he emphasized, which, as David Shulman says, is about a "counter world" that we create in response to this world. If this counter-world carries the genesis of *rasa* in us, why then is the *Kāvya* way of reading considered outmoded? Why do we not foreground *rasānubhava*, but almost always judge texts only with tools of the real world?

> The Telugu scholar Velcheru Narayan Rao had observed in a talk: "We are worried about who wrote the book, where he lived but not about how it should be read," which has led to homogenization of reading and meaning. He added: "If you cannot enjoy a poem for its own sake, but are always thinking of its hidden meanings, you must stop reading poetry."

In using another work by Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subramanyam – *Textures of Time: Writing history in South India 1600-1800 (2006)*, we get an alternative to the homogenization of reading that happens in research work.

> "…in this book we are listening for something else – for the logic and sensibility that have shaped an entire conceptual system. It is in this act of listening that we rely upon the crucial factor of texture, a central concept at every stage of the discussion." (Nārāyaṇarāvu, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2006)

In *Textures of Time*, the authors suggest that while History was not a genre of its own in ancient and medieval India, it continued to be written meticulously in the dominant genre of a given time period. However, readers of the time period knew how to read the nuances and extract history from fiction in any given work. They observe these nuances as textures, and with select works from the 1600-1800 CE of South India, showcase how to listen to textures in a text. In doing this, they place the onus of meaning making on the reader, where reader and writer enjoy a mutually satisfying exchange through reading hidden textures. Feeding well into the Indian mind for

riddles and a deep-rooted sense of cyclical time, this mode of creating as well as reading allows for *rasānubhava*, a flavoring of essences, paradoxes, ambiguities as well as philosophical comments interspersed and encountering historical reality.

As A.K. Ramanujam (2014) articulates, "the Indian way of thinking" could be called "context sensitive." What appears circuitous, untruthful, confusing, conflicting and thoroughly foolish begins to make complete sense in a different notion of reality that is embedded in cyclical time, philosophy and ethics that are rooted in *ṛta* - cosmic order or harmony, unraveled in *dharma* (ethical action), that is specific to professions and communities, age of individual and a given time period/ place or space. The notion of truth that emerges in such a philosophy that revels in paradox, and ambiguity, rooted in context-specifity and yet contrasted against the wonderful uncertainty of *karma* allows for a constant interplay and change of personhood and destined events. Such fluid and flexible notions of truth inevitably cannot be read in modes that are definitive and prescriptive.

Textures of Time (2006) shows the evolution of a conceptual system that intercepted this monotony and homogenization of reading by embedding codes that the readers would decode. The codes of a given time period are textures that one can hear with careful listening. This keeps the reader too in active engagement, for there is flavor here, humor and philosophy, and a continuous reminder of action and principle, of being. Written with precision and jest, the format allows for flourish and identity, pride and intelligence, teasing and riddles all embedded within a framework that rests in humility and acceptance of the wisdom of cyclical time. Both reader and writer, aesthete and artist enjoy their games of observing and interacting with each other,

allowing a slow unfolding of experience, revelations that take one across multiple dimensions of being, not disciplinary silos.

These intriguing textures that can be read in artistic research and practice are what make it different from other approaches to research. It invites the reader to participate in order to evaluate. The approach is one of conversation and dialogue in friendship, in time that is often cyclical. The meaning making cannot happen in linear time, as the inquiry and story have not happened in linearity. There is no certainty, because the inquiry is into ambiguity itself. The results are not conclusive or prescriptive, because the process is the texture, the very thing that is the subject of the inquiry.

Maffioletti, Hjelde and Bradfield (2009, 54) make a case for 'alternative literacies' in "'reading' art as R/research" to expand the notions of knowledge as articulated in PhD as a research degree. They suggest that such literacies will "override the historical preoccupation with reducing Research to a single Knowledge claim characterized by clarity, specificity and un-equivocality."

4.5 Artistic Practice as Research Methodology: The Practitioner's Frame

Starting with the question -Who is the artist who is the researcher?, I use Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden's (, 69- 83) approach of using an artistic researcher typology to frame the research inquiry of myself as a practitioner. Using sociologist C. W. Miller's ideas as a starting point, Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden (2014) emphasize,

> "An artistic researcher never works in isolation, outside the worlds of arts and humanities. He or she is not living in a social vacuum but in various societal, social and cultural contexts with various publics and audiences."

The four broad typologies that they discuss for the artistic Researcher are

- Artistic Researcher as Professional where, 'artistic researcher performs and acts in two different surroundings: on one hand in studios, galleries, museums, streets and other public spaces, and on the other hand, inside the corridors and lecture halls of academia.' In my work, I exhibit both in private galleries and public spaces, as well as interact with students within and outside academia.
- Artistic Researcher as Policy Advisor, where 'the policy role consists of the researcher's acts in the public sphere, that is, in the different fields of policy making, be it cultural policy, educational policy or perhaps economics.' While I am currently not working directly with policy, I have participated in National policy discussions for the arts, and art education alongside other educators as part of the National Council for Educational Research and Training Workshops, trained teachers, contributed as an illustrator and advisor to the role of arts in Math education and National textbooks over the years.
- Artistic Researcher as Public Speaker, where artistic researcher in 'her public role defends and allies with civil society', where the 'individual's role would be that of curator, speaker, facilitator, advocate or mentor inside and especially outside academia.' I work consistently doing workshops both internationally and nationally in discussing arts, arts education, environmental awareness and environmental education through the arts and in the role of a mentor have worked with students and general public.
- Artistic Researcher as Critic, where artistic research presents itself as 'critic of ideology in the market-driven society' both inside and outside academia in the role of an advocate for the arts through publishing, education as well as doing interactive workshops, drawing upon the philosophical and aesthetic paradigms.

As a professional artist and designer, philosopher and educator, questions and research design are specific to this choice of typology as Professional and Critic. While all four of the other typologies match my current work experience, there is a greater emphasis on the professional and the critic within the framework of the thesis. However the work that is discussed is not the points of intersection with the public or civil society, but the points of engagement with the natural world and the evolution of creative work, placing it within the current debates in environment, positioning cultural epistemologies and ontologies. While during the period of the thesis, I have conducted several workshops, designed curricula and engaged in public discussion in conferences, these inform my work, but are not discussed within the thesis, except briefly in the conclusion offering future possibilities for research and engagement.

1.6. Artistic Practice within Ecological Consciousness

In emerging artistic practice within the subcategory of ecological consciousness, more specific research criteria that considers how the natural world is interpreted, experienced, and engaged with become critical. Practice, analysis and aesthetic experience with reference to the artist's relationship to the natural world, socio-political constructs, physical or metaphysical experiences need to be made visible in order to be studied. *Porous* or intangible experiences in the natural world have been discussed in the first two chapters making it clear that specific criteria of experience, aesthetic experience may be used to differentiate these experiences from other more tangible experiences. A closer study of ecological consciousness, different kinds of eco-art and in particular expressions of intangibility of experience in the natural world will provide more specific directions. In terms of personal practice, I record moments

of experience through detailed description, annotate sketches and write reflective records to build more nuanced understanding of artistic practice within ecological consciousness.

1. Artistic Research through Personal Practice

This section looks at research methodology and methods to show ways in which practice, critical reflection, textual analysis, documentation and annotation can support research in and through artistic practice.

1.1. Self as a Subject of Research

An artist working with text, image and movement – moves across diverse perceptivities of reality in her engagement with creative practice. In order to create work in each of these dimensions, artists usually experience the world not in disciplinary silos but what can be best explained through the metaphor of weaving a tapestry. The threads that are used for weaving are also experiential and embodied and draw from diverse disciplines at a given space and time. Much of this also emerges from long-term interests that the artist has. Every work of art is often a cross-section of this self that has been crafted over long periods of engagement with the world, reflecting on relationships and the particular craft that the artist specializes in.

The embodied, experiential approaches that draw richly from cultural nuances, traversing through emotions, translating the elusive and hidden nature of phenomena render the artist's mind and consciousness into a seamless mode of *porous* exchanges across everyday life, through time and space. This nature of the artist's mind is what allows for the patterns and mathematics of creativity to become river and flow of

forms and symbols that interweave differing realities into a new whole.

For the artist, the disciplinary silo is both irrelevant, and meaningless in the process of meaning making, for the approach through silos, does not provide answers to the whole that the artist seeks from any given exploration or interrogation. One of the challenges of trying to frame artistic practice within the realms of academic research is this attempt at trying to explain through a disciplinary silo. It is the nature of the artist's mind, which holds the clue to the methodological approaches that emerge in practice-based research.

In pointing out the 'diversity and pluralism' of the sciences as an advantage and a 'goal to strive for', Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden (2005) position a framework for artistic research methodology in diversity rather than homogeneity. Further, they make a strong link between methodologies that are open to pluralism with ethics. This link between ethics, diversity and pluralism in research methodology is critical to interpret the research methodologies as used in this thesis. "We see it as a tool because pluralism and polyphony, as methodological goals, increase our possibilities for understanding and experiencing the world. In turn, we see it as a goal because true diversity is, in our opinion, a necessary starting point for ethics (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden, 2005, 17)."

Caduff also emphasizes the presence of methodological pluralism in the arts and points out how in the arts, the methods are not visible and considered implicit in the work of art.

> "In general, scientific methods are disclosed: question, path of knowledge and results are set out explicitly and are therefore understandable. Artistic

> methods, however, are traditionally not disclosed. Usually the steps remain covert, the artistic result "speaks for itself". Artistic research, however, exists through the connection of these two worlds. Methodological pluralism is manifested by a countless number of artistic research projects, especially because they are located in different artistic disciplines and distinctly refer to different scientific contexts." (Caduff, 2017)

In my work, my long terms interests have panned across consciousness, human goodness, ethics, philosophy, ecology and conservation, ecophilosophy and ecological consciousness, language studies, art and design practice, dance, lyrical prose and poetry, Indian art history, aesthetics and thought, creativity, embodied experiences, education and healing practices. As a result, my artistic practice has emerged at the juncture and interweaving of all these layers. In other words, they have coalesced into a new whole in the realm of practice, emerging with distinctness in a new form with its own inquiries. For instance, the following painting and poem, created in 2012 is part of a series called "*Sahṛdaya" (*One at heart*),* there is a coalescing of ecological consciousness into poetry, aesthetics, philosophy, human goodness, a quest for new ethics, form explorations and healing practices. Embodied experience is at the heart of the painting. This is a woven layer, one discipline integrated into another seamlessly. The challenge of practice-based research emerges from this frame. It challenges the disciplinary frame as the threads of a work are emerged from diverse experiences, different perceptions of realities, altering of perceptions, melding and melting of one into the other, crafting new vision and meaning and hence moves into a transdisciplinary frame of work.



Fig 1: 'Sahrudaya I - Woven Hearts', Acrylic on canvas, 2009 - 2014, (3ft by 3.5ft)

Touching the great wilderness
Men,women, eagle, fish,
Leaves in conversations,
Curved forms, bent tree
Children in embrace
Leaping, laughing
In heart woven heart
Sahrudayas
Emerge
Rest
Submerge
Fly

Breathing in and
Breathing out,
The great
Wilderness.

In my practice, all of these diverse inquiries emerge into the presence and action of

'being' and in this sense, *The porous self* is a study on beingness. The organizing principle for drawing out the methodology for research thus comes from the whole woven tapestry and return to the threads from this whole. It arises within this creative force of experiential melding of phenomena and self, one interwoven into the other. As an artist as well as researcher, I draw from diverse resources and disciplines to create a tapestry that reflects the nature of artist's mind and consciousness and therefore her artistic process. These reflections connect back to the training of the artist in Asian traditions.

1.2. Traditional Indian Frameworks of Practice, Research, Aesthetics

Artists often consider research in their own creative practice. This allows for inquiries into practitioner's framework of research, tacit knowledge and inquiry into consciousness. Practice allows for investigation and insights and in annotating practice; thinking, cognition, leaps of intuition, methods and methodologies become visible. The challenge however lies in positioning personal artistic practice as contribution to knowledge. Objectivity, reliability, and validity are considered as critical to qualifying rigor in research. In self-reflexive research, how can these three criteria be considered?

My doctoral inquire resides in a particular frame/ state of consciousness that I articulate as *Porosity*. Investigations in *porosity* happen through diverse art practices for me, which include: Text, Image and Movement using different formats and media. Often, what I cannot research in one artistic media/ form, I use another form to arrive at insights. Poetry and lyrical prose allow me to investigate certain frames of being and consciousness, while visual art allows other. Both are rooted and emerge in the embodied practice of dance. As a trained *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer, my sense and

meaning-making processes happen often through a visceral embodiment of experience. By negotiating the insights that I derive through these three forms of artistic practice, I have emerged methods and methodologies for my doctoral research.

The frameworks of transdisciplinarity allow for mixed research methods, as well as a philosophical stance that provide me the space to investigate consciousness and creativity in their subtle and gross layers. Largely informed by the aesthetic-philosophical traditions of Indian-Hindu thought and art, my research work emerges as an inquiry into the tacit artistry of creating '*Porosity'* as a symbol.

1.3. The *Porous Self* as an Artistic Research into Symbol

The *porous self* is an inquiry into symbol where symbol is as Raimon Panikkar (2005) says "not an objectifiable reality". The idea of *porosity* as presented here does not seek to unravel it as a concept, but seeks to unfold or unfurl it as a symbol. "The symbol reveals the symbolized in the symbol itself, not outside, transcending thus the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism (Panikkar 2005, 12)." It is this lack of dichotomy in a symbol that becomes essential in the perception and engagement with the concept of *porosity.* Reiterating from the introduction, the simple premise of my research is that the physical form of the human body in its gross or subtle states; physical body or mind, is not its boundary in relationship to self or life in all its other forms.

I inquire into *porosity* and *the porous self* through artistic research. As an artist working with text, image and movement – I move across diverse perceptivities of reality in my engagement with creative practice. In order to create work in each of

these dimensions, I usually experience the world not in disciplinary silos but in embodied transdisciplinarity. The embodied, experiential approaches that draw richly from cultural nuances, traversing through emotions, translating the elusive and hidden nature of phenomena render my mind and consciousness into a seamless mode of *porous* exchanges across everyday life, through time and space. My works of art are a cross-section of this self that has been crafted over long periods of engagement with the world, reflecting on relationships and the particular craft that I specialize in. For me as an artist, the disciplinary silo is both irrelevant, and meaningless in the process of meaning making, for the approach through silos, does not provide answers to the whole that I seek through my artistic inquiries. Some of the challenges of trying to frame artistic research in academia are the limitations of disciplinary silo, reductionist paradigms, and Cartesian duality.

The central debates around 'artistic research' rise from the need to articulate what constitutes research in the arts and why artistic research needs to be seen as parallel, integral or in contradiction to traditionally held notions of academic research. From these arise questions of approaches and methods, verbal and non-verbal models of research and the need to cultivate not only artist-researchers but also a sensitive audience of researchers in academia who comprehend the unique problems that the artist as researcher raises.

2. Unpacking Artistic research

Some provocative positions that I have considered as I delved into personal practice as artistic research. I raise the critical question: What does Artistic Research look

like?

And seek to understand what frightens/ bothers us or makes us feel that artistic research is not substantially rigorous. Through observation of specific moments of artistic practice, I draw out tacit experiences and processes to articulate what artistic research can look like and why it is different from other forms of research making it appear difficult to comprehend or even frivolous to some.

1. **Artistic research looks like an encounter with intuition. Thinking often happens in metaphor.**



Fig 2: Inner sky, Watercolours, 2017
Can the inner sky where the deer trespasses in alertness, merge, interweave, shape-shift into the outer sky?

Observation 1 - I dream of deer, I dance seeking the gentle alertness of the deer's movements. I paint and let the colours and form come to me. I write without thinking and a cryptic verse emerges on the paper. Six such pieces emerge through the day. When I am done, I suddenly know in a deep felt sense that an inner door of perception

has opened. Research opens up to experiences of *porosity* and I suddenly know how to look anew.

2. Artistic research looks like quest for resonance with the tacit-hidden; a pursuit of feeling & being; conversations with the formless



Fig 3: Drawn into lake-skies: Heron in flight, Acrylic and ink on canvas, 2017.

In drawing, I let the rasa, the essence of a feeling emerge in its own right. I must stay with the tacit-hidden-invisible for a very long time, sometimes years, to hear what it has to say. I don't know if it is a feeling, a state of being, a momentary transition in consciousness. But each minute I spend drawing is an act of researching this non-verbal - emotive – experiential force until it reveals itself. Finding words to articulate

is a longer, gentler process then, for resonance and inner movement happen before description.

3. Artistic Research looks like embodied experience

The mind-body duality, the subjective –objective paradigm cease to exist. Research thrills in embodiment as practice. A moment of permeation with the stillness of the pochard haunts me for months while I try to find form to visualize my inner experience

The common pochard sleeps on a still lake and I feel rested.

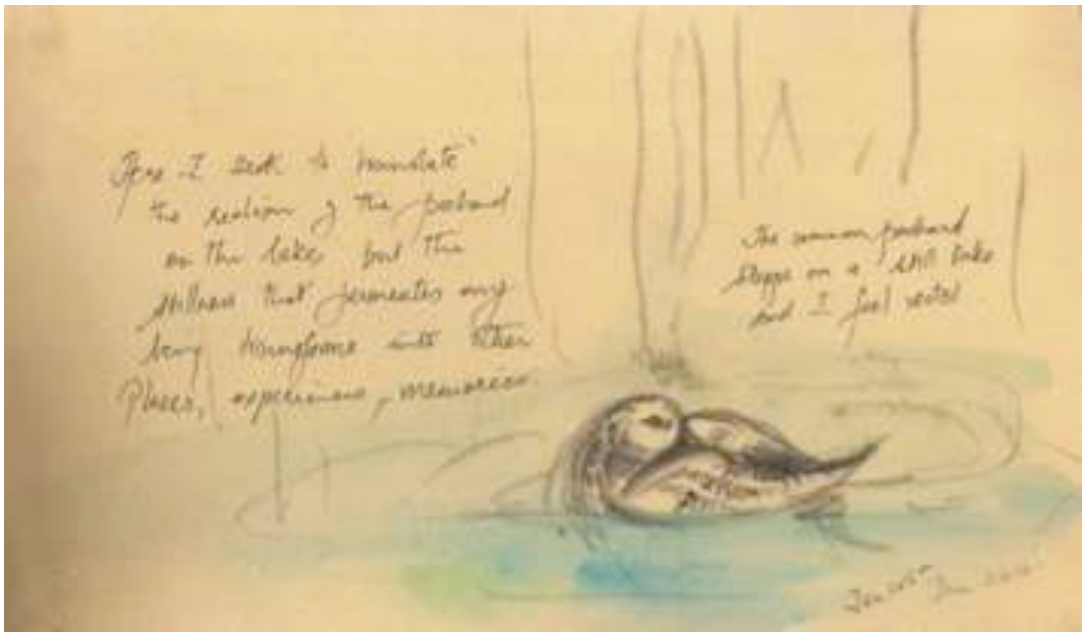


Fig 4: Common pochard at Sukhna Lake- Sketch, Mixed media on handmade paper, 2015-16
Notes: Here I seek to translate the realism of the pochard on the lake, but the stillness that permeates my being transforms into other places, experiences, memories.



Fig 5: A frame from the painting Nekilci : Moments of transformation', acrylic and ink on canvas, 2016, (4ft by 6ft)



Fig 6. Pochard at Sukhna Lake, Watercolours on watercolour paper, 2020.

4. Artistic Research and its outcomes look like works of art

Form of the artistic output is an equally important aspect of artistic research. Works of

art offer clues to processes, inquiries, contemplations and several other aspects of research. Learning to observe and look closely at works of art is an essential facet of artistic research.

Terrain *(Nov 27, 2015)*

Slowness
deepens
subtlety…

The body
embeds itself
layer by layer
into landscape.

Heightened awareness
is mischievous play
altering the terrain
of the self.



Fig 7: Memories of Bandipur and Nilgiris, Pen and Ink on Watercolour paper, 2014

The validation for an artist lies in embodying answers in works of art. These are non-verbal outcomes of artistic research. The study of form cannot happen by excluding form as a research method.

5. Writing about Artistic Research sounds subjective

Practice as Meditation

In crafting form, the artist crafts consciousness. And in crafting consciousness, the artist merges with all life finding the great rest of ānanda. In all this there is creative ingenuity, a certain madness of being possessed, the paradox of multiplicity of selves, inner laws bound by the outer, imaginative improvisation lending itself to sensorial experience in the gross, the subtle and the transcendental. The body is tool, kṣetra, hall of sentience, sensory celebration, porous paradox and the very heart of the ritual of transformation. Embodying these inner transmutations that have taken place in the great ritual between the inner and the outer, the artist invites the sahṛdaya to share and bathe in these experiences. Between the two, they carry yet another interior paradoxical truth of porosity as each carves the other in reflexivity. Rainforests and oceans, rock, mountain and tree, snake, eagle and boar, bee and moth, and the great outer sky intensifies into the inner, even as the inner evening in its deep cerulean blue hues intensifies into the mysterious night of the owl in the richness of endless shimmering black. Come play with colour and form, with line, space and time, and let the porous seep in into that forgotten being! Come stand my friend at the dvāram[7] and let the inner and the outer tease each other.

[7] Doorway, liminal space



Fig 7: Kabir Ulat Bansi Series 1- Being Beyond Boundaries. Pen and Ink on Watercolour Paper, 2010 - 12

Our research stems from our work. What appears subjective, biased, opinionated is also perceptive, inter-subjective, sensed through tacit dimensions of experientiality, driven by cultural lineage and memory that is inherited and intuitive.

6. Artistic Research looks like an enquiry into self

In Tagore's poem, he unravels a moment of personal joy and mystic pleasure, making this inner personal experience of the self, the very subject of his work.

"I shall meet silence with silence under
this sky.
I shall become one with night,
clasping the earth to my breast.
Make my life glad with nothing.
The rains sweep the sky from end to end.
In the wild wet wind jasmines revel in their own perfume.
The cloud-hidden stars thrill in secret.
Let me fill my heart to the full with
nothing but my own depth of joy."
- Rabindranath Tagore
(Mehta and Tagore 1990)



Fig 8: Śālabhañjikā- Tree nymph, Sketch from a journal, 2008

Is it selfish, narcissistic obsession or contemplative, meditative search for self? I wander for years in search of elusive states of consciousness. I do have a guiding framework that comes from Indian philosophy and aesthetics. I have an inkling of those states because I have read them in poetry, seen them in paintings, heard them in music, felt them in dance, touched them in sculptures, breathed them in in my encounters in the natural world. I have gone back to reading them in theoretical

treatises. But long before I inquired intellectually, I absorbed and internalized these states of consciousness through the works of other artists. I wasn't practicing to get a perfect line. I was practicing to find the quality of being in which I would emerge that perfect line in harmony with the elusive states of consciousness that I had internalized.

I quest for new selves, as I discard, transform, modify, challenge, or extend my old ones.

7. Artistic Research looks like practice of being – physical, mental, emotional, experiential, embodied, spiritual & 'intellectual'



Fig 9: Inbreath- Outbreath, watercolours and photocolours on water colour paper, 2010

The Tamil word *uḷḷam* to me is the '*Porous Self*' I am inquiring into. I listen to *Mānasa Sancararē*[8] in order to research into being. I draw the painting of two birds, one breathing in the presence of the other.

Academia is often limited in its notions of what research should look like, because it is limited in its notions of what 'intellectual' looks like; because it prizes knowledge production in a certain form over other forms. These are long held biases that academic institutions across the world are waking up to and pushing the boundaries to rethink what 'new knowledge' could look like. Wisdom traditions, 'Indian' philosophy and aesthetic schools of thought however hold value for a nature of self and beingness in which the 'intellectual' is situated. Cultivating being is a practice to create resonance with all life, with the source of life. When does new knowledge occur in traditional Indian notions?

The word *uḷḷam* in Tamil, captures this state of being, which is one of alignment with care. Culturally, it is interchangeably and contextually used to indicate heart, mind, thought, consciousness, soul in no particular order. However, when the word is used to indicate any form of action – learning, experiencing, mystic experience, all these concepts are in perfect alignment to allow for deep experiences. Not unlike the category of '*ātman*' or '*manas*', which it is parallel to, *uḷḷam* is used in the Tamil conscious as a mundane everyday word that is charged with its capacity for a great depth of experience – emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical. In other words, it allows for a simultaneous depth across these four realms of experience and does not allow for fragmentation in the experiencer or the experienced. My inquiry into

[8] Mānasa Sancararē is a Carnatic song composed by Sadashiva Brahmendrar in the 18th century

porosity emerges at the heart of this unifying potential of *uḷḷam*, a material sheath that can contain Emotion, Spirit, Intellect and Body without divisiveness. (Tamil etymological dictionary, 139,

Section 1, part 3). When the *uḷḷam* is in its element, vibrating with resonance across all sheaths, it invites the unknown, the other, which is nothing but its own true reflection.

3. Frameworks of Research, Practice as Research and Analysis

So what do I actually do as research? What do the methods look like? Starting out the with the research question: **How does experiencing oneself as a *porous* being impact one's ecological consciousness, artistic inquiry and creative practice? How does artistic inquiry impact *porosity* and consciousness in turn?**

7.1. Methodology

In keeping with the nature of inquiry, the research approach looks at non-conclusive, possibilities of states of being, making and approaches to creating form. This approach to research is a crucial difference as it allows for unfolding, unraveling and transitioning of the research question by positioning it in a relative in a temporality and spatiality. The end result is a non-sequential/non- linear, continuous, rhythmic and recursive way of experiencing the question. Therefore a new sensibility of artistic research that invites the unknown, the tacit-invisible is the source of creativity.

Artistic practice is made visible through documentation, journaling and annotation of

- Inquiry into material, form and creative process
- Reflections based on twenty five years of practice: An integrated reflective

journaling based on practice and drawing from varied disciplines and sources

7.2. Practice

Guided by metaphorical questions, I attempt to bridge the gap between everyday life and the metaphysical. Asking myself -When will my bird fly? Is the inner fused into the outer or is it the other way? Research is guided by practice. I go in search of methods of practice because my quest for drawing a 'lines of life' drives me to. Out of this dialog with life emerges questions and methods of practice.

7.2.1. Questions of Practice

Philosophical inquiries into form, materiality, and aesthetic experience

- How does one play with the slipping of space and time from one being to another in visual or textual form? Does it need to be a layered and complex form that is nuanced to interpret and enjoy or can it be a simple form that is instantly evocative to the discerned?
- Can language be physical-gestural, oral, visual, textual, tacit-subtle? Can dual or multiple languages be used to construct evocative landscapes?
- Can the final modes of interaction with audience too take many forms from seeing/ viewing, reading/ listening to interactive workshops, interactive theatre play and performance?

7.2.2. Methods of Practice

My practice is to make visible the linkages between the exterior and the interior, the nature of *porosity* that allows for a fluid exchange between the two, that allows the

transmutation of matter and energy in subtle consciousness. My work is about rooting the creative back into the landscape and gently drawing the landscape into the inner - moral, emotional, metaphysical and physical layers as a playful, sensuous exchange and interchange.

As a practitioner my research will focus on studying *porosity* as implementation/ action/ experience. Tracing the cognitive episodes that occur when an experience of *porosity* happens is the first step to establishing a direction for practice and the study of practice.

- Reality alters when principle of consciousness (*porosity*) is deliberately changed
- Ambiguity and paradox is introduced in the frame of experience
- Intellectual and experiential nodes go through contradictions, confusions, new experiences, allowing different perceptions to emerge
- Ambiguity and uncertainty lead to intuition and engagement
- Intuition, further research – both primary and secondary allows for deepening of practice and possible directions.
- Frameworks of practice begin to emerge through analysis of practice, observing patterns in practice
- Contemporizing traditional frameworks to inquire into generalizing principles

i. Setting up Self as/ for Experiment

General practice

- Walking and seeing with purpose

- The field artist whose perceptions document altered states of reality in altered states of self.
- Conscious documentation of states of self and nodes of experience.
- Showcasing how the artists tools are tools of
    - Observation, Perception, Interrogation, Assessment.

ii. Forms of Practice

The practice may include art making through text and image; Reading and researching; Walks/ Observations; Gardening; Exploring experiences of *porosity* with creatures, landscapes, forces of nature and 'self' through movement practices, Conversations with communities, Creating interactive spaces of exchange and aesthetic sharing

iii. Principles of Practice and Engagement

a. Artistic reflection
b. Ritual practice
c. Philosophical inquiry
d. Metaphysical embodiment
e. Physical transience
f. Mythological storytelling
g. Aesthetic play

iv. Experiential Principles

- Melting, Dissolving, Amalgamation, Coalescing, Alchemy, Cracking, Disintegrating, Surrender, Balance, Embody, Transform, Transcend,

Transmute, Permeate, Transfer, Sublimate, Play, Reflection, Contemplation, Simultaneity, Becoming, Being and Non-Being.

v. Aesthetic Devices

Continuous Narration, Recursion, Seamlessness, Shape shifting temporal and spatial play, Fluidity, Permeability, Malleability, Transitions and Transience, Repetition, Interweaving, Transparency, Simultaneity, Rhythm, Myth and Symbolism, Simultaneity

vi. Artistic Directions

Artistic directions can be varied and exploratory in my attempt to make sense of *porosity*. My current practices range over a wide gamut of possibilities allowing different aspects to revealed or hidden depending on the context. Some directions include: Aesthetic, Romantic, Scientific, Interpretative, Illustrative, Abstract, Symbolic, Metaphysical

vii. Areas of Artistic Inquiry

Artistic Processes (Observing, Questioning, Internalizing, Doing, Reflecting); Form and Materiality; Language and Poetics (Visual/ textual/oral); Subjectivity (Intuition, vision, utterance; Imagination, Ways of seeing/ concepts of reality, Artistic processes); Audience; Aesthetics; Philosophy & Politics of ecology.

7.2.3. Documentation of Practice

i. Proposed Methods of Documentation of Creative Processes

My practice emerges through seven key principles/ codes of practice that are interconnected in a non-linear fashion in my creative process: Artistic reflection,

ritual practice, philosophical inquiry, metaphysical embodiment, physical transience, mythological storytelling and aesthetic play. The seven methods are further expanded in chapter 10.

Through movement, text and image, I build everyday practices that become my grounds for artistic inquiry and research. Research itself moves into the realms of subjective, inter-subjective, intuitive and imaginative as well as those of seeing and perception. In keeping with the nature of inquiry, the research approach looks at non-conclusive, uncertain possibilities of states of being, making and approaches to creating form. This sensibility of artistic research allows for inviting the unknown, the tacit-invisible. The contribution of this research to the field of art and ecological consciousness lies as much in methodology as in content.

ii. **Proposed Methods of Study for Practice:** Journaling, Photography and Videography, Annotating work and Reflective writing.

iii. **Contemplative, Reflexive Self Study and Autobiographical Methods**

Self-inquiry and reflection as I perceive them evolves their premise from Indian theological, mystical traditions. *ātma-vicāraṇā* and *Vimarśa* are two words that I allude to when I use Self-Inquiry and Reflection. Reflection as used in the thesis, deliberates upon the usage in the mystical-metaphysical traditions of self, as used in the Sanskrit word *vicāra*.

In the *Advaita Vedānta* tradition, self-inquiry, is a constant observation and attention to inner awareness. In Ramana Maharishi's (2005) teachings, this contant observation

of awareness, is the most direct way to dissolve the I-consciousness to discover the true self**.**

Vimarśa as understood in *Kāśmīr Śaivism* is the ability of consciousness *cit,* to reflect on itself, where consciousness is the immeasurable self-illumination light *prakāśa* that is both the cause of the world and the ability to comprehend it.

These are traditional methods of contemplation and to study one's own self. In the thesis, I make these reflections and inquiries visible in the style of writing, the circular logic and the way I integrate creative work with the research.

7.2.4 Analysis of Practice

i. Textual and Visual Analysis

Textual and visual analysis of work by other artists support in bringing out cultural nuances and intuitive imagination in my work. I adapt the tools of analysis to study my own work as well in the process.

Reflecting, critiquing and positioning creative work, artistic vision and aesthetics in relation to traditional Indian frameworks and contemporary frameworks of Eco-art, Deep Ecology and Ecophilosophy.

- Study of traditional Hindu philosophy in relation to art and how they translate core principles of nature and its connections with human life through art and what kinds of creative methods they chose to use across different art forms
- Informed understanding of self, ecological consciousness and creativity from multiple disciplines
- Study of select art practices, art forms and artists
- Analysis of creative work of self and other in the emerged frameworks

ii. Analysis of Creative Process

The creative process is as critical to be studied as a work of art itself. Analysing internal and external inputs, inspirations, experiences through journaling, looking at narratives of what guides creative processes in other artists provides a guiding framework for analyzing creative processes involved in the experience of *the porous self.*

iii. Formal Analysis of elements and principles of art and text in relation to the worldview as established through the thesis

- Movement, Text and Image are the three primary forms that I choose for my exploration.

iv. Conceptual/ Philosophical/ Iconographical analysis

Rooted in Indian philosophical and aesthetic traditions, my practice emerges at the juncture of iconographic analysis and using Kapila Vatsyayan's frameworks, I study traditional Indian art forms, creative processes, aesthetics and aesthetic experiences. I then look at tracing some of these in my own practice when it is intuitive, and apply it in my practice when it is deliberate. I study around twenty-five years of my personal lived experience and practices in the form a curated journal through Indian categories that emerge through this analysis.

8. Dilemmas and Discussions on Artistic Research

Philosophy of art and consciousness are integral to an artist's creativity and her ability to evolve aesthetic principles. However this process is not linear and hierarchical.

Rather, often aesthetic principles translate into art and consciousness as well. This recursive loop of art, consciousness and aesthetics forms the crux of the artist's meditations on form and therefore artistic research. For the artist, it is the creative process, the vision and the embodiment of the vision that is performance and research rather than a final work of art, be it visual or a singular performance on stage.

The central core of my work lies in the crafting of consciousness itself and the artistic practices are here to support this process and sometimes complement it. There are points where the art and the nature of consciousness dissolve into each other and become impossible to differentiate.

There is a need to move away from asking for reductionist perspectives of validity to inquiring into holistic perspectives. We need to ask how we can embrace artistic research as a rigorous paradigm that offers new meaning and knowledge creation.

Artistic research in India is in the nascent stages and needs to catch up with international debates and discussions. Though some practice based doctoral work is emerging in the country, there is a need to deepen the dialogues.

Tools of assessment and peer conversation, more active participation across institutions, training and development and increase in the numbers of guides with a practice based doctoral degree (Ph.D) in artistic research is the essential way forward.

There is a need to expand transdisciplinary cross-cultural frameworks to understand and bring to light the incommensurate paradigms in which different knowledge systems rest, thereby need for critiquing the dominant narratives for cognitive justice.

Objectivity, reliability, and validity considered as critical to qualifying rigor in research emerge from reductionist versus holistic paradigms. There needs to be acknowledgement that these are incommensurate with nature of new knowledge that can emerge from transdisciplinary artistic research.

There is a need

- To expand definitions of new knowledge
- For cognitive justice in the definitions of new knowledge/ research paradigms
- To move away from reductionist perspectives of validity to inquiring into holistic perspectives of validity
- For Internal and external validity
- For rigor in artistic research and within the transdisciplinary cultural paradigms to be reviewed from the cultural categories as well
- To move away from asking for reductionist perspectives of validity to inquiring into holistic perspectives. We need to ask how we can embrace artistic research as a rigorous paradigm that offers new meaning and knowledge creation.
- To embrace artistic research as a rigorous paradigm that offers new meaning and knowledge creation.

Through the thesis, I encounter, make visible and discuss many of these challenges as I analyse, document, reflect on or develop my frameworks.

Chapter 4

Designing a Transdisciplinary Framework and Theory of *Porosity*

Koganemushi

I hurled it against the night

How deep the darkness

- Kyoshi

- Translated by Nagayama Aya and James W. Henry

(Hyakku, Kyoshi and Teiko Inabata. 2009. *100 works of Kyoshi: Kyoshi Hyakku*. Victoria, BC: Trafford.)

Sections

1. Evolving a Framework of Transdisciplinarity for *Porosity*: Challenges and Possibilities
2. Environment Related Fields: Environmental Ethics and Philosophy as Essential Frames
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7. Positioning *Porosity*

    7.1. Self-reflexivity as Action of a *Porous* Consciousness

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    7.4. Reflecting on 'Value' in *Porosity*

    7.5. Emergences in Paradox

    7.6. Aesthetics, Creativity and *Porosity*

    7.7. Direct Insight in *Porosity*

    7.8. *Porosity* as Symbol and Nuance

8. Summary of Transdisciplinary Framework of *Porosity*

Chapter 4: Designing a Transdisciplinary Framework and Theory of Porosity builds the groundwork and framework towards transdisciplinary theorization of *porosity.*

When drawing connections across epistemologies and cross-cultural frameworks that are incommensurate, two key aspects are to be kept in mind:

1. How does one define a transdisciplinary conceptual/ philosophical framework?

2. In what ways does one evolve tools and methods of practice?

The challenges are first laid out at the different levels and across different categories.in which one must find a structure for transdisciplinarity.

Then a transdisciplinary framework of *porosity* is evolved across several categories leading to a transdisciplinary theory of *porosity*.

1. Evolving a Framework of Transdisciplinarity for *Porosity:* Challenges and Possibilities

When drawing connections across epistemologies and cross-cultural frameworks that are incommensurate, two key aspects are to be kept in mind

1. How does one define a transdisciplinary conceptual/ philosophical framework?

2. In what ways does one evolve tools and methods of practice?

The challenges are first laid out at the different levels in which one must find a structure for transdisciplinarity.

Environment related fields as we understand them today have diverse vocabulary, philosophy, conceptual, ontological and epistemological frameworks and there are also diverse traditional lived practices and the frameworks that these practices reside

in. Our lifestyles and everyday actions also are in a different economic, social and ethical paradigm from the frameworks of a past era. Even as cultures have adapted and evolved their own frameworks to suit modern times, it is not always possible to find a completely coherent new framework that bridges past and present, tradition and contemporaneity, belief and practice, different notions of being and epistemologies.

- How current practices and disciplines can be related to and draw from traditional practices and philosophies must be carefully studied to find ideas that can be adapted and find innovative approaches on how they can be adapted.
- The second aspect is related to politics of conservation and other environmental movements of the present and how these politics differ in different countries. The politics are rooted in different cultural practices, socio-economic conditions as well as the environment and biogeography of each region.
- The third aspect is to look at the dilemmas and possibilities of adaptation and evolution of older/ traditional frameworks into current disciplinary languages/ action and application.

These are huge challenges that need resolutions in varied dimensions across diverse fields of education, arts, sciences, humanities as well as in action, policy and practice. The attempt to find a framework in this thesis focuses only on *porosity* and artistic practice and the transdisciplinary framework as evolved here is for this purpose. Within these limits, the transdisciplinary framework supports developing the following aspects towards a framework of practice, that is the methodological

contribution of the thesis. The following six aspects are discussed in chapter 10. In this chapter, emerging the framework that will enable their development is the focus.

i. Evolving and framing artistic inquiries
ii. Developing principles of engagement
iii. Developing principles of practice
iv. Developing principles of experience
v. Developing principles and methods of research for practice
vi. Developing different tools for and methods of artistic practice that include aesthetic devices, form and principles of form, and artistic directions.

Artistic practice is also limited here to painting, poetry, creative poetic prose, and choreographic ideas. There are further stylistic limits that have also been kept in consideration to limit the nature of the practice as part of this inquiry.

Transdisciplinarity is evolved in line with the gaps that the thesis seeks to address, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

- **Perception and Worldmaking: Using Processes of Reflection and Contemplation**

  This is done through developing concepts and categories of consciousness, ecological consciousness, critiquing the social and political implicates of these concepts and how they impact our ability to form a relationship with the natural world.

- **The Limits of Form: Self and Body: Using Processes of Personal Transformation**

  While this is dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter, here embodied categories of consciousness and the unfolding of ecological consciousness as a philosophy of transformation that delves into our relationship with the natural world are drawn out.

- **Language and Expression: Through Re-learning and Re-imagining Articulation**

  The entire chapter focuses on inquiring into what a new epistemology and ontology could be towards developing a transdisciplinary framework of ecological consciousness. In this process, rich vocabulary and conceptual cateogories of consciousness, ecological consciousness, ethics and values, aesthetic and creative categories are discussed. This opens the way for generative possibilities of creative expression through a whole range of culturally rich as well as transdisciplinary conceptual categories and vocabulary.

- **Aesthetics, Creativity and Making: Through Processes of Creative Expression/ Action through Artistic Practice**

  This section contains the backbone of the key ideas and principles and crucial contributions of the thesis, which will be expanded in greater detail in the next 3 chapters. In this chapter, concepts of aesthetics, aesthetic experiences, aesthetic encounters and brief discussions on creativity and ethics are offered to provide a broad transdiciplinary framework for aesthetics and creative practice.

To provide a structure for ease of reading, this chapter uses transdisciplinarity framework to examine the categories listed below and create a theory of *porosity*.

i. Environment Related Fields: Environmental Eethics and Philosophy as Essential Frames
ii. Consciousness: Evolving Categories, Concepts and Vocabulary
iii. Ecological Consciousness, Self and Notion of Intrinsic
iv. 'Value' as a Dilemma
v. Unraveling Aesthetic Frame of Perception/ Sesthetic Consciousness as Essential to Action
vi. Positioning *Porosity*

1. Environment Related Fields: Environmental Ethics and Philosophy as Essential Frames

2.1. Ecology as a prefix – Should We have a Disclaimer?

"Ecology has become a multiple metaphor" says Mohan K. Wali in his paper, *eco vocabulary: A glossary of Our Times (1995).* Wali asks for a deep re-consideration of spinning words and proliferating different fields with eco-vocabulary to ensure that we stay focused on understanding and responding to the issues rather than being distracted by language and coinage. In critiquing the vast applications and usage of ecology as a metaphor, he points out the dangers of diluting our understanding of on-ground issues in language (semantics) or academic and intellectual exercises on coinage of new terms with eco as prefix.

> The reason for the burgeoning of these terms lies, in my opinion, in the surrogate use of "ecology" and "ecological" for "environment" and

> "environmental." The focus is clearly on the state of our environment – local, regional and global –and on the failures of society to protect natural resources. But with equal rapidity, terms have been coined to convey the impression that environmental problems can be solved just as easily as they have arisen. Thus, a plethora of terms has been introduced into the layman's lexicon to reassure the general populace that it is possible to "have a technological fix for every technological fault." Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is only "spin control." (Wali 1995)

While in the two decades since Wali's paper, many terms like ecological consciousness, eco-philosophy, eco-theology, eco-poetry, eco-art, eco-criticism, eco-literacy, environmental ethics, philosophy and aesthetics are beginning to emerge as fields/ disciplines in their own right, Wali's warning and critique continues to hold true. While there is a call for transdiciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks, academic boundaries are fraught with competition, mistrust, oppositions and disagreements that are then articulated through creation of newer jargons, definitions, descriptions, intellectual discourses and conceptual differences rather than seeking out for context sensitive diversity and meaning-making as well as action. (Wali 1995; Skolimowski 1990)

Today, the positioning of eco/ environmental suffixes to a range of our work allows for human beings to be in one group or the other in the contemporary world, almost as a choice for those who claim to be interested in 'nature', are 'tree huggers' and those who are not, those who see it as a growing advantage as ecological limits are imposed on industries, and those who see it as against development. While, the eco-vocabulary

has lent itself to evolving important fields of inquiry, inadvertently, even as more and more people join, adapt and become part of this vocabulary and its allied fields, the vocabulary also separates, affords choice to be in one camp or the other. Additionally, given the varied interpretations within its diverse movements and philosophies, confuses and confounds the layman encountering the ideas. They leave one longing for an older world or an 'ecotopian' future where nature and culture are interwoven, that no distinct ecovocabulary is required to engage with our lives and all that entwines with it.

For those trying to figure out how to act in a time of ecological crisis, there is a constant seeking for something that will work in light of their personal lives and self-identity- a belief, a value system, a practice, a position, a direction, a set of actions and practices.

The discussions within this thesis are adding to the fields of eco/ environment - prefixed fields. However, as eco-prefixes become a convenient market force, it is important for each of us to look at these words with discernment and deeper understanding.

2.2. Tracing Key Ideas of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy

The possibilities of evolving a transdisciplinary framework cannot emerge from completely dissonant disciplines, concepts and cultural paradigms. Hence by rooting the work in environmental ethics and philosophy as central to developing a framework, a set of guiding principles for engaging with transdisciplinarity are evolved. The directions that emerge from this point onwards looks to understand

environmental philosophy and ethics as a field and trace their evolution in the west and in India broadly. Consciousness as understood in Indian categories is explored to develop a blended framework that allows for *porosity* and also depends on *porosity* for its evolution. The notion of ecological consciousness as an intrinsic force that arises from these new fields and draw the possibilities from western categories of ecological consciousness as well as Indian traditional categories to emerge a working framework for *Porosity*. Following these, aesthetic perceptivity as critical to deepening the capacity for a relational ecological consciousness is deliberated upon.

Lynn White, Jr.'s paper (1967) "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" published in *Science*, emerged the need for environmental ethics and philosophy as a field and stimulated the interest of academic philosophers (Calicott and Frodeman 2009, XXII). White's paper pointed out the roots of ecological crisis as emerging from the Judeo-Christian worldview that had dominated the west. This worldview as he points out, defined a division between man and nature and a belief that God had created man in his own image to dominate over nature. He was emphatic in his position that, science and technology could not solve the problems of the ecological crisis as they stemmed from the same world view and what was called for was an alternative to this western worldview. He wrote, "we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (*1*). He also pointed out that while his broad survey provided the overarching issues that arose from the Christian worldview, that it is still limited and mentions St. Francis of Assissi as the most important spiritual revolutionary in Christianism to be considered seriously. St. Francis' views supported in evolving an ecological dimension to Christianity. Though the Fransican worldview

failed in its attempts to provide an alternative to the Christian worldview, it did raise a different imagination and direction to some. White also traces that St Francis' ideas evolved possibly from those of the Cathar Heretics who originally got it from India.

White's message is simple yet profound, that our environmental crisis is a product of the Western worldview and fundamentally philosophical and ideological (Nelson, 2016). And he emphasised that we needed to clarify what our relationship is to the world and things around us to address the ideological foundations. "Until we "think about fundamentals," "clarify our thinking," "rethink our axioms," White said, we will not adequately address our environmental crisis (Nelson, 2016)." This led to the first generation of environmental philosophers studying alternative metaphysics within the Western traditions as well as move to Asian traditions to research into alternative worldviews. (Calicott and McRae 2015)

Environmental philosophy provides a broad framework to connect ethics and the natural environment. Comparative Environmental Philosophy, which emerged around 1984 has attempted to expand our collective human understanding on different epistemologies and ontologies on environmental consciousness across the world. Calicott and McRae trace the evolution of environmental philosophy and comparative environmental philosophy in their book *Environmental philosophy in Asian Traditions of Thought* and point out that while values drawn from Asian worldviews may or may not impact the Western worldview, but maybe relevant for Asian worldviews to evolve their own environmental ethics in the current context.

While philosophy as a discipline for most of its history was focused on thinking about nature, in their preface to the encyclopedia of environmental ethics and philosophy, Calicott and Frodeman (2009) sum up the challenges of twentieth century philosophy and their relationship to thinking about nature in their introduction with a perceptive eye (XXI-XXV). They clarify that logical positivist philosophy later called "analytical philosophy" more Anglo-American in its roots, celebrated Science, its methods, positivism in scientific knowledge and the notion that all events are "causally determined", while continental philosophers, drawing on thinkers from the European continent, critiqued the scientific model and posited the alternative of phenomenology, focusing on consciousness and direct experience (Calicott and Frodeman 2009). However, as twentieth century philosophy developed, Calicott and Frodeman (2009, XXII) point out that "the discipline—in both its analytic and continental manifestations—became ever more arcane and self-absorbed," as well as 'estranged'. They also trace the history of how older categories of philosophy lost their value in twentieth century

> "In the positivist spirit of late twentieth century, metaphysics in the grand manner, aesthetics, and theology had become antiquated categories, expressions of dogmatism and subjectivity that had lost their raison d'etre"(XX).

They extend their analysis and historical tracing to show how philosophy as a field had begun to specialize and became small closed communities of experts instead of looking at broader questions, thereby evolving a language that was 'impenetrable to outsiders'. They draw a picture of the time in which environmental ethics came on to the scene when philosophers did not acknowledge its value or its importance within

the philosophical domain. However they extend their vision and show that

> "But the field (Environmental Philosophy) would not go away, in part because it was engaged with something relevant and useful outside the walls of academia. Increasingly, natural-resource managers, ecologists, conservation biologists and professionals in both the theoretical and applied environmental sciences took an interest in the values aspects of environmental problems. There was, moreover, a growing demand by students for environmental ethics courses on college campuses. And the few but gradually growing number of professional philosophers who were attracted to the field realized that environmental ethics and philosophy returned philosophy to its traditional role of synthesizing as well as analyzing—philosophy conceived not as handmaiden and emulator of the sciences, not as quixotic challenger of the sciences, but, once more, as queen of the sciences." (Calicott and Frodeman 2009, XXII).

While they are conservative about the possible influence that environmental philosophy would hold in the present and the future, they point out one of the essential features that it would bring in articulating,

> "Environmental ethics and philosophy could thus liberate philosophy from the narrowness and overspecialization into which it had fallen during the twentieth century. The environmental crisis gives philosophers an opportunity once more to ask and to try to answer the big, perennial questions that, until the twentieth century, philosophers of all the past ages and in all traditions tackled." (Calicott and Frodeman 2009, Introduction)

The challenges of environmental issues were expressed through science and ethics in the 1960's, however very soon the need to expand environmental philosophy in varied categories and dimensions of ethics, "metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, and other domains of philosophical inquiry" has arisen. (Calicott and Frodeman 2009, Introduction)

In India, we are dealing with the impact of colonialism and decolonization as two critical frameworks to engage with when raising questions around the ecological crisis and developing indigenous frameworks of environmental philosophy and ethics that are context sensitive. Given the great plurality of the subcontinent, the possibilities and challenges of localized frameworks require nuanced field work with diverse communities as well engagement with diverse philosophies and conceptual categories. As secular country that has diverse cultural and religious practices and philosophies, local beliefs, traditions and nature-based practices are equally different. Urban, rural and tribal cultures are also very different, as also the socio-political and economic disparities that impact the rights of each community. Law and policies that dictate our relationships with the environment are impacted by colonial times as well as modern conservation ideas from the west. Indigenous philosophies struggle against the onslaught of a development based framework that favors consumerism as everyday practices, ritual practices and traditional methods of managing forests, agriculture are overturned, or heavily impacted by development. Economic disparity, survival and livelihood options for the poor further impact how environmental ethics and philosophy may have to be evolved in reference to everyday reality. To process such complexity against the given odds requires imagination, passion, will and a creative spirit that can work with openness and plurality. Developing the capacity in

individuals for owning and operating within such a consciousness is best done through the contemplative modes of philosophy and ethics as the essential paradigms.

While it does not matter where we draw our metaphysics or worldviews from, it is essential that we have a relational view of self with nature as emphasized by most environmental philosophers and historians and those concerned with environmental ethics. (Calicott and McRae 2015; Lynn White Jr 1967; Naess, Drengson and Devall 2016; Skolimowski 1990; Uhl 2013; Weston 2009).

Using the insights that environmental ethics and philosophy can offer, and the challenges and possibilities of ecological and environmental related fields, the following guidelines enable the development of a transdisciplinary framework across conceptual and lived experiences of consciousness, intrinsic ecological consciousness, aesthetics, and towards evolving creative practice:

i. Setting out specific questions as required to develop a transdisciplinary/ conceptual framework of *porosity*
ii. Analysis of terms across fields
iii. Mapping out common conceptual structures/ frameworks
iv. Looking at differences in philosophical, ethical and value based frameworks versus the actual practice on ground
v. Outlining the challenges of time/ time-period, space/geography as a critical factor in how we engage with these frameworks.
vi. Mapping out Artistic practices in relation to the category (when relevant)

3. Consciousness: Evolving Categories, Concepts and Vocabulary

Revisiting the questions asked in chapter 1(repeated), this chapter attempts to develop conceptual categories, vocabularies and transdisciplinary framework to engage with these questions. All these questions are reflected upon answered throughout the thesis. In this chapter the intention is to build transdiciplinarity across cultural frameworks that span different time periods.

Set 1 – Consciousness based questions

i. What is *porous self* as experience as a state of ecological consciousness and how does one arrive at this state of consciousness?
ii. What are methodological processes for arriving at the state of consciousness?
iii. Provided one places it within an aesthetic ecological conscious state what are the properties and methodologies?
iv. Is *porosity* the shift in consciousness or the principle that leads to the shift in consciousness?

As discussed in Chapter 1, consciousness as interpreted through this thesis is evolved from Indian categories in section 1 and in relation to modern conceptual categories of ecological consciousness. Ecological consciousness as a category in both modern Western and traditional and modern Indian contexts is dealt with in section 2 of this chapter.

1.1. Unfolding Consciousness

Consciousness at its most basic is awareness. However consciousness also exists in sleep and deep sleep states. Christof Koch (2018) says “Consciousness is everything you experience. It is the tune stuck in your head, the sweetness of chocolate mousse,

the throbbing pain of a toothache, the fierce love for your child and the bitter knowledge that eventually all feelings will end." This in some sense is self-consciousness. Consciousness in itself has been debated for centuries and there are no clear definitions that we can resort to. I draw my sources of consciousness from discussions in Hinduism, drawing upon select ideas from *Rigveda*, some *Upaniṣads, Advaita Vedānta, Sāṃkhya and Śaiva Siddhānta, Kāśmīr Śaivism*.

In *Advaita Vedānta*, there is a recognition of *Brahman* as Pure Consciousness, a layer of lived reality and the consciousness of that lies in the transactional, and the illusory individual consciousness that seeks to find its own truth in the Pure Consciousness. In *Śaiva Siddhānta* too, one finds a similar categorization, where *Śiva* is pure consciousness, the transactional layer lies in the play between *Śiva* and *Śakti* that enables the existence of the world, and the individual consciousness that merges and finds its truth in the pure *Śiva* Consciousness. In *Sāṃkhya, Puruṣa* is identified as manifest consiousness and *Prakṛti* as unmanifest consciousness and the the individual consciousness is the first evolute of the interaction between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. In Hindu thought, one is constantly dealing with the notion of the individual consciousness, the social consciousness and the universal consciousness and the interrelationships between each and how they impact the trajectory and choices of individual lives, barring the differences in the definitions of these notions and the diverse possibilities of action and contemplation such differences can lead to. One of the finest metaphors of the questions of consciousness is found in the idea of two birds, one eating the fruits and the other witnessing it without participation.

"Two birds perfectly winged, sysygies companions,

Embrace the same tree.

Of them one eats of the nourishing sweet Pippala fruit[1]*,*

While the other eats not, but over-sees"

- Ṛgveda 20, Hymn 164, Maṇḍala 1

Translation by Vikraman Balaji (2013)

How does one resolve one's understanding of consciousness and find a way to act? This is a complex question when one intersects it with an ethical paradox of being. What is ethical action of consciousness, long debated, eternally confusing and deeply context sensitive, this question remains at the heart of the act of living. In the philosophical paradigm of Indian thought, it is best resolved in the metaphorical yet paradoxical poetry of the two birds emerging in *Ṛgvedic* Poetry and continuing into the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads*, *Bhakti poetry, Vacanās,* later in Kabir's poetry, that blends the *Sufi* and *Bhakti* frameworks and further ongoing commentaries and interpretations by Tagore and Aurobindo in their work.(Sri Aurobindo, 2010)

Kak's translations of the *Śiva Sūtras*, aphorisms of *Śiva* and writings on consciousness see the *Śiva Sūtras* as reiterating Vedic concepts of consciousness and he draws out how the notion of *Śiva* or *Bhairava* as universal consciousness alludes to the metaphor of the two birds in the puzzling possibilities of *Śiva 's* union with the phenomenal world (Kak, 1996). Vikraman Balaji (2013) in his nuanced reading points out the difference in the meanings and beings of the two birds in the poetry of the

[1] Fig tree, Ficus religiosa

Ṛgveda and the ones in the *Upaniṣads*. He sees the experiential nature of the two birds in two different planes in both sets of poetry. In the *Ṛgvedic* verses that he chooses, he sees that the bird that witnesses and the bird that engages with the transactional reality have no conflict between each other. Both are in a state of divine participation. In the *Upaniṣadic* verses, he points out that the bird that is participating is lost in the illusory reality and must find its way back to the eternal witness of Pure Consciousness.

The first one is a singular state of being, in the second there is movement or action from one state of being to another that defines the purpose of life. In the first, the work of the human is to provide 'preparedness' and 'receptivity' which will allow for a state of complete consciousness. In the second, there is a continuous ongoing practice, *sādhanā* or *yoga*, that will enable the 'preparedness' and 'receptivity.' In the first action in all levels of reality are seamless, in the second, the action is to move from one state of reality to another. In the first the ethical questions of being are not framed in the same paradigm as in the second.

Now there are two more layers one needs to consider in Hindu thought before choosing to define consciousness in a certain frame.

- The first lies in the attitude of questioning found in the Hymn of Creation in *Nāsadīya Sūkta*. Here, the *Sūkta* questions the primordial being and its manifestation, clarifying that the gods came much after the act of creation and no one may really know what prompted creation, how it happened or why. Likewise in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, one finds an all-encompassing *Puruṣa* that pervades all life and yet transcends everything including itself, in both space and time.

- The second lies in the question of action and roles of individual as well as collective in this process. Daya Krishna points out that this nature of questioning in the *Puruṣa, Nāsadīya* and *Bhāvavṛtta sūktas* emphasize that what is essential for action is not defining a 'Being' or Godhead, but in 'seeing' an order that has 'actuality' and 'validation' (Krishna, 2011, 252).

He extrapolates these attitudes and actions with

> "*Ṛta* and *satya* provide the cosmic foundation of the universe and may be brought into being by *tapasyā* or disciplined "seeking" (*sādhanā*) and realized through them. The *sūkta 10.191*, the last *sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*, suggests that this is not, and cannot be, something on the part of an individual alone, but is rather the collective enterprise of all humankind and names the god of this *sūkta* "*Somajñāna*" emphasizing the "togetherness" of all Being and spelling it out as "*saṃ gacchadhvaṃ saṃ vadadhvaṃ saṃ vo manāṃsi jānatām devā bhāgaṃ yathā purve saṃ jānānā upāsate*" This *upāsanā* is not the *upāsanā* of the Upaniṣads, which is done in loneliness for the attainment of "aloneness," but a togetherness of mind and heart, as the subsequent verses explicate."(Krishna 2011, 252)

One finds consciousness defined through the order of *ṛta*, emphasized as cosmic harmony, a truth, that finds its actionable resolutions in *dharma,* ethical action. G.C. Tripathi (2004, Foreword, vii) succinctly captures the essence of the concept of *ṛta* in his foreword, by clarifying that it is the essence and foundation of the Indian philosophical tradition and its evolution over time. He points out that it is a dynamic and fundamental principle that is not only the force behind the "Being" of this universe, but it is also the principle the sustains, governs and runs the universe.

> "Derived from the root *ṛ* = 'to go', 'to move", it originally means 'movement' or 'dynamism' necessary to run this universe which in itself is *jagat*, i.e. 'constantly moving' (from the root *gam*)."

He elaborates that *Dharma* is the manifestation of *ṛta* in the transactional world. The triad of *Ṛta, Satya and Dharma* then provide a framework, which leads consciousness into a harmonious sense of being and action. The concept of *saṃskāras* too is bound to the concept of *ṛta* and strives to create correspondences between human actions, behavior and thinking to the cosmic order of *ṛta*. The law of *Karma*, which is central to Indian religious thought is 'subservient to the law of *ṛta,* which takes care of it.' (Tripathi 2004, Foreword, viii)

Questioning, a sense of community, reflexivity and self-awareness, an ability to perceive the underlying order of life, preparedness and receptivity that allow one to see beyond the limits of one's own being, then become essential aspects of how we can perceive consciousness in the broader Hindu framework.

The two birds as in the *Ṛgvedic* rendition then are in a state of being that allows them to engage with the cosmic order, the transactional reality and their own existence in a harmonious whole. While this may not answer any contextual questions in the transactional layer or the dilemmas of the individual self, it provides a working framework for how we can engage with an active yet integrated consciousness. What is particularly relevant and fascinating about this framework for engaging with questions of ecological consciousness is that action in the transactional reality is a pre-given and indispensable, the cosmic order or harmony, essentially an ecological

limit is identified as truth, the notion of ethical-moral action dharma is derived from this truth, forever binding, consciousness, ecological limit and ethical action.

Consciousness in the *Bhakti* traditions, tracing their origins back to Karaikkal Ammaiyar from Tamilnadu in the 5-6th Century CE opens up to a fluid dimension that stems from love and surrender.

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār is considered as the first poetess to have gifted the style of writing *Bhakti* poetry, and particularly on the dancing *Śiva* image, which over time took over the entire subcontinent. She writes about the dancing *Śiva* in Tiruvalaṅkāṭu imagining him in the cremation grounds, her images of the lord at once fiery and gentle, that one is drawn by images otherwise associated with fear to create a wild contented emotion of exaltation and joy in the dance of *Śiva* . The image of *Śiva* as painted here evokes affection for a madman. According to legends, *Śiva* is considered to have invited Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār to witness his dance as *Naṭarāja* along with *Kāḷi* in Tiruvalaṅkāṭu. This story of the poet saint adds many layers and dimensions to how the poetry can be read. *Śiva* in the cremation ground, dancing, balancing life, celebrating it and dancing it into existence is a poignant image of the cycle of life, of nature transforming into art, symbol and iconography. Death is at the heart of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's poetry, or so it seems like, when the symbol of the dancing *Naṭarāja*, throws death in sharp contrast, however one is caught by surprise, for underlying this contrast is sinuous harmony of life in perpetual dance.

Is the corpse really dead?

A ghoul creeps up

pointing with her finger

she shouts, she wails

she throws at it a burning ember-

In the grip of a terrible fright

she taps loudly her hollow stomach

Several other ghouls

Disperse in fear –

there, in the garb of a madman

He dances, our Lord of dance.

(Dehejia 2002, 167)

Norman Cutler (1987) explores the heart-mind-body-consciousness complex in the *Bhakti* tradition. Consciousness in *Bhakti* is a fused whole that emerges in deep love for the divine, where the divine is all existence and experience. In *Bhakti,* there is a complete revolution of social-political-intellectual frames as all rules are discarded in bliss and the emotional landscape of the human. It is the reasons of the heart that lead the *Bhakti* poet-mystic into experiencing the world. Here consciousness is set free for imagination as poets imagine their favourite deities as children, consorts, abstract symbols, lovers, nature, parents and cosmos and they are not bound by rules and rituals.

They reach out into the heart of life and beingness, and allow themselves to be enveloped in the stillness and silence that pervade the world. They conform to nothing, and are rebellious and bold, their only guide in this pathless world, their own love for and surrender to the divine principle.

“Not infrequently the *bhakti* poet addresses his own heart (*neñcu, uḷḷam*), his mind (*maṉam*), or the "breath of life" (*uyir*) that animates his body. In these poems the poet is both speaker and addressee, and so it appears that the deity as well as the audience overhears the poet's words. There is a prototype for this type of poem in the *Caṅkam* anthologies, but the classical poem and its *bhakti* counterpart differ in an important way. In the former it is a dramatized character, not the poet, who addresses his heart. In contrast, the *bhakti* poet speaks to his own heart in his own voice. Often in these poems the poet speaks about his relationship with the deity, and he either upbraids his heart for impeding complete surrender or praises his heart for helping him to achieve union. The split in the poet's identity implied by the rhetorical structure of these poems complements a view of human identity as a composite of body and heart/mind (*uṭal/ uḷḷam*) or of body and life-breath (*uṭal/uyir*), a motif that frequently appears in the poetry of the saints. In this poem by Peyālvar, the poet speaks to his heart about *Viṣṇu*, and he encourages his heart to surrender to the lord.

He became the world, the Eon,
and the ocean,
he became red fire
and the sun's brilliant, far-flung rays,
O my heart, give your whole being to the feet of the lord
who wears a crown of pure dazzling gold. (*Mūṉṟām Tiruvantāti* 44)”
(Cutler 1987, 25)

Consciousness in the *Bhakti* tradition therefore is more open and reflective of each poet-mystic's work. Many states of consciousness are explored by different poets and eventually drift into the common consciousness through widely sung songs that are an intrinsic part of the tradition.

Poems that go back to the fifth-sixth century continue to be sung, practiced and taught to this day in the Tamiḻ traditions particularly. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's songs remain in vogue as much as the songs of poet-saints Appar, Cuntarar, Māṇikkavacakar and others. The poets plead, celebrate, play with, revel in ecstasy, cry in pain, lament in grief, scold in anger, fall in love, and hold their trust in experiences and revelations, intuitions and utterances opening themselves to the endless force of creativity in their work.

These concepts are drawn from what is considered as traditional Hindu categories of consciousness, which in some ways is limiting. However, within the Hindu framework, these concepts evolved over time, continue to be living traditions and are from diverse schools of thought. Broad ranges of vocabulary from different schools of thought are blended together in section 6 to evolve a transdisciplinary *porous* state of consciousness.

2. Ecological Consciousness, Self and Notion of Intrinsic

Revisiting questions from chapter 1 (repeated) this chapter attempts to develop conceptual categories, vocabularies and transdisciplinary framework around the notion of intrinsic ecological consciousness to engage with these questions. All these questions are reflected upon answered throughout the thesis. In this chapter the

intention is to build transdiciplinarity across cultural frameworks that span different time periods.

Set 3 – Axial questions

i. What is the relevance of the *porous* state in social/ personal dilemmas of value and action?
ii. Where and how do consciousness, creativity and ethics meet? And in a state of *porosity*, how do each of these change from other states of being?

In the Western paradigm, we will look at some of the current inquiries into ecological consciousness to position our understanding of an intrinsic ecological consciousness. We will look at the work of Henryk Skolimowski, Arne Naess, Baird Calicott, Christopher Uhl and David Abram and artistic ideas of eco-art, environmental art, landscape art, wildlife and conservation art and nature based art.

In the Indian context we will look at four key triads and their interconnection across each other for the discussion on how intrinsic ecological consciousness is evolved in Indian thought.

Ṛta-Satya-Dharma, Adhidaiva-Adhibhūta-Adhyātma, Sthūla-Sūkṣma-Śarīra-Para, Sṛṣṭi-Sthiti-Saṃhāra. Guṇa-Doṣa is a twin concept that we will consider in relation to the other four triads as well. *Rajas-Tamas-Sattva*. We will broadly look at how *ṛta* is drawn into concepts of literature through the lens of seasons and the concept of *ātman* as a concept of man that has intrinsic ecological consciousness and how these extend in art.

Further, we will also look at contemporary challenges in conservation in the Indian context and how our envisioning of an intrinsic ecological consciousness needs to draw upon the realities of social conditions through the work of Gadgil, Guha and others.

2.1. Ecological Consciousness – Outline of Ideas

Polish philosopher Henryk Skolimowski coined the term ecological consciousness and set it within the eco-philosophy framework that he founded. (Skolimowski 1990; Singh 2014)

Shmeleva articulates a broader framework: "Ecological consciousness is considered as multilayered, dynamic, reflexive element of human consciousness, incorporating multivariate, holistic aspects of interaction of the human being as the H.S. and the Humanity representative with the environment and the Planet (Shmeleva 2009)." In her paper she calls for a psychological approach to the study of ecological consciousness.

> "According to V.F. Petrenko and O.V. Mitina (1997), the multidimensionality of consciousness determines and defines the multidimensionality of paths of development of society, thus leading many authors to distinguish among forms of consciousness, such as: a) religious; b) ethical; c) aesthetic; d) legal; e) political; f) professional; g) ecological." (Shmeleva 2009)

This approach to distinguishing consciousness may support in context-sensitive understanding and also free us from limiting philosophical questions of consciousness

to one realm. It has been increasingly understood that conceptual models of consciousness vary with culture and individuals. The way the world is experienced also changes with the model that one follows. Even as we increasingly go through similarities in educational experiences, and follow common international frameworks of knowledge, deep-rooted cultural frameworks of consciousness continue to co-exist and impact our experiences of the world.

In a multicultural world, it would be meaningful to retain fluid meanings of ecological consciousness, so that any movement that emerges within it allows for multiple cultural interpretations and actions.

However, is it possible perhaps to define a broad framework of ethics towards the environment that are based on universal principles rather than cultural/ religious principles? What are the challenges that rise when ethics begin to inform policy decisions? The play of ethics, metaphysics and our conceptual structures of engaging with the natural world, are complex and intricate woven webs of diverse kinds of individual and community relationships that create the delicate, yet tenacious structure on which the realities, sustenance and subsistence of our lives unfold, as much as our greed and extravagance.

Skolimowski positions the need to articulate the metaphysics of ecophilosophy and deep ecology

> "Ecophilosophy and deep ecology are two parallel efforts to reinterpret the world and to outline a new metaphysics. This metaphysics (or the new conceptual matrix- if one is allergic to the term "metaphysics") must provide a

new cognitive interpretation of the world. It must provide a guideline for human action." (Skolimowski 1986)

2.2. The Challenges and Interpretations of Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness

The idea of 'intrinsic' in ecological consciousness and how the word is interpreted conceptually by different schools of thought are discussed in this section. The challenges of the word and how the thesis unpacks it to derive its own interpretation in using it as a way to frame *porosity* are explored in detail.

2.2.1. Ecophilosophy and Ecological Humanism of Skolimowski

Skolimowski (1990) argues for intrinsic values to be placed within an axiological claim. He argues that 'Values do not reside in objects, but in our consciousness.' In developing his argument further, he articulates the importance of differentiating between morality and analytical scrutiny of moral concepts. He points out that the issue of a 'brilliant logical mind', that is 'insensitive, eaten by skepticism and nihilism' doing an 'analytical scrutiny of basic moral concepts', may result in no 'moral insight'. He clearly points out that difference between analytical and linguistic insights versus moral insights.

> "We have to be aware that an intrinsic value can be recognized as such on two levels: 1) On the level of our intellectual consciousness, by the merely intellectual recognition that some things have intrinsic value. Then we are led to such assertion as: "The universe is of an intrinsic value," "Human life is of intrinsic value" (for what it is and as is); 2) on the level of our attitudes as formulated and expressed by our human values. We then act out these intrinsic values, usually within the framework of some ethical imperative; for instance:

behave in such a way that you treat the universe reverentially, or that you treat human life reverentially."

The first level could be called the cognitive level, or the level of the intellectual consciousness. The second level could be called axiological or the level of value proper." (Skolimowski 1986, 11)

However he clearly positions that axiological values precede intellectual values, and are often intuitive and emerge from "values which we cherish in the depths of our hearts and souls." By placing intrinsic values within the frames of intellectual/cognitive as well as axiological consciousness, he frees the burden of an intrinsic value from being objective or absolute and personal or subjective. These two frames provide 'intrinsic values' with qualities that bring together both heart and mind in partly a linear evolution of intellectual from the axiological that is species-specific, and at other times as it evolves into eco-ethics, an entwining of the intellectual and axiological. (Skolimowski 1986; 1990)

He also emerges the notion of 'intrinsic values' through three key points:

1. **Reverence:** He emphasizes that certain "core of intrinsic values" must be accepted in order to develop Eco-ethics. He suggests that considering the "planet as sacred" and considering "other species as equal to humans" could lead to emergence of "reverence for life in all of its manifestations as an intrinsic value of Eco-Ethics (Skolimowski 1990)."
2. **Axiological:** Intuitive, species-specific, values as lived in our lives (Skolimowski, 1986; 1990). "Values do not reside in objects, but in our

consciousness. For this reason, they cannot be justified by reference to objects, but by reference to human consciousness (Skolimowski 1990)."

3. **Inter-subjective and trans-subjective:** "Intrinsic Values need not be defined as absolute or objective. They are however universal for the species at a given time –given our present constraints and present imperatives of survival and the desire for meaningful life". He therefore argues, that being species-specific, values are not personal and subjective, but inter-subjective and trans-subjective (Skolimowski 1990).

Through the development of this argument, Skolimowski places "Ethics in the domain of axiological consciousness" positioning himself against Baird Callicott and others who define intrinsic value of an object/ being independent of valuing consciousness of the human (Skolimowski 1990).

2.2.2. The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology: Arne Naess and George Sessions

Deep Ecology articulates intrinsic value at two levels in its eight basic principles that are positioned as a common ground.

i. Placing intrinsic value on life in all its forms both human-and non-human.
ii. From this primary value, arises a set of intrinsic values for action that are obligatory for anyone who subscribes to the basic principles of deep ecology. (Sessions and Naess 1986)

However Naess points out that these principles are not necessarily the "central messages" of deep ecology, but messages incompatible with these should not be

"accepted as the expressions of central messages of deep ecology (Naess 1986)." Deep ecology emphasizes plurality, diversity, dialogue and practice as key to its framework.

Naess, considered the father of the deep ecology movement positions self-realisation as the general principle for life's philosophy, requiring a keen inquiry into the self that needs to be realized. His own realizations led him to observe the interrelationships of life.

To him, self-realisation is an every day personal inquiry as each of us is constantly changing. The deep range ecology movement draws out the relationships of three grassroots movements of the twentieth century– peace, social justice and ecological sustainability. From these he emerges practices and actions that "emphasize the importance of diversity, cooperation, and beautiful actions, with the high quality of a joyful life based on nonviolence and low consumption (Næss, Drengson, and Devall, 2016, viii)."

Naess's work is influenced by Spinoza's *Ethics* and Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. He embraced the open-inquiry methods of the Vienna circle and extended it to include his own lived experiences that were informed by his perception of wholeness of other beings and the natural world (Næss, Drengson, and Devall 2016, 7). All of these engagements characterize the deep ecology movement in its openness to diversity, complexity as well as individual personal inquiry. He coined the word ecosophy for ecological wisdom.

2.2.3. Embodied Cognition and Embodied Cognitive Ecosophy

Theories of embodied cognition challenge the distinction between mind and body and see the human experience as equally informed by bodily experiences and insights. Embodied cognitive ecosophy additionally also comprehends the role of place and environment as an extension of the body and its experiences, a concept also prevalent in phenomenology and human geography.

Derek Jones (2017) in his paper on "Embodied cognitive ecosophy: the relationship of mind, body, meaning and ecology" draws from ecosophy concepts of Arne Naess, Felix Guattari and their own influences from Gregory Bateson's work to emerge newer concepts of embodied cognitive ecosophy. According to Jones, at the heart of Naess, Guattari and Bateson's works lie the concept the ecology is both conceptual and embodied.

One of the primary challenges of embodied cognitive ecosophy as an emerging field, is how thinking itself needs to be reframed or extended in order to grapple with the new realities that concepts of embodiment emerge. Several thinkers that include Arne Naess, Felix Guattari, Giles Delueze, Bruno Latour and Michele Foucault among others have attempted to emerge ecologies of thought and ecosophies to develop new thought systems that are in alignment with embodiment and are not normative. However as Jones, points out, the challenge remains that, "As with many thinkers starting from the normative position the very language of entities and relations prevents any truly new language to emerge, potentially restricting any new meanings or concepts (Jones 2017)."

By comparing, critiquing, analysing and synthesising Guattari and Naess's ecosophies, Jones raises three important yet three simple insights that help us focus on how to think about the epistemology and ontology of embodied cognitive ecosophy in terms of their relevance to everyday life and action.

- "We are a necessary (but insufficient) part of our own cognition"
- "We become certain of some things only by electing to ignore others"
- "We create, or supress, ethics by acknowledging limitations of subjectivities" (Jones 2017)

The problems of reductive methods in an attempt to develop ecologies of thought as well as embodied cognitive ecosophies leave us open to the need to discover, adapt non-reductive approaches that can support the evolution of these ideas.

2.2.4. Critiques and Suggested Directions for considering Notions of Intrinsic in Indian Contexts

Guha (1989) in his critique of environmentalism and deep ecology as envisioned or expanded particularly in America, points out that the environmental positioning of deep ecologists is "mired" in the "anthropocentric-biocentric" distinction accepted as axiomatic by them. He emphasizes that the deep ecology and the version of American environmentalism plays out "preservationist (radical) and utilitarian (reformist)" dichotomy. The notion of intrinsic right to exist based on the moral imperatives of a biocentric perspective have also been extended into scientific arguments for the preservation of wilderness and biodiversity and led to radical policy proposals being advanced by deep ecologists (Guha 1989).

Guha points out that the interests of humans are to be considered valuable and ideas for restoration of pristine nature cannot exclude the needs of human. Guha argues that the anthropocentric –biocentric distinction is irrelevant when placing them in the light of two more serious problems, i) "overconsumption by industrialized world and urban elites in the Third World" and ii) militarization and short and long-terms wars that are regional s well as "the arms race and nuclear annihilation (Guha 1989)."

His critique of deep ecology as practiced in America raises from the fact that in its particular form raising from its assumptions, and leading to policy, as well as transfer of these ideas to other –third world countries leads to policy decisions that are at a disadvantage to people and their lives here. He is particularly critical of the way deep ecologists in the American way see themselves as "the spiritual, philosophical, and political vanguard of American and world environmentalism (Guha 1989)." And the consequences this has on environmental movements and policy in other parts of the world. He also finds it problematic that by positioning their roots in eastern traditional thought, and presenting deep ecology as a synthesized notion of traditional wisdom and modern ecological wisdom, a certain universality is proclaimed without considering its ramifications. He also voices the caution that Eastern history clearly points out that people in the east have also manipulated nature consciously and the romantic notion of a "biocentric" east is a selective reading of eastern traditions without considering details.

He points out that the preservationist/ utilitarian division may be "completely reverse in countries such as India" as we have a long history of co-existence and "finely balanced relationship with nature, in agrarian populations (Guha 1989)." He

extrapolates this to show how ‘Project Tiger’ considered a success internationally with a focus on the interests of the tiger, has led to devastating consequences for the peasants and tribes living in and around these forest areas declared as Project Tiger Reserves. He provides the German Green movement and Indian notions of environmentalist as an alternative to think more deeply about ecological issues, notions of conservation and preservation. The German Green movement, he says looks closely at industrialization and the “economic and ecological exploitations of the third world”, pointing to the intimate links between “industrialization, militarization, and conquest (Guha 1989).” They advocate the need to focus on “no growth” economy and bring down the unsustainable consumerist levels. Guha points out that the American version of deep ecology “runs parallel to the consumer society’ and does not ‘seriously question its ecological or socio-political basis (Guha 1989).”

He draws on the relevance of the Green Movement to the Indian context and provides the link between environmental movements in India and their fundamental arguments for subsistence and survival positioned within equity and fair ‘economic and political redistribution’ rather than an enhanced quality of life. While a small group of Indian elite have benefited from colonialism and Industrialization, this has happened at tremendous environmental and social costs to others. “The ecological battles presently being fought in India have as their epicenter the conflict over nature between the subsistence and largely rural sector and the vastly more powerful commercial-industrial sector (Guha 1989, 5) .”

For Guha, a revolution in consciousness is not going to be substantial without considering human community from its socio-political frames. He is emphatic that

"The expansionist character of modern Western man will have to give way to an ethic of renunciation and self-limitation, in which spiritual and communal values play an increasing role in sustaining social life (Guha 1989)." Extrapolating from Guha, an intrinsic value for nature cannot be constructed on the biocentric-anthropocentric divide or the preservationist-utilitarian divisions as paradigm, but looking at the well-being of both human and nature as a whole. In developing an intrinsic ecological consciousness, one has to deal with context sensitive realities that are bound in socio-cultural and political frames as much as they are sharp concerns of philosophical, ethical, aesthetic and metaphysical questions.

Madhav Gadgil's work in social ecology in India provides a vision for how valuing human needs and nature in theory, practice and policy are both methodological and moral (Guha 2008 214-215). In contrast to a nature-centred approach to ecological consciousness, Madhav Gadgil's work raises sharp and important questions that values the human with a deep understanding of rural contexts and tribal conditions, where subsistence and survival are critical to constructing any worldview about the man-nature relationship.

Vandana Shiva brings forth the critical framework of ecofeminism, using ecological roles that women play as nurtures, providers and the preservers of traditions of knowledge related to nature, questions the patriarchal structures that drive capitalism and consumerism. For Shiva, intrinsic ecological consciousness lies in preserving native seeds, agricultural and ecological practices, and reviving the feminine aspects of our relationship with nature.

Ethics, notions of ecological consciousness, rights and laws, when divorced of their context and freed from the powerful tool of dilemma, leave us with empty platitudes and must be carefully reconsidered with thoughtful critique and more nuanced understanding of reality on the ground.

2.3. Notions of self and a relational ethic

Christopher Uhl, ecologist and author of Developing Ecological consciousness emphasizes the need for a new story of our times. He positions sustainability as a 'shortsighted notion" and calls for new stories that are emerging across humankind.

> " The new story challenges us to wake up, in so doing so, to see ourselves, not as *apart from* the earth (as we now tend to do), but instead as *a part of* the Earth- literally *a part of* the body of the earth."(Emphasis in the original) (Uhl 2013, xi)

Paul Shepard, a human ecologist develops a notion of self, drawing on ecological metaphors to deepen an alternative vision of the human self,

> "In one aspect, the self is an arrangement of organs, feelings, and thoughts—a "me"—surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes, and insular habits. . . . The alternative is a self as a center of organization, constantly drawing on and influencing the "surroundings, whose skin and behavior are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it. . . . Ecological thinking . . . requires a vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self ennobled and extended rather than

threatened as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves (Shepard 1969, 2)."

Skolimowski (1994) introduces the notion of a participatory mind by drawing out the differences between the 'relational account of self realisation' in African cultures and contrasts it with the more individualist notions of the Greek culture.

Abram (1996), looks at oral traditions, that are free of the conceptual structures of language as holding the key to intrinsic ecological consciousness. He encourages visceral participation in natural world that allows for embodied interactions providing a vital connection for development and co-evolution of body and mind, gestural and oral languages that evolve from closeness to nature.

The notion of *self, ātman* is "conceived as the central principle of the concept of man in both *Vedic* and *Upaniṣadic* thought (Vatsyayan 1992)." There is a biological reality and his psychical world that is noted, his relationship to the essence of life, cosmic essence is also evolved in parallel. The conceptualization of the self, in its perception of the essence of man, sees the interconnections across all life, and also sees the same essence in all beings. This view of man in relationship with all life, sharing the essence of the primordial creative force provides for another facet of intrinsic ecological consciousness.

Ecological consciousness in traditional Indian thought (Hindu) is evolved at three different categories of the natural world and then their subsequent interactions are further worked out in detail according to context.

- At one level nature is perceived as an integral unified and transcendent category out of which emerges a transcendental framework of ecological consciousness.
- At another level, it is evolved in perception of the biological, ecological, environment of beings, landscapes. This evokes a category where sentience has been accorded to all life and hence a consciousness that acknowledges beingness in everything and wonder, appreciation as well as intersubjective experiences are acknowledged in this categorization.
- The third is the category in which it is the socio-cultural conditions of human beings that are influenced by the natural world. This evokes the intersubjective, yet practical state of ecological consciousness.

The grammar that connects these distinct categories is rich and complex and allows for interpenetration, fluidity and flux.

The *Kalātattvakośa: A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of Indian Arts* series that studies 250 Sanskrit terms that can provide a key to the unified conceptual matrix that underlies Indian culture and diverse disciplines unpacks this grammar carefully in how pervasiveness of ideas and interdisciplinarity is created across traditional Indian thought and practice. In the General Editor's note in Vol IV, Kapila Vatsysyan draws our attention to this grammar (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x).

She points out that "Key terms are often in triads, which denote dimensions, levels and processes. The cluster of *ādhibhautika, ādhidhaivika and the ādhyātmika* allude both in spatial and temporal terms to the primal elemental materiality, non materiality

and inner core self. The unsaid implicitly related to not only an object but to the subject. Not only the perceived but the perceiver (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x)."

The terrestrial, the cosmic and the personal that this triad signifies are forever entwined with each other. While each maybe capable of existing in their own states of freedom and independence, at the point of interaction, there is an inevitable relationship. Vatsyayan (1999, v-x) further elaborates, the next triad as *sthūla* (gross), *sūkṣma and para* (transcendental). (subtle) The *śarīra* (body) is both gross and subtle, whether it is material or non-material, tangible or intangible. This cluster of terms are in constant movement from one to the other and "an edifice of gigantic structure of embodiment and disembodiment is created through the inter-connected terms(Vatsyayan 1999, v-x)."

All of these are influenced by the categories of *rajas, tamas* and *sattva* that indicate the activity, inertness and balance that create varied intensities, dimensions and levels of being, experience, engagement and relationship. The twin concepts of *guṇa (qualities)* and *doṣa (impurities)* that are single strands of an entwined rope point to changes in the material, physical or psychical nature of a being (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x).

There is a continuous movement between categories that allows for fluidity and flux in all categories. This is the fundamental conceptual frame that allows perception of multiplicity as well as unity. This is seen in how origin, evolution and dissolution are considered together as another triad that observes the ebb and flow of life with a stark inevitability and at the same time places it within recursivity allowing a symbol to be

created. It is at once myth and a conceptual structure of life as perceived in this epistemology.

All the categories discussed above, according to Vatsyayan,

> "together culminate conceptually to the most fundamental triad of *sṛṣṭi, sthiti, pralaya* or *saṃhāra.* Now the process and movement is given a central place. The essence is in the kinetics of origin, evolution and dissolution in an unending movement. The beginning is the end, the end is the beginning. Indian myth and art is the unequivocal articulation of the conception, of continuous movement of change and of 'form' in an unceasing cycle. The countless myths and the consequent typologies of iconographical forms communicate through a visual, aural and kinetic design this dynamics.*"*(Vatsyayan 1999, v-x)

Each of these individual concepts have implications and applications in various fields of Indian thought – astronomy, sciences, literature, arts, medicine, mathematics, architecture. They also have specific application in art and aesthetic concepts, which will be of key interest to the development of ideas here.

When we take up *Ṛta*, the abstract concept, in *Ṛtu*, its twin concept it becomes an active aspect, the form in which nature expresses itself in an 'orderly sequence', namely the seasons (Raghavan and Sharma, 1972). *Ṛtu* is an important concept that provides us a sense of how environment perception in Indian thought is looked at using the lens of the seasons. In the Vedic literature, in *Yajur Veda* and the *Brāhmaṇās,* six seasons are identified- summer (*grīṣma / gharma*), monsoon (*varśā*),

spring (*vasanta*), autumn (*śarad*), early winter (*hemanta*), and late winter (*śiśir*). Time in its specificity of seasons and the play of seasons in their impact on human and other life forms provided a basis for building clear relationships. The *Vedic* sacrifices allowed for establishing correspondences between the cosmic, terrestrial and self in continuous exchange, where each season had specific offerings. It is in *Vedic* texts that one finds clear articulations of the activities of each season, correspondences between a season's natural character and related human behavior, actions, modes of dressing, emotions and moods, names for seasons all of which find a strong resonance in later *kāvya* usage (Raghavan and Sharma, 1972).

Raghavan elucidates this through three points of how seasons are treated in poetry, *ṛtu varṇanā*

i. They are integrated with life, the actions of the characters happen against the backdrop a concerned season.
ii. The emotions of the character are entwined and expressed through the season.
iii. The character transcends his/her own personal emotion in experiencing the wonder of a season (Raghavan and Sharma, 1972,11).

One also finds that a lot of early Indian literature was composed by people living in forests, sages as well as sage-poets as evidenced in *Vedas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads* and the *Ādi Kāvya* of Valmiki. They lived in close relationship to nature and experienced its "beauty, severity and sublimity (Raghavan and Sharma, 1972)." This lent to their writings/ expositions an appreciation and understanding that emerged from lived experience.

In later poetry and painting of the *Bhāramāsa* collections, based on the lunar calendar, love as a subject through each season is vivaciously explored and portrayed as shades and tones of human emotions respond to and arise from each season as well as the changing of seasons (Rao, 2012). The *Citrasūtra (About 450-650 CE)* of the *Viṣṇudharmmotara Purāṇa*, a treatise on painting also codifies clear outlines for how to depict each season (Rao, 2012). In the *rāgamāla* paintings (created in most schools of Indian painting around 16-17 CE) one finds further intensified metaphorical links drawn between music, seasons and human life (Rao, 2012).

In early Tamiḻ *Caṅkam* poetry, we find ecological consciousness embedded through five landscape categories. Mountains, rivers, desert, fields and forest from the background in and through which human emotions and experiences are intensified and entwined.

In later *Bhakti* Poetry, one finds the metaphysics of *Upaniṣads* and the myths of the *Purāṇās* with more personalized envisioning of deities by poets, expanding on nature in its cosmological-symbolic categories.

Beyond these, we also have the tribal knowledge systems and nature worship that evolved in multiple practices among different communities. The widespread practice of planting sacred groves among several communities, the practice of the Bishnois in taking care of the Indian antelope as their own child, perceiving trees and other beings as human ancestors, the villagers of Kokkarebellur adopting the migrating painted storks and pelicans as their daughters and family are ideas that have influenced everyday practices and ecological consciousness. All of these have contributed in

different ways in which we have protected and preserved nature. (Gadgil and Guha 2014).

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, however, under the onslaught of a consumerist culture and the industrial age, a lot of these practices have degenerated, some of them have been lost or misinterpreted. However, the core ideas hold a lot of value for understanding how the notion of an ecological consciousness that is entwined with ethical action informs Indian thought. In these ideas, axiological discussions happen through the frame of '*dharma*' as a concept of ethical action. In extending *dharma* back to its root connections to *ṛta* and *satya* one finds the ecological frame in which ethical action has been defined. This provides for an intrinsic framework of ecological consciousness.

2.4. Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness in Creativity, Aesthetics and Art

In the creative sphere and notions of creativity, the intrinsic nature of ecological consciousness as an inquiry of aesthetics and art, today requires an expansive framework. While individual artists may choose diverse positions, it is important to be critical of one's sentimentality, emotional maturity as well as information and knowledge traditions to consider carefully the ramifications of their works on the common consciousness. However, at the same time, the artist also needs to be responding to her own intuition and raise questions that remain deeply metaphysical and philosophical, and lend new perspective through the limited yet contrary notion of creative freedom. Whether her works are socially engaged or more private reflections of life around her, the artist has a wealth of narratives to choose from to construct her

own ecological consciousness. “Intrinsic” in a reflective frame is more a journey for the artist than a static position.

Tagore’s ideas, reflections and his envisioning of Santiniketan provide a critical understanding of how to think about an intrinsic notion of ecological consciousness (Tagore, 1915). Place, celebration, education, are entwined with landscape, seasons, and the dynamic presence of the natural world. In his envisioning, the nature-culture divide ceases to be, and a closer harmony of relationships is established.

In the Indian arts, Ananda Coomaraswamy’s book *The Transformation of Nature in Art* provides some of the key ideas that connect philosophical ideas with techniques and creative processes in Indian thought (2014). Essential to this discourse is that the artist is like a seer who sees all things imaged in his own self and this enables him to create work that is resonant with the natural order that shows the oneness and interconnections of all life. Line becomes a critical element of art and provides the tool that can reduce the plurality of form through its capacity to capture the flow and energy of life as an integrating feature. Hence a woman and a lotus stalk or a banana leaf, a bull and a man, a child and a flower can all find resonances that shape their form.

Kapila Vatsyayan’s work in her own scholarship and through the IGNCA provides a framework for recording people’s relationship to environment as traced in the arts.

> “The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, established in memory of Smt. Indira Gandhi, is visualised as a centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts – each form with its own integrity, yet within a

dimension of mutual interdependence, interrelated with nature, social structure and cosmology." (ignca.nic.in)

Key ideas and concepts, conceptual structures, artistic practices and their ritual counterparts, intrinsic ecological consciousness as can be perceived in visual form in Indian arts are studied carefully and systematically. The *Prakṛti* Series, the conference publications on Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern and Concepts to Time, the republishing of Ananda Coomaraswamy's works, particularly *The Transformation of Nature in Art (2014),* and *Yakṣas: Essays in the Water Cosmology (1993), Kalātattvakośa: A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of Indian Arts* series that takes up 250 select terms, many of which have deep connections to the environmental perception in Indian thought are some of the key references that bring us to an overarching understanding of ecological consciousness in the arts. Hiriyanna's work on Indian aesthetics and art experience, *Art Experience (1954)* further elaborates the connection between nature and artistic expression and the entwining of man and nature. As the main focus of my thesis lies in this area, much of these ideas are expanded through the remaining chapters and are only dealt with as a quick outline in this chapter.

Eco-art, Environmental art, landscape art, wildlife and conservation art and nature-based art are discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

I acknowledge the concerns around notions of intrinsic ecological consciousness within the contemporary Indian conservation framework. Within the framework and limits of the thesis, the focus however remains on arts and creativity. In this regard,

there is a detailed inquiry into aesthetics and self to draw out implications of intrinsic ecological consciousness on creativity as a notion of our times.

3. 'Value' as a Dilemma

This section continues with the axial questions of the previous section. Through the questions of consciousness as a larger category and aesthetic consciousness as an essential dimension of interrogation, the dilemmas of how to act in the layer of transactional reality and then how to move consciousness into the limited category of the *porous self* have been discussed above. From here, my questions seek towards a possible conceptual structure for Value that can allow the inquiries to move forward for the individual self/ selves.

Daya Krishna (1969) in his essay on "The Active and the Contemplative Values" raises a philosophical inquiry into the nature of socially led values leading to action and self-reflective values raising from contemplative inquiry. He points out the essential dilemmas that raise in the human encounter with values. The most critical aspect of his argument that is relevant to my inquiry lies in the distinction he draws out between them,

> "The distinction lies primarily in the content of what the consciousness actually seeks and the implications this has for the consciousness itself. The consciousness, that is contemplatively oriented, seeks a state of its own being which it feels to be supremely significant in terms of the actually felt and lived experience of the psyche. The seeking of active values, on the other hand, is not concerned with the type of consciousness that one enjoys oneself but rather with the continuous engagement in an activity which may probably help

others or achieve a certain state of affairs in the natural or the social world." (Krishna 1969)

He extends the argument to point out how these two values are in opposition to each other as one requires engagement and interrelationship, whereas the other requires withdrawal and emerges these qualities further to discuss how this argument can allows to expand and engage with the dilemmas of how we use values in a culture or as individuals (Krishna 1969).

On the other hand, the concept of context-sensitivity as A.K.Ramanujan (1989a) introduces the epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, and much folklore deal with the concept of value through the concept of context-sensitivity of *dharma* and action.

Also, in the concept of *dharma*, the active and contemplative values are found to unite and *svadharma* that arises out of reflexivity demands that the individual take the time to find meaningful actions that reside in *ṛta*, cosmic order and yet function in the mundane.

So when, where and how do active and contemplative values meet, coincide and more integrated and evolved actions develop? This is the complexity of any culture that tries to resolve its own active and contemplative values. Environmental philosophy and ethics as fields of study too struggle with this particular problem as the stakeholders are diverse as are the contexts in which environmental actions, conservation movements, ecological laws and practices are emerged. It is further complicated by the notions of intrinsic values, human-centric or eco-centric

paradigms, all of which attempt to favor one life form over another, split in their inherent philosophical and ethical standpoints. While this thesis restricts itself to active and contemplative values in aesthetics and creativity, the question of value is much more deeper and critical and requires careful study that allows for plurality of practices that are context-sensitive.

Our openness to questions of value are critical to digging deeper.

Our questions cannot remain only in a reductive paradigm and must be open to holisitic and paradoxical paradigms as well for new understandings of value to emerge. Some guiding questions could be:

- Does value determine our experience of the natural world?
- Or do our wordless experiences lead to emerging values towards the natural world?
- In what state of consciousness can we truly experience the natural world?
- What is real and unreal about the reality we perceive and our perceptions of what we consider as the 'reality' of the 'natural world'?
- How does perception impact value considerations and how do values affect perception?
- Where and in what ways do actions, perceptions and values meet for everyday engagement and reflection in the context of the ecological crisis in both self and outer world?

4. Unraveling Aesthetic Frame of Perception and Aesthetic Consciousness as Essential to Action

Revisiting questions from chapter 1 (repeated), this chapter again attempts to develop conceptual categories, vocabularies and transdisciplinary framework relevant to aesthetics to engage with these questions. All these questions are reflected upon answered throughout the thesis. In this chapter the intention is to build transdiciplinarity across cultural frameworks that span different time periods.

Set 2 - Aesthetics, creativity and practice questions

i. What is creativity/ aesthetics at the juncture of the *porous* state of consciousness?
ii. Why is environmental aesthetics or eco-creativity essential to ecological consciousness?
iii. What are the implications of any form that arises out of this state of consciousness?
iv. What are creative / aesthetic methodological processes in each of the forms?
v. What is the technique of art that could evolve from a *porous* consciousness?

To me the social component of practice lies largely in the fields of design and education in my practice and in the sharing of my art in public spaces. I have conducted several workshops, built curricula, design tools, educational tools, as part of my practice, discussed my work with others. These actions, their dilemmas, research inquiries and outcomes are beyond the scope of this thesis for elaboration. However my understanding of the need for individuals to find meaningful relationships with nature emerged from my work with diverse communities. People's

needs to evolve choice based and context sensitive ways of engagement with ecological crisis at large in understanding themselves and finding their own harmony with the natural world emerged from my work with them.

A particular aspect of many of our discussions led to inquiring into the grief one feels for the environment and the emotional paralysis that follows, rendering people unable to act, make decisions or feel that anything they do contributes in some meaningful way to healing the earth. Chris Jordan, acclaimed artist and activist speaks of these moments of despair and paralysis with great accuracy and eloquence in his interview with Lisa Bennett (2013). He speaks of his first visit to the Midway Islands in the Pacific Ocean, where he went to see albatross and came back " emotionally and spiritually devastated." He says not only was he overwhelmed by his own response to the impact of plastic debris on the life of the albatross, and the extensive death of albatrosses that he witnessed there as they had swallowed a lot of the plastic debris that we trash into the ocean. He says, "But I was confused by it, and I was especially confused and heartbroken by the responses of people who wrote saying they saw the images and felt paralyzed, or panicked." What he does share though is his conversation with writer Terry Tempest Williams, and he shares her insightful response. "I'm sorry I can't get you to hope from here. I think there is more to the story. You haven't gone all the way through the fire yet." He speaks of going back to the island and witnessing the albatross all over again as they returned to the island to mate, give birth and he speaks of how this intimacy of watching them at close quarters emerged a story of '"beauty, elegance and grace." (Bennett and Jordan 2013)

Joanna Macy, environmentalist and deep ecologist speaks of the value of 'active hope' as action that helps us to move from a state of paralysis (Macy and Johnstone 2012). To pass through the fire of grief, to one of active hope and action is a journey of the self. This may happen in many different ways for people, however, one of the essential capacities and emotional environments that we need to create for ourselves is to experience beauty alongside grief. In Chris Jordan's words ,

> "One powerful elixir is beauty. There is nothing quite like beauty. When you bring beauty and grief together, you can't look at it, because it's so sad — and you can't look away, because it's so beautiful. It's a moment of being transfixed, and the key is turned in the lock." (Bennett and Jordan 2013)

The role of the arts in creating this aesthetic temparement and consciousness to experience the world is key to unraveling *porosity* in my work. Hiriyanna (1954) discusses the poet, the aesthete, aesthetic encounters, creative process and aesthetic contemplation in his essays on '*Art Experience*'. He captures the essence of the aesthetic consciousness and what is the nature of experiencing the world created by the artist that can transform us in the notion of rasa and how the artist goes about creating this experience in his work of art. He positions the poet as a seer and 'someone who shows'. From his readings of *Kāvyaprakāśa* and other texts, Hiriyanna (1954) say the role of the poet/ artist is to show us the truth of nature that is hidden and yet there, while also idealising nature to show us something that transcends nature, and is not there. In both these cases, the artist is compared with the creator. To the question, what it is that we seek from poetry, Hiriyanna responds through this study of Sanskrit poetics that it is for attaining *rasa, the* unique aesthetic experience (1954, 20-21). He simplifies our approach to *rasa* by placing our need to seek out

poetry and poetic experience in two paradigms i) an optimistic point where we seek poetry to be closer to "intrinsic truth and beauty of the universe"; ii) the pessismistic standpoint where we seek poetry to move away from "sufferings and perplexities of actual life" (Hiriyanna 1954, 20-21). He finds that when we engage with poetry, we are transported into the world that the poet has imagined and called into being and in the process, we forget ourselves and our lives, transcending our narrow self-consciousness to find aesthetic delight. Here, he finds the poet and the aesthete in resonance and while the transcendence is natural for the poet, the aesthete's experience is induced by the poet (Hiriyanna 1954, 20-21). He sees the poet as an alchemist who metamorphoses us through his work and the poetic experience that he creates. This experience that is both metamorphosis and transcendence of self is *rasa*, the very pupose that draws us to poetry (Hiriyanna 1954, 20-21).

Hiriyanna (1954) also draws our attention to the complexities, nuances and difficulties of aesthetic contemplation. He points out that aesthetic contemplation is not passive, but requires effort on part of both the artist and the aesthete, the artist who strives for idealisation of content, and the aesthete whose experience and appreciation of the work will evolve from "imaginative reconstruction" of the idealisation. Hiriyanna emphasizes that for the spectator, only in the act of active reconstruction, the beauty of the work is realised and 'verified by his own heart' and he experiences *rasa,* the aesthetic end goal.

Rasa is the totality of the aesthetic experience and not merely the act of finding pleasure, which is in itself not seen as the purpose of art in Indian thought. Achieving a state of consciousness that is uniquely 'disinterested' and deeply sympathetic to the

world created by the artist, and for the artist to experience this insight and intuition in his experience of the world, is the true essence of art. Art maybe used in other ways and for other purposes, however the very essence of art lies in the process that moves the artist/ aesthete from experience of the real world, to deep perception, to idealization, then to reconstruction, feeling one at heart with the artist and experiencing *rasa.* While the experiences and requirements of preparedness are different for the artist and aesthete, aesthetic contemplation that leads to aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic beingness- *rasa* are key to understand the importance of developing aesthetic perceptivity as essential to the development of the *porous self*.

> "As Bronowski (1985) points out, appreciation of a creative act is a process in which one re-lives the act of creation. The general assumption is that the creative faculty that distinguishes the poet is also found in the *sahṛdaya*, with the difference being that the poet creates a world of his or her own and shapes it in words, while the *sahṛdaya* recreates from these very words the poet's world once again. This is a recurrent theme in the *rasa* literature: "The poet creates poetry, the appreciator realizes it and being a *sahṛdaya* he recreates the creative mood in his own self (Ghosh, 2008, p. 201)." (As cited in Sundararajan and Raina 2016, 788–809)

The critical idea that is often omitted in the discussion of Indian aesthetics is the that the artist is also the aesthete. As theoretical discussions abound around who an aesthete is and how the *sahṛdaya* is central to the concept of aesthetics, the idea that is missed is that the artist is first a *sahṛdaya.*

> "An example of mirroring is when a *sahṛdaya* feels happy at the portrayal of happiness, grief at the portrayal of grief, misery at the portrayal of misery (Goodwin, 1998). Dehejia (1996, 52) explains: It is only the "polished heart" of the aesthete that is capable of total identification with the art object, a process called *Tanmayībhāva* which signifies that the heart of the *sahṛdaya* engages itself with the art object seriously, deliberately and completely, leaving no room for feelings such as, "it is happening to me, no it is not happening to me," removing the duality of the subject– object consciousness and assuring a total of *advaitic* [non-duality] art experience. " (Sundararajan and Raina 2016, 788–809)

It is the artist as *sahṛdaya* who becomes open to the universe, to the natural world and the experiences she encounters and it is in the state of *tanmayībhāva* of the artist, that artistic process, creativity and art work emerge. And it is this very aesthetic consciousness of the artist that the aesthete resonates with. The artist herself as an aesthete is one of the most important aspects of Indian aesthetics that is least discussed, understood, analysed or discussed. However the practitioners theory of aesthetics, artistic processes and practice would lie in this realm.

According to Maxine Greene "Experiences with works of art still seem to signify for many people a kind of confrontation with something beyond the visible world… and so have many continued to perceive art (especially literary art) as a means of apprehending the exemplary, the true, the 'really real' (Greene 1968)." The intangibility of truth is challenging to describe in rational terms and yet people seek out the arts and aesthetic experiences to delve into and savour inner truths and

emotional realities, mystical or metaphysical realities and other ineffable realities, which can be sensed, expressed in artistic languages and felt in ways that are beyond the rational.

Greene (1968) encourages the need to develop aesthetic sensibility and criticism in students to enable them to perceive "new dimensions in life, in the enterprise of art, and in themselves." She postulates that in training students to ask "authentic" questions about their own experiences when encountering works of art, and in evolving their critical ability to distinguish between what they perceive as art or non-art and identify characteristics of each,

> "They will be moved to ponder the relationship between what is within human consciousness and what human beings project into the cosmos beyond. Perhaps they will be moved to challenge the silences above the stairs by deliberately shaping their own authentic meanings, by imposing their own forms. And perhaps, after all, art will succeed in educating-by enabling some of them to *be*." (Greene 1968)

For Maxine Greene (1977), the importance of training in aesthetic appreciation and perception is to deliberate upon human consciousness and being. She finds the need for art and aesthetic education to push the boundaries of "vision and awareness" to find new directions. As she articulates the possibilities that art and aesthetic education offer, "There is cotton wool all around-and there are living beings waiting, hoping to break through (Greene 1977)."

Greene (1980) pushes our understanding of consciousness and awareness that arises out of artistic-aesthetic experiences, both for artists and aesthetes. She asks us to look at the way the arts can stretch our abilities to perceive "human possibility" and deepens the conversation into finding meaning in consciousness.

> "For those who are aware of their own awareness, there is the recognition that it is possible to move through different "provinces of meaning" (Schutz, 1967), to direct attention variously to the faces of the world. In the artistic-aesthetic province, with clock-time and theoretical and practical projects momentarily left behind, individuals can look from the perspective of inner time and lived biography. They can see with their own eyes and, freed of the necessity to separate fact from value, attend to their lived situations by means of a valuing consciousness. This signifies an ability to grasp things in the light of what might be and what is not. Surely, works of art- when properly attended to- hold intimations of human possibility, just as they often hold intimations of better social states." (Greene 1980)

"A valuing consciousness," as Greene phrases it becomes the central essence of artistic and aesthetic encounters as fact and value get interwoven in works of art, challenging and demanding us to find deeper meanings and richer possibilities to being human.

Daya Krishna (2011, 45) asks us to look deeper into the "roots of creativity" that lie within the human self-consciousness and motivate artists to create works out of his visions and ideals that drive the need for both self-actualization and relationship. He too finds that our attempt to understand art must arise out of our deliberations on being and consciousness that are at the "roots of creativity." He ruminates that when

we seek the roots of creativity and ponder about what it is that seek actualize in art, our brief encounters with works of art "may change and modify our ordinary living with a subtler, deeper sensitivity to nature, human beings, and above all, the transcendent that surrounds us all the time (Krishna 2011, 45)." He emphasizes this notion of beingness by positioning the arts in life, and drawing a connection across life, artistic creation and works of art.

> "The arts, therefore, are ultimately rooted in what may be called "the art of living," and unless life is seen in terms of an artistic creation, we cannot understand the creation that is embodied in a work of art."(Krishna 2011, 45)

4.1. Reality, Imagination and Intuition

In order to comprehend and derive aesthetic paradox as used in this thesis, let us delve into few other mental constructs that would be relevant. In the realm of human thought, reality and imagination are two constructs that can never satisfactorily be defined in absolutes. The relationship between the two remain paradoxical. The very perception of reality is a mental construct and in that, it is an imaginary boundary to enable us to function. But those constructs maybe defined by cultural beliefs and values. This is yet another imaginary construct. To feel a *porous* flow of beingness or even sensuous elements from one to another requires imagination to enable the trigger to experience. An openness of mind that imagination requires is as much a construct as a logical inquiry that could allow us to move forward between two realms of thought. These kind of inquiries put us in dilemmas and paradoxes that are philosophical, moral, political, intellectual, aesthetic and metaphysical.

While a phenomenological inquiry may support us to position our experiences in the sensuous realm of the body, the very definition of body is a mental construct and can vary from culture to culture. The ontologies that we believe in define the structures of our construct. Our constructs themselves are complex forms that build complex worlds of interaction with self and the other by entwining the various strands that we have emerged in one context or the other. This we find to be the essential human condition in how our notions of reality are our own mental constructs limited to our conditioning and capacity for imagination. These are further encoded within the realm of language and how each language is constructed.

However, mystical, metaphysical and aesthetic theories and practices claim the possibilities of stepping outside these intellectual and cognitive constructs by using intuitive, alogical, analogical processes in brief moments that can be expanded to longer periods of time through practice. However to articulate these moments, one comes back to the realm of language, which resides within mental constructs. This has led to the paradoxical claims in Indian and Chinese cultures that those who have experienced, cannot speak of it, and those who speak of it could not have experienced it.

Imagination delves into layers of time, space, experience, memory and emotions and it is something quirky that defies logic, something that is rebellious of accepted norms. Imagination allows us to delve into what is, sometimes through what is beyond it, what is not it and what it could be. It allows us to shift the paradigm, bringing in new perspective and direction.

- How do we build our capacity for imagination?

- What really is imagination?
- Why is it critical to construct our consciousness?
- In what ways do we deepen the quality of our imagination?
- What are the possibilities of imagination and how do we engage with them?

Greene (1987) sees our capacity to experience as a process of texturing and layering that can emerge through artistic sensemaking and citing from Dewey, she suggests that this happens through imagination. In tying together experience, sensemaking, imagination, Greene offers insights to the five questions above.

> "I think in terms of expansion, of new connections in experience, of a sedimenting or a layering of meanings, a thickening, if you like, a growing density of texture as persons allow their past experiences to feed into their present ones, as more and more is known. I think of Dewey, saying in *Art as Experience* that experience becomes conscious only when meanings derived from earlier experiences enter it. "Imagination," he wrote, "is the only gateway through which these meanings can find their way into a present interaction."' He meant that present experience only becomes fully conscious when what is given is extended by meanings drawn from what is absent, what can be summoned up imaginatively" (Greene, 1987)

And it is through engaging with arts in an informed way, that it is possible to break away from predetermined worlds and engage with possibilities (Greene 1980).

E.Burtt (1953) in his paper discussing intuition in Eastern and Western Philosophy provides a loose definition that frames it well for the present discussion. He positions intuitive perception as a method, that "is analogous in its directness and immediacy to

sense perception; but, second, that it is nonetheless different from sense perception (Burtt 1953).” He frames intuition as an apprehension, a state of awareness of the consciousness.

> “We are concerned with intuition, not as a supernatural phenomenon giving information on particular matters which might be learned about in other ways, but as a mode of apprehension which supervenes on the ordinary methods of knowledge and is supposed to reveal truths which could not be disclosed by any other means, truths peculiarly important for human well-being and for philosophic understanding. This is the significant meaning.” (Burtt 1953, 283-284)

The key point that Burtt (1953) makes is that the focus on Indian philosophy lies in self-realization and hence even logical inferences or empirical studies are framed within the paradigm of self- knowledge. In this framework, intuition becomes critical to self-evaluate. Integral to Eastern notions of intuition are self-assessing strategies, rigor and methods for judgment or assessment (Burtt, 1953, 283- 284).

One of the fundamental factors that differentiate Eastern philosophical and knowledge frameworks from the Western ones is the stress on how one acquires the knowledge. While deductive and inductive reasoning and logic are critical to Western notions, Eastern notions have an additional self-assessing framework of intuition. This integral notion of intuition rises from another important difference between Eastern and Western knowledge constructs. In the Eastern notions, self-knowledge to attain oneness or liberation is the central notion of real knowledge. The critical learning and teaching revolve around consciousness. In the west, inquiring into the outer world and

the physical nature of reality is critical in order to understanding one's relationship to the outer. The very notion of self-knowledge sometimes varies, sometimes corresponds between the eastern and western frameworks. However, depending on the notion, the very concept of reality changes. The aspects where imagination and intuition differ in the Indian context are the notion of reality around which life is centered. The ontological and epistemological shift in aesthetic appreciation centres around, not the observable facticity of the everyday world, but the real that transcends this world (Sundarrajan and Raina 2016).

And it is in this frame that intuition offers a completely different paradigm of understanding concepts of reality. Allowing for paradox as a fundamental reality, and consciousness of oneness as an eternal truth, the play of unfolding cosmic relationships with self are guided by intuitive states of meditation and practice in eastern models, particularly the Hindu model. While reason and logic ground all practices of everyday life, philosophy and ethics allow for an area of knowledge that transcends reason and logic through the concept of *para (transcendental)* that defies all human conceived/ perceived notions of reality. How does one intuit the *para*, then forms the crux of the Eastern work in consciousness, self-knowledge and *bandhu (*relationship) (Kak 2015).

While intuition itself is present in our life in innumerable moments and within diverse disciplinary knowledge systems, the arts offer to intuition, infinite possibilities that daily life denies, and hence they offer much to the comprehension of human experience, and expansion of human consciousness in ways otherwise denied in the predictable and defined reality of everyday life. Arts among all other disciplines of

human knowledge, offer these possibilities, because even as they have been rendered marginal through the industrial era of human civilization because they care for the intuitions, feelings and imaginations that are suppressed, denied, or demystified otherwise. They hold the roots of revolution, because they dwell in the possibilities of human beingness and consciousness opening new doorways to what we can be. Donoghue (1983) writes,

> "The arts are on the margin, and it doesn't bother me to say that they are marginal .... I want to say that the margin is the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for, and mostly seems to suppress .... Even in a world most secular, the arts can make a space for our intuition of mystery, which isn't at all the same as saying the arts are a substitute for religion .... It's enough that the arts have a special care for those feelings and intuitions which otherwise are crowded out in our works and days. With the arts, people can make a space for themselves, and fill it with intimations of freedom and presence." (Donoghue 1983, 129)

Today's research framework in academics is bound by the intellectual responsibility that is grounded in reason and logic and a reductionist paradigm. However, practice-based work often defies the construction of reason and logic in deductive or inductive ways. Further, when one's practice is embedded within cultural lineages, sense of self, meditative practices and art as a mode of transcendence (as most traditional Indian art forms believe), the challenge of articulating in academic research becomes manifold. Derek Jones (2017) summarises in his article the problem of "*underdetermination"* when reductionist views are "insufficient to describe certain phenomena, qualities or events in the world (or our experiences of the world)" and

how while reductionist approaches may seemingly provide certainty in some contexts, they fail in relating them in a wider context. Artistic research is often looking for these wider contexts, connections against the challenge of "underdetermination". What needs to be acknowledged is that,

> "Artists are for disclosing the extraordinary in the ordinary. They are for transfiguring the commonplace, as they embody their perceptions and feelings and understandings in a range of languages, in formed substance of many kinds. They are for affirming the work of imagination- the cognitive capacity that summons up the "as if," the possible, the what is not and yet might be. They are for doing all this in such a way as to enable those who open themselves to what they create to see more, to hear more, to feel more, to attend to more facets of the experienced world" (Greene 1987)

6.2. Environmental Aesthetics and its Questions

Environmental Aesthetics today concerns itself with the philosophical issues surrounding man's appreciative relationship with landscapes, environments and ecosystems as well as built environments (Carlson and Berleant 2004). As Arnold Berleant (1992, xii, preface) positions it, it is discipline that is an emergent synthesis from diverse disciplines, international in its scope, and belongs to the "intellectual and cultural evolution of our time.'"

> "An interest in the aesthetics of environment is part of the broader response to environmental problems, to national and international environmental policies, and to public awareness and action on environmental issues, and it reflects the growing recognition of aesthetic values in environment (Berleant 1992, xii, preface)."

Environmental aesthetics today does not stem from the closed notion of beauty, but an encompassing view of nature in its many dimensions from urban environments to countryside and wilderness, from built environments to natural landscapes. As Berleant (1992, 11) frames it, the implications of this encompassing aspect of aesthetics is critical to how we redefine value theory and philosophy in general and how aesthetics becomes a critical category of human experience at large.

> "For enlarging the limits of aesthetics means not just admitting more kinds of objects into its purview; more penetrating consequences follow the extension of aesthetic awareness. If every thing has an aesthetic dimension, then so does every experience of every thing, since things stand for us only in so far as we experience them, and an aesthetic dimension is inherent in all experience. The aesthetic becomes, then, a universal category, not the universal category but the omnipresent concept of a pervasive feature of experience.(Berleant 1992, 11)

Berleant (1992, 13) roots for an "integrated aesthetic" which will affect our "social ethics" and "moral understanding of human relationships." In this he locates an environmental aesthetics of engagement as a political act that can free us from "hierarchy and an exercise of power" towards community participation and freedom.
Environmental aesthetics brings us back to the centrality of human perception. A direct embodied perception is central to experience of environmental aesthetics, where the physical senses begin to play the role of an "integrated sensorium" to build a "matrix of perceptual awareness" (Berleant 1992, 14-15). Berleaunt takes the notion of perception further by showing why it is central to human life and aesthetic experience.

> “Perception is the central fact of human life, Merleau-Ponty claims, and it is primary because "the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us." Perception, furthermore, is at the same time the central term of the aesthetic. Extended to include imaginative perception, which is crucial to the literary arts, perception is a necessary condition for aesthetic experience and, for some, its sufficient condition, as well. The very term 'aesthetic,' readily accepted since it was introduced by Baumgarten in 1750, identified it from the start with perception by the senses. The confluence of these germinal ideas- the centrality of perception both for human life and for aesthetic experience-suggests that environment as a condition of life bears within itself the seeds of the aesthetic. How these are cultivated is the story of the art of human culture.” (Berleant 1992, 156)

To extend his question on how perception is cultivated in human culture, I draw upon the two critical questions that Berleant raises in environmental aesthetics:

i. “ How well does an account illuminate and explain our aesthetic experiences of environment?
ii. And the complement of this: How effectively does a proposal promote an increase in the range, quantity, and refinement of aesthetic perception, three not irreconcilable objectives?” (Berleant 1992, 15)

These two questions offer us important guidelines towards a theory of environmental aesthetics. To these I add two more questions,

iii. How does a deepened perceptual awareness that emerges from a heightened environmental aesthetics impact consciousness?

iv. What are the social, political and ethical implications of an integrated environmental aesthetic?

A sense of aesthetics develops only through people's encounters with art from within their own perspectives of reality. It is only when a "direct encounter" occurs and a work of art seeps into an "individual's consciousness'" through quality time, that the work of art can come into being and shape into experience (Greene 1977). And the ability to "select, attend and decode" works of art can only happen through both education and individual choice to be "open to works of art (Greene 1977)." Extending this to an environmental aesthetic, people must be willing to engage with their environment and be open to it, to dwell in it in quality time so that it can inhabit their consciousness and direct encounters can happen. Only through such engagement, a sense of environmental aesthetics can intrinsically develop in a person.

Rasa and *Dhvani* are central to the concepts of Indian aesthetics. The aesthetic states of consciousness and being, *rasa* and *dhvani*, which suggest an intuitive yet highly training skill of aesthetic appreciation goes beyond an empathetic encounter and experience of art to a state of transpersonal and transcendent dissolution into the art work and the characters of a work of art to find a state of aesthetic bliss.

> "*Tādātmya* is a state of the reader or spectator who loses for a while his or her personal self-consciousness and identifies him or herself with some character in the story or scene. It can be differentiated from the Western notions of empathy. One major difference, according to Goodwin (1998, p. xi), is that while in "empathy" one shares the feelings of others, in *tādātmya* one loses oneself in the other." (as cited in Sundararajan and Raina 2016)

This state of dissolution when paired with the concept of 'Nature' as understood in Indian thought leads to ways in which aesthetic experiences are meant to connect one to the essence of nature, the life force that binds all of us together, and the transcendental that goes beyond time, space and the origin of the universe as we perceive it.

> "One thought that came to me is the distinction between the concept of Nature in the West and in India. In the West, it appeals and heals at the emotional level, whereas in India, it is taken to be transcendent behind appearances and, therefore, its effect is more life-transforming. This is the sense in which the theory of *dhvani* in Indian aesthetics is quite unique." (Subhash Kak, July 25, 2016, Email communication with author)

Drawing from the centrality of emotional expression at the heart of aesthetics, one critical question that is required is -

- As a civilization, where are we in our need to express our emotions towards nature?

There are rich, conflicted, disturbed, strong emotions that we feel towards the environment, human impact on the environment and its devastation. There is sorrow, grief, happiness, elation, pain, fear, anger and much more. There are also the transcendent, transpersonal emotions that go beyond the everyday emotions, in which in the Asian sensibilities, one finds the very essence of nature. Both reach out far into kinds of aesthetics that are different and stem frm different states of being and consciousness.

Traditional Asian cultures have emphasized the second over the first as integral to the evolution of human consciousness, however they have not ignored the first either. There is a need for an integrated evolution of aesthetic theory that can blend our needs to express emotions, one that is rooted in the everyday and the other that emerges out of transpersonal, transcendental states of being. Wisdom in aesthetic theories and practices can emerge only out of such a blended and integrated understanding of aesthetics. We need to be able to evoke through visual, verbal, oral, musical and gestural languages aesthetics of both kinds of emotions, to find ourselves fully immersed in aesthetics of environment and a heightened sensitive perceptual awareness.

The *Rasa* theory has four important aspects that have relevance to the thesis argument.

i. *Rasa* is the essence or flavor of any artistic work that evokes aesthetic absorption in the *sahṛdaya*, the aesthete who is one at heart with the artist.
ii. *Rasa* is a state of being and consciousness
iii. *Rasa* may also offer entertainment and an ability to experience different emotions and transform the experiences of everyday life
iv. The purpose of evoking *rasa* is to dwell in the transformation of one's own consciousness and find alignment with the transcendental reality and essence of consciousness, which is the true essence of nature.

Sundarrajan and Raina (2016, 156) argue that the 'empathic mind-to-mind transactions as envisioned by *rasa* and other non-western traditions of aesthetics' are based on intersubjective openness as against the notions of individualism that

mainstream psychology focuses on and allow for a relational framework where the origin of an individual mind lies in intersubjective community of minds.

Rasa theory therefore offers a direction in environmental aesthetics that covers varied ground for relational aesthetics – Our relationship to the environment emerging from a state of aesthetic absorption, aesthetics as a quality of being and consciousness that enables our perceptivity of and sensitivity to the environment, the ability to experience and express varied emotions in relation to the environment, and then to be able to find a state of bliss, and resonance in the essence of nature.

Dhvani, or the theory of aesthetic suggestion, focuses more specifically on the resonant nature of aesthetic experience that emerges between the aesthete and the poet/ artist when they meet on the same wavelength in aesthetic encounter of a work of art. *Dhvani,* translated as sound or resonance, as Anandavardana describes it, is the very essence and soul of poetry, and it is not literal and obvious, and a sensitive reader would be able to experience it in suggestiveness. This ability to tune into the same frequency as the artist himself, allows a sensitive aesthete to experience *dhvani. According to K.D. Tripathi (2004, 217),* it is the concept of *vāk* in the Vedas, word/ speech seen as consciousness, that blossoms into the aesthetic theory of *dhvani. Dhvani,* then offers a way to experience the environment that emerges through the concept of resonance, an attribute of sound, different from empathy as well.



Fig 1: Bodhisattvā Padmapāṇi, Cave 1 Ajanta. 2nd BCE -5th century CE Source: Wikimedia commons

The *Bodhisattvā Padmapāṇi* from the painting in the Ajanta caves, holds a single lotus in an indrawn moment of transcendent consciousness. The lines of his body emerge from the lotus stalk itself, where it is impossible to differentiate the lotus, the water, the human, the divine and the moment of enlightenment that is infused in the work. This lotus is no more the lotus that we encounter in real life, it is a symbol of transformation in human consciousness. However, the lotus, the water, the stalk, the leaf, are all infused into this divine human form, reality transformed and transmuted, and drawn from the essence of real life. This is true of the representations of *salabhanjikas*, tree maidens too and much Indian art.

Makoto Ueda (1963, 424-426), in his reflections on the poetics of Basho, explains how good haiku is transpersonal, and reflective of the state of *sabi,* that represents the essence/ feeling of nature in its "transpersonal loneliness". Transparency is defined as the critical quality that lends itself to such an aesthetic appreciation.

> "The true poet has his mind entirely transparent, as it were, at the moment of his composition. An external object enters the mind and dyes it in its own color, whereupon a poem emerges by itself. Such a poem would be the purest type of haiku, the "haiku without impure thoughts," as Basho describes it elsewhere." (Makoto Ueda 1963, 424)

The beauty of the *rasa* theory of aesthetics is that it gives us techniques, methods and guidelines to bring out a rich integrated environmental aesthetics theory. *Dhvani* on the other hand, gives us guidelines to deepen our reflections of transpersonal moments, and the hidden essence that goes beyond our intellectual comprehension, where our intuitions, imagination and notion of reality are challenged to find the existence of the intangible.

As Hiriyanna (1954) notes, in India aesthetics and ethics are an integrated frame and both are located within the larger paradigm of cosmological harmony and the threads that connect the interior and the exterior. As K.D. Tripati (2004, 219) further enunciates this relationship between ethics and aesthetics,

> "All creativity as an activity is the free manifestation of the 'plenitude' and 'order' and this activity is an ordered one. 'Chaos' arises from losing sight of that 'plenitude' and 'order'. Manifestation of multiplicity with the awareness of 'plenitude' and 'order' is the *krīḍā* or *līlā* (play enunciated in *āgamas* and *Purāṇa*s, whereas forgetting the 'plenitude' and the 'order' is an impurity and sin, hence the fetters…In fact, awareness of and adherence to the 'cosmic order' (*ṛta*) is staying in *dharma* and forgetting it results remaining in *adharma*." (Tripati 2004, 219)

K.D.Tripathi (2004, 2019) also clarifies that awareness of and adhering to this order does not imply that there can be no change, novelty or dynamism and one is stuck to a status quo, but that "this awareness of plenitude renders all changes as new and beautiful." Often misunderstood, when the idea of tradition is discussed today, within tradition, there is incomparable freedom, that arises from the concepts of *ṛta, pūrṇa, Puruṣa, Prakṛti, Śiva - Śakti*, and the *līlā* that offers great plurality in manifestation and in being able to reach into aesthetic experience that transcends "temporal and relational reality", it becomes possible to discover this aesthetic freedom, *rasa*, that is a gift to human creativity (Tripati 2004, 219).

The entwining of ethics and aesthetics in Indian thought can be understood only through the connection between the concepts of *ṛta* and *dharma*, Chandra Rajan (2004) in his chapter on "*Ṛta*: The ordering principle in the cosmos and in Art" elucidates this further,

> 'It is as *dharma* that the ancient and powerful of image, *ṛta* enters the world of art... *Ṛta*, reinscribed in *dharma*, provides that interconnectedness and interdependence of all of forms of being in the cosmos, held together within a network of relationships based on hierarchy of place, power and responsibilities. *Dharma* is the guiding principle." (Rajan, 2004)

Therefore in extending Indian theories of aesthetics and reinterpreting them in the frame of environmental aesthetics, new guidelines for a relational aesthetics can be articulated that are ground in both an aesthetic consciousness (*rasa*) and an ethical one (*dharma*)- law, duty, responsibility, right action, social order and the *svadharma*,

one's own internal essence (Rajan 2004, 271). The intention of aesthetic consciousness is not independent of social, spiritual, ethical and personal levels of being and actions in each of these states of being, but integrated when seen through the thread of *ṛta, dharma* and then eventually *satya* (truth) that also arises from a responsibility towards and of 'plenitude' and 'order.' R.Sathyanarayana (2004, 297) emphasizes this responsibility and its connection to one's conduct, way of life, by reinforcing the concept of *ṛta* in its relationship to the artist

> "…the individual qualifies for participating in the bliss of cosmic creation and creativity only by subordinating to, and harmonizing with, the cosmic law through his own conduct. This is true of his own creative endeavor and quest for beauty." (Sathyanarayana 2004, 297)

The principles of resonance and absorption both lie within the notion of *porosity* and hence there are many possible ways in which traditional Indian theories of aesthetics can be extended to *porous* frameworks. And when resonance and absorption are traced back to plenitude and order, oneness and multiplicity, then a newer spatial-temporal dimension that lies between the everyday, and the transcendent arises, in which creativity is bound by a cosmic moral law, and freed by its perception of oneness and multiplicity. An aesthetic consciousness that can reside in such a place is not bound by the concept of novelty, and is yet free to be dynamic, novel and constantly changing**. It is *porous* between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic.**

And in order to discover this ability to be dynamic, the concept of *līlā*, play must be further experienced with insight and intuition. And play becomes possible in yet another insight that binds the relationship of the artist and *ṛta* through the concepts of

oscillation and order as, R. Sathyanarayana articulates in his chapter on *Ṛta - Saṁgīta* (2004, 311).

> "Order is the perception of a pattern among the Chaos of sense data. This constitutes meaning. All existence, all life, all beauty, all art – in fact *ṛta* is an oscillation: oscillation between creation and chaos, between involution and evolution, between referential and non-referential consciousness, between intuitive insight of creativity and its grammatical articulation in sastra, between the *asti-bhāti-priyam* of the *jiva* and the *sat-cit-ānanda* of *brahman*."

Līlā becomes the active principle and action through which one can navigate these oscillations between the cosmic order and sva-dharma, one's own responsible creativity.

Note: Notions of practice and transdisciplinary frameworks are discussed in more depth in the section III of the thesis, which focuses on the practitioner's framework.

5. Positioning *Porosity*

Drawing from these juxtapositions, I evolve a position that allows me to blend and interplay consciousness and creativity as an intrinsic aspect of ecological consciousness.

Porosity may be seen in different dimensions and layers. This section will discuss its diverse possibilities. It will then place it within the realm of consciousness at two levels – aesthetic and ecological. From here the argument will be positioned to show how ecological and aesthetic consciousness can meld together in a state of *porous*

consciousness. These discussions will happen from the realm of artistic practice as the backdrop.

i. Developing *porosity* towards a focused study within ecological consciousness
ii. Deliberating on values and intrinsic as well as paradoxical nature of *porosity*
iii. Positioning *porosity* within art practice and aesthetics
iv. Establishing *porosity* as a state and symbol of aesthetic ecological consciousness
v. Designing a transdisciplinary theory of *porosity*

5.1. Self-Reflexivity as Action of a *Porous* Consciousness

The *porous self*, from the experiential accounting in the first chapter corresponds in my cultural lineage with the state of oneness as experienced with the essence of life itself, this essence whether it is called *Brahman, Ṛta, Śiva , Puruṣa* or by other names. As tradition would have it, these states of oneness are not possible to translate and communicate. Also, in that time when such a state happens, there is no witness to the experience, as the witness is also part of the oneness. It is only when one emerges out of it, that one may have some recollection/ awareness of the state of consciousness.

However, in keeping this correspondence with *Brahman* as a tether/ anchor in my inquiry, my work takes off from this framework to look at the *porous self* and how *porosity* acts as a principle of consciousness while one is striving to be in a *porous* state of being as in the *Upaniṣadic* frame, and secondly when one is in a *porous* state as in the *Ṛgvedic* frame as discussed by Vikraman Balaji (2013). Practice in both these states are different, as in the first one, there is an opacity that leaves us fractured and blind to seeing the cosmic order or the interrelationships that drive the complex

web of life; in the second, one is able to see the order, however in a transactional reality, it remains difficult to answer questions of action and resolve actions meaningfully.

In the second state, when choosing aesthetic questions to guide action, yet another category of inquiry emerges through artistic practice. Here, prima facie my concerns are those of self-reflexivity as an essential action in itself. And the questions of an intrinsic ecological consciousness are therefore taken up within the realm of **self-reflexivity as action** rather than action as intervention, participation, community engagement etc. The practice as engaged in the thesis is largely within the contemplative paradigm of self in relationship, albeit, a self that is in a self-reflexive engagemement and considers contrary viewpoints to evolve with context-sensitivity.

5.2. A *Porous* Consciousness: Blending Categories

Different dimensions of consciousness as interpreted in Indian categories are blended together by bringing multiple perspectives from different schools of thought, aesthetic and meditative practices. This is done in order to creatively interpret as well as reveal a more complex, intricate, nuanced and integrated possibility of consciousness that is active in a state of *porosity*. While theoretical purists may perhaps find this blending of categories of consciousness problematic, the lived experiences of *porosity* as a contemplative philosopher and artist, drawing richly from mystic traditions, I find it natural that lived categories of consciousness are far more fluid and do not have the boundaries of theoretical ones. Consciousness as a lived experience is a way of life and everyday transformation rather than a static conceptual or theoretical category. In

this light, I have expanded the Indian categories of consciousness introduced in the first chapter and how they blend in a *porous* state of consciousness.

i. Pure Consciousness

Ātman, Brahman, Puruṣa: Undifferentiated consciousness*, Turīyā* -Unchanging pure consciousness, *Ṛta, Cit, Caitanya, Uṇarvu, Aṟivu (old* Tamiḻ *words indicate consciousness, but in current practice may be interpreted as feeling and knowledge)*

These words and concepts are representative of the transcendent category of consciousness in Indian thought. In these states, consciousness is undifferentiated from the cosmic oneness of the very principle that makes life possible, and is resonant with cosmic order that governs the principles of life. Considered as born out of wisdom, and deep insight, it is a state of being, where all differences dissolve and pure awareness rises. Being in this state is considered to be timeless, spaceless and free of all dualities and identities. And the popular refrain '*kaṇṭavar viṇṭilar, viṇṭavar kaṇṭilar'* emphasizes that those who have experienced this state do not speak of it, and those who speak of it have not experienced this state. This indicates the paradox, as someone who claims awareness of the experience is split into a dual state and hence not in a state of dissolution and complete oneness.

However, this transcendental state of consciousness is also seen as deep awareness where a person realises his/her oneness with all life. While our everyday lives may not have sustained experiences of transcendence, all of us may go through these moments of transcendence unexpectedly where a feeling of oneness abides. *Ṛta*, the cosmic order of harmony is a larger conceptual

framework, that considers the fundamental principles of harmony that bind the existence of any form of life and the multiple relationships between life forms, heavenly bodies, landscapes, human behavior, practices and actions across the cosmos. *Ṛta* is a fundamental concept to Indian thought and may even be perceived as a root concept of the Hindu framework on which all other concepts depend.

ii. Consciousness as Perceptual Awareness, Language, Wisdom

Vāc: Word, Language; *Rūpa*: Form - verbal/ non-verbal and gestural/ visual, senses, *Prajñā* – Discerning intellect, wisdom, *Jāgṛti* (wakeful), *Uṇarvu, Aṟivu*

Consciousness when interpreted thorough the lens of awareness, language and wisdom bring the importance of being aware/ perceptive of a state of being, articulate about it, be reflective and discerning and engage with wisdom that arises out of such deep reflection and articulation. Consciousness in these conceptual categories moves into the inbetween space of transcendence and re-engaging with everyday life after transcendent experiences. They form the steps towards individual as well as cultural consciousness that engage in developing shared language and vocabulary drawn out of wisdom, insight and intuition.

iii. Consciousness as Paradox

Līlā - Play, *Māyā* – Illusive, paradoxical play, *Sākṣi*: Witness element; *Svapna* - Dream state

Consciousness in Indian categories is identified as paradoxical and much of the philosophical and mystical texts as well as mythological work plays on varied concepts of paradox. The witness *Sākṣi,* who experiences consciousness makes it

possible for existence, identity and awareness possible. But it is strange, as there are so many witnesses to the witness, that one finds a recursive pattern in awareness, making it a paradox,

- for without the witness, would we know we existed?
- However if there is a witness, then who is the self?
- When the witness dissolves, what happens to identity and existence?
- What is the relationship of the witness consciousness with pure consciousness?

These questions lead on to the conceptual categories of a dream state *Svapna*, and a playful state *līlā*. Both these states celebrate the illusive and elusive possibilities of consciousness. In the dream state, one continues to experience all the sensorial experiences through the mind, even as the senses themselves are inactive and at rest. In the playful state of *līlā*, one actively engages with the illusive and elusive aspects of consciousness, playing with oneness, duality and multiplicity, playing between transcendence and being here and now, between falling in love with another, while dissolving oneself, as the *ras līlā* dance of *Kṛṣṇa* signifies. *Māyā,* which embodies the illusive nature of consciousness, in itself, is a category that indicates a highly aware conscious state imbued with awareness of illusion and paradox as personified in the goddess *Māyā.* Freedom from *Māyā* will lead to transcendence, and yet it is *Māyā* herself who offers the path and direction, yet another paradox within the paradox.

iv. Consciousness as Mystic Eexperience/ Transformative, Transcendental Awareness

Ānanda - Ecstasy, Bliss; *Kaivalya – Transcendent pure consciousness; Samādhi* - A state of complete absorption; *Sthitaprajña* - A state of wisdom and stability; *Aṉpu, Tayai* - Love and compassion

The states of consciousness, in which one is flooded in an effulgent experience of transformation, complete absorption and transcendence form another category of concepts woven around consciousness. Extending the idea of such transformation, I also draw out love and compassion within this category of concepts, as both these emotional states of being are also the most transformative in human experience, that are akin to states of bliss. Love that arises of compassion and compassion that evolves from love, arise out of wisdom, enabling fundamental transformation of the self. Ecstatic, blissful happiness, as a state of being, is also a fractional moment of time, when a leap is possible between states of consciousness.

v. Consciousness as Aesthetic Transformation and Experience

Rasa, Rasānubhūti, Rasānubhava, Sahṛdayatva

Rasa is the flavor, mood or sentiment and states of being as understood in Indian aesthetic theories. The experience of *rasa* is seen as integral to transformation. *Rasa* is also consciousness filled with aesthetics that traverse the possibilities of human experience. *Rasānubhūti* and *rasānubhava* arising out of aesthetic encounters are seen as *brahmānanda sahodara* (Dehejia), akin to the state of *ānanda,* blissful ecstasy. They are imbued with the same powers of transformation and blissful experience as the one that arises out of meditation or contemplation.

The state of consciousness in which one is one at heart with the artist and the artwork, a vibrant resonance, is the advance theory of aesthetic experience *sahṛdayatva. Sahṛdaya***,** the aesthete who is at one with the artist and the artwork, encounters transformation through the recreating of an artistic work through an aesthetic experience of it.

vi. Consciousness as Embodied Being/ Practice/Transformation

Sādhana/ *Yajña, Yoga, Prakṛti*, *Jīva* (unity consciousness), *Suṣupti* (sleep)

Consciousness is also embodied; it is as much material as it is non-material. The embodied and material aspects of consciousness emerge in the category of *Prakṛti,* where *Prakṛti* is seen as manifest consciousness of the unmanifest *Puruṣa.* Manifested consciousness, is the state in which it is pliable, open to transformation, dynamic and full of the richness and possibilities of experience. It is the state in which crafting of consciousness becomes possible. *Sādhanā, Yajña,* and *Yoga*, consider this practice of crafting, transforming, and working contemplatively with consciousness in all its embodied aspects, including the material body in all its sheaths- subtle, gross and transcendental, the *pañcakośhas* – physical body, breath and energy, mind, thought and emotions, discerning intellect and bliss. In *suṣupti*, the deep sleep state, the body and the self, encounter a state of oneness, that occurs with no awareness. However, in our everyday deep sleep state, our embodied experience encounters oneness. We wake up with this experience, that we have neither memory nor awareness of and yet it is an experience that we have encountered, and hence remains dormant within us, awaiting our ability to experience it in awareness. Much of the contemplative, aesthetic and meditative practices in Indian thought focus on the practice and

crafting of consciousness as the essential purpose of living, and the most creative act of being.

vii. Consciousness as Witness

Sākṣin – Witnessing self, *Vimarśa* – Reflective Consciousness

The reflective state of consciousness, which allows for both witnessing and a process of reflective awareness, critique, pondering are essential categories for crafting consciousness.

viii. Consciousness as Socio-Political Engagement and Relationship Embedded in Everyday Reality

Camūka Uṇarvu, Bandhu, Uṟavu, Svadharma

Relationship is central to the manifestation of consciousness in everyday reality and the concept of *bandhu*, *uṟavu* (Tamil), (both indicate relationship) is therefore integral to Indian thought. It is in this category of relationship that socio-political as well as cultural realities of everyday life are encountered. It is also in this category of relationship that mystical, divine relationships, abstract relationships that connect us to all life are all pondered about. It is the most responsive state of consciousness that can occur between life forms and beings, in an act of drawing the bonds of connections that guide us to co-evolve and relate with each other. And it is bound by one's own righteous conduct, *svadharma.*

Emotional complexity arises from a consciousness that is multi-dimensional and richly nuanced. Crafting such a complex layered consciousness can lead to developing a more nuanced and enriching relationship with the natural world. A

relational consciousness that is both transcendent and deeply rooted in the natural world paves way for a culture that can deal with the ecological crisis with more wisdom, love and compassion. A *porous* consciousness evolves out of such complexity and multi-dimensionality. On the other hand, being open, without the rigid boundaries of self and other, *porosity* enables emotional complexity and relationship with the natural world.

A *porous* consciousness thus blends the reflective, transcendent, perceptive, aesthetic, embodied, paradoxical, playful, self-aware, ecstatic, loving and compassionate states of consciousness. It is such a layered consciousness that becomes capable of operating in transdisciplinary frameworks as it is not limited by theoretical categories or limited boundaries of ontology and epistemology.

5.3. *Porosity* as principle of Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness

Porosity as a principle of consciousness is fundamentally an intrinsic state of ecological consciousness. It is both a physical and emotional principle that offers much towards developing our relationship with the natural world. Intrinsic, is reflective of the word *svabhāva,* natural to a state of being. As discussed in chapter 1, our biological functions are *porous* exchanges with elements and other beings, our emotional lives are also porous exchanges across people and other life forms. Without the ability to give and receive, in mutual exchange, often unconsciously, we would cease to exist as a species. When this relational awareness rises, both conceptually and sensually in an embodied manner through both physical and emotional experiences, we enter a reflective consciousness state. In this reflexive state, we become more aware of the constant nature of exchanges across life-forms, through

life, death, disease, emotional states of being and sensuous experiences. And this state of relational awareness with reflexivity opens insight into and the ability to experience a *porous* state of consciousness. We become aware of the principle of *porosity* that drives our very existence, and how it is the essential aspect of our consciousness that enables relationship, co-evolution and communication.

While our relationships with the natural world maybe driven by different emotions - awe, wonder, fear, disgust, anger or otherwise, depending on our exposure, training, experiences, lifestyles, orientation, philosophical and cultural beliefs and values, all of them are essentially *porous* relationships. In my work, I root *porosity* in the transcendent state of oneness with life, where judgments cease to exist. This is a state that arises out of experience of even a moment of feeling the essence of life that binds us together with everything, and floods us with both calmness and ecstatic bliss. While this moment of experience and state of being may be considered mystical or esoteric, it is also what is considered really real in the Indian traditional frameworks of consciousness as well as truth/ reality.

It is only in this state, where we are free of conceptual intellectual categories, judgments, and the ego consciousness, we find a paradigm for creativity and reflexivity. This paradigm provides the environment in which an ethical framework can be evolved on how to work with *porosity* to deepen our relationship with the natural world and not leave it as another superficial concept that merely describes a principle of consciousness. It is in sva-dharma, a self- correcting state of consciousness that is bound to the laws of cosmic order as well as creativity that can actions of *porosity* can find their moral compass. Arising out of a self- reflexive state

sva-dharma integrates into its understanding the notion of interconnections, and interdependences of the cosmos. And in this state of consciousness, *porosity* too becomes intrinsic, as it is absorbed in cosmic order.

As an intrinsic state of ecological consciousness, *porosity* aligns with *ṛta,* in which the cosmic order of harmony drives the ethics of truth, relationship and action. *Dharma* and *satya* too become the guiding principles.

5.4. Reflecting on 'Value' in *Porosity*

To me, there are two layers, two paradigms that are trying to work simultaneously in an inquiry on the *porous self*.

1. The *porous self* is an intrinsic nature of my consciousness,
2. however the need to study it arose from my social beingness and interrelationship with the world at large, the impact of human life on the natural world and on themselves as a species.

While I propose to study self, I seek the study to play out as a way for us to find an ethical value system that will enable us to act socially. The study itself therefore entwines the active and contemplative values as distinguished by Daya Krishna (1969).

The first paradigm thus rises from my inherently irreverent, playful self that is looking to inquire into this *porous self* with a gentle sense of wit, to negate it in order to understand it, to play with it, to mock it, to humor it.

- If a self has no boundary, how is it to be a self?
- Can I lose the self, I wonder, to a no-self rather than a *porous* one?

- When I am *porous*, can I be another self, another being? Can I choose a self because I am malleable?

The *porous self*, endangers all notions of self, that it is almost a fierce opposition than a creative ally.

The second paradigm rises out of social relationships and action and is the active value that seeks to inquire into the ramifications of the *porous self* on ethical everyday action.

- A self, that is bound by social norms, how is to stay *porous* and interact with duality and multiplicity in the everyday world?
- How does a *porous self* act in a context sensitive manner to resolve environmental conflicts and social realities?

A philosophical engagement understanding the contemplative notion of being; in freedom that the *porous self* seeks out and its possible meaning in terms of a value in an ethical sense; in action, offer two contrary paradigms trying to meaningfully resolve themselves.

Is the paradigm of resolution in the self or in the social world? - This inherent contrariness lies at the heart of this inquiry.

- While at one level there is a claim- There is a *porous self*, it happens at the point when our notions of body as boundary disappear both as a cognitive idea and a sensuous one.
- This is followed by logical pursuit of that claim, a phenomenological inquiry into experience, teased in its contours by cognitive and aesthetic paradoxes that engage with the inquiry extending its dimensions. This approach is pure

play. It does not pay heed to proving a possibility, not even an assurance of the existence of the first claim.

However there is a moral ethical boundary in which the inquiry attempts to forge its way from a metaphysical, self-reflexive reality of self-inquiry in freedom into social reality and self-inquiry in engaged action. These are however not to be seen as a seamless singular paradigm in which these phenomena occur, but two different paradigms, where the laws and rules of play are completely different. This incongruence of paradigms, philosophical, moral, ethical and aesthetic is critical for the readers to engage with in order to understand the flexibility of self-inquiry in freedom and its correlated notion of self-inquiry in action bound within ethical inquiries.

- Does this mean that the first paradigm has no ethical concerns?
- Or does it rather mean that one is attempting to coalesce these two paradigms in a rather imaginative fashion?
- Are they encounters and are they to be left as such, and in the rich documentation that arises at their meeting points suffice as possible guidelines?
- Does one limit the other or enrich it?
- But what are the points of intersection at which either of these events/ effects happen?

There is a certain endless quality of continuity to inquire if one does not choose to close the inquiry one way or the other and also to allow perpetual paradoxes to play out in the form of a monologue addressed to self. In that there is play, and in poetic

metre or lyrical prose, the play has a certain structure, a definitely intentional game, not a naïve continuity.

In the early phase of my research through writing as a practice, a free flowing intuitive model of inquiry led to expressing the emotional and metaphorical approach to discerning *porosity* as an experience as expanding in the following lyrical prose piece. Notions of consciousness, being, pristine, wilderness, urban, rural, forest categories and notions of ecological consciousness arose in writing this piece. The metaphors were drawn from direct experiences of the natural world where correspondences are drawn between the quality of different beings and *porosity* as an element of consciousness.

> *The Porous Self is the music of wilderness within a human being. It is a nature of consciousness that is layered and woven within the realms of our identities as humans. Unseen, unheard, quiet and nuanced, it is a realm of subtlety needing to be uncovered with patience and diligence. How does one experience porosity and find the right words to articulate something that is simultaneously metaphysical and real? How does one describe wilderness, its shape and inherent quality within the dimensions of the human frame and as a disposition of the human self? It is this pulsating spirit, the vast and unending desert in all its harshness and the limitless rain forest in its teeming life that shapes the porous self. Mountains in moonlit night, unrecognizable forms and shape, driven by the forces of shifting tectonic plates and the silent depths of the secretive ocean, tempestuous and calm at once – both guide this porous self to become, to be. It exists, unyielding to man himself and often elusive to*

him and yet it remains alive in the most startling ways hidden inside our limited definitions of self. And its porosity evolves like weathered rock and fine sand, intertwined roots of trees that hold on to the earth with fine tenacity.

It becomes earthworm and phoenix worm, compost and new life, it becomes debris and dust, showering and disintegrating into soil and ocean. Absorbing, transpiring, osmotic, breathing in and breathing out, the porous self becomes a vital interaction with nature allowing the mind and body to slow down and reframe themselves in different dimensions. Transparency and opacity change like the rhythms of music, as do density and intensity in these symbiotic bartering of soul, spirit, matter and energy. This wilderness of spirit demands subtle shifts of time and space and therefore deep changes in the very dimensions of our existence. Any of us who have walked through hours of a natural landscape can feel it throbbing through us, this sacred temperament of the porous time and space. It is frightening in its overwhelming intensity and perhaps comforting for the same reasons.

The sweetness of this self lies in its terrible innocence, in its intelligence, in its deep emotion that resonates in the echo of wild species, in the wild elephants, in their solitary tusker and the matriarch with her deep commitment to family and the playful babies. Its freedom lies in the swifts, their thrilling sense of being in the air, the creative spirit within them defining the form of their bodies and wings. It's subtlety lies in the camouflage of the tigress as she stealthily slips into the undergrowth, only to be welcomed volubly by her cubs in healthy unsatiatable joy. Snake soul slithers through it in graceful quietude,

as does reptilian stillness. All of this is the essence of the porous self, in its eons of relationship to nature.

This resonance in both spirit and form with nature's diversity, its biotic and abiotic elements are inseparable from the textures of the porous self and hence the nature of its consciousness. Today its poignancy lies in its survival in man made cities, the glory of imperviousness to nature defining its gilded cage. The city itself is indeed a fine construct, but its hardened opaqueness leaves no room for the whale's journey of thousands of miles. And its tragedy lies in its pristineness, for rarely is pristineness understood, unless it is to be exploited for oil, mineral, coal, gas, for wood, feather, soil and endless resource. And the porous self is as hunted as our wilderness. Its subtleties elude the hunter and perhaps therefore evoke his fear, his need to destroy what he does not understand. Any remnants of its survival remain as precarious and endangered as our landscapes and the diversity of our species. Yet, its salvation lies in its ability to regenerate into forest, wild storm, teeming life, hot springs and creature. And for those in whom, the porous self is still alive and active; it is their cross to bear and their exultation in life.

And because the porous self emanates from nature herself, it is not something that one can acquire as much as one can gently awaken. And because its integrity arises from the ecological principles of nature, the porous self has immense strength and capacity for endurance. And because it is a way of being, the actions of the porous self are intrinsic. They are neither driven by

altruism or an empty need to fill time and save the planet. They are sometimes liberated in the outrage of self-defense and the intelligence to survive.

Yet, the language of this self is lost, unarticulated and bound by newer ways of being and a fragmented, distorted self that separates the human and nature through the desire for unbridled materiality. And in that lost language lies its torment and excruciating boundaries, for unfortunately language fosters our ability to perceive, think and be. Every instance in which we can find the time and space to be in resonance, in tune with wilderness, the need for language disappears and overwhelming certainty of being takes its place.

Yet, one must come back to the impervious city to make meaning, to protect, to survive, to speak, cajole, leave it be. And in this strange relationship between the porous self and the city, between its subtleties and the hunter, its poignancy and tenacity lie tremendous possibilities. And to plunge into those possibilities this self must be protected and then nurtured; it must find its voice, self-defense and strength.

Platitudes to living have no meaning to this self, for it rejoices in the very same things that allow wilderness to be mysterious and unfathomable – alertness to life and resonance with it, fragility and will, integrity and death, the sensuous and the sacred. And life is an integrated whole – it is not just living breathing species, but ecosystem and the network of all those vibrating cords that make it possible for us to be here at this time in this fragile planet. And guiding the porous self to find its intrinsic voice is perhaps the greatest

challenge of our times for it is as critically endangered as the mountain gorilla. Unless it finds both its purpose and salvation, its rudder in these times, we will lose our best allies for an ecological consciousness.

To gently awaken this porous self and relentlessly pursue it within oneself is then in its own way a prayer of being. Luckily, there have been those ahead of us articulating, defining and living in porous frames with nature to guide us to rediscover our own spirits of wilderness. These journeys are deeply individual and yet they must have the nurturing and unstinting support of friends. And because our lives are mangled in millions of definitions of what it means to be human and ideas of human growth and development, it is a precarious journey back into the porous self. Yet without that courage to reach far within ourselves, we will remain raging defensive creatures, quiet reclusive beings or simply indifferent ones tormented by what we cannot set free from within ourselves – wild wind, scents of the night jasmine and the albatross in flight.

While this reflective and intuitive poetic essay gave me a roadmap, it emerged some important questions on

- How to look at nature?
- What is nature?
- What is my perception of nature? and
- How do I evolve language that would allow me to frame nature in and through a *porous* consciousness.
- Where could the two different dimensions of value meet?

Also in the above piece of writing, there is a strong contrast locating the urban and wilderness at opposite ends, positioning one against the other. While, it would be impossible to not see the differences in landscape, space, time and emotional expansion that is enabled in a natural landscape versus a city, it is also not impossible to find a small piece of wilderness within the city in a single creeper, wrapping around a metal fence or a calotes (garden lizard) rushing through a tiny backyard potted garden. Nor is it impossible to find a great sense of *porosity* in the first onset of monsoon in the built environment of the city. While I found these contrasts essential to drive my early work, I also felt they were not such clear categories and I decided to play with categories by posing paradoxical and absurd questions to myself to emerge new categories of perception and understanding of nature.

There were also strong questions of value that were emerging that I realized I would need to unravel in greater depth to comprehend *Porosity* as a state of being and as a state of consciousness. And in locating the space between the microcosmic and macrocosmic, the mundane and the spiritual, in which rasa as aesthetic consciousness resides, I found a spatio-temporal possibility for *porosity* where social, ethical values meet internal spiritual values of transcendence, the place where *ṛta, dharma and satya* meet.

5.5. Emergences in Paradox

In the poetic inquiry below I began to juxtapose different categories of being to play with notion of *porosity*. There are ontic and epistemic questions. There are irreverent, reckless questions. There are genuine questions of bafflement and then they are layered and juxtaposed to create inter-textual paradoxes. There is my own sense of

humour, memory of lived experiences within a part liberal and part orthodox Hindu family and playing with the 'high spiritual' categories of matter and spirit and the association between them. In the poem, these are used to inquire into limitations of human thought and notions of reality. But the humor lies in my internal processing, possibly invisible to the readers. It also introduces imaginative realms into seemingly real ones.

Absurdity allows for paradox to take reign. But this is intentional, a way to remain creative without the weight of clarity that is bound in well-defined articulations that have an end goal. To tease the clarity in paradox through poetry is an intentional game. The play raises paradoxes, but also in voicing conflict, refrains from resolving it as an immediate action. If there were to be no resolution, then we leave the question in its original creative state of possibilities, both cognitive and sensory, or in the category that is simultaneously cognitive and sensory- aesthetic, as I would argue for it.

Reflecting on Porosity

When is something porous?
Does it require fluidity?
Is it the taste, rasa that melts?
Is it something that can dissolve?
Is porous when one disappears into another?
Is porous when one amalgamates into a new whole?
Is it that which has form or that which is formless?

Or perhaps that space between the form and the formless?

What is the play of the porous?

Is it something that is supple, is it something that cracks?

What is the quality of that which is porous? Is it structured or unstructured?

Is porous multiplicity or oneness? Can one coalesce into the other? What is left, is that porous?, What is created – is that porous?

What disintegrates – is that porous?

That which is buried, or that which is cremated? – Which of them is porous?

Must it be porous in air, or water or earth? Must it be porous in fire or sky?

Is the inner sky porous in its spatiality or temporality?

Is it porous biologically or psychically?

Is it porous through the senses or through transcendence?

What is porous? – matter or spirit? śarīra or rasa?

Can the body transform, is it porosity then?

Or is it the mind that plays with illusion that is porous?

Can consciousness be annihilated or does it merely become the formless?

When is something porous? And what is that which is porous?

That which is porous, what is its materiality?

Can it ever transcend physical form if it merely becomes psychic,

yet another form coalescing into new multitudes?

Can it be contained in space, this porosity

Or is it bound by time?

The dead human becomes flowers

In austere transitions they say…

This shape shifting- is that porosity

Of one being entering and embodying another

Transitioning into yet another

constituent of dirt…

Does porosity leave or enter?

Is it reticence and shyness or brash courage,

These subtle transitions of self and being,

these grand transitions of sun and sky

Which way does one plot, map, consecrate, resolve, articulate the porous?

Is it embedding or releasing,

Is it great stillness or tremendous movement?

This paradox of porosity, is it layered sheathing or nakedness?

Is porosity sensuous surrender, the act of making love,

the terror of creation or destruction

or is it the fine act of balance?

Where does one locate this porosity

In physicality, in materiality,

In spiritual quest or metaphysical meandering?

How does one map the intangible, the intuitive revelation?

What is this landscape on which the porous enacts itself out?

Is there a moral code, should we bring in ṛta, the cosmic natural law?

Is porous pervading silence

Or is it that anāhata nād, all pervasive,

The great silence under the banyan tree?

How does one map, plot, locate this transience,

Or is it transcendence, effervescence, gentle

scent of the permeating night jasmine?

Did it travel through the nerves or the sap of the bones?

Did it travel through the breath, prāṇa

Or through song or word or meaning?

Did it travel through mind, or heart or intellect?

Or did it just shatter through it all?

Did it become ānanda or ananta?

Endless joy!

In this poem, while paradox and relationships are used as two key frames to build the inquiry, *yajña* / transformation continues to be the basic principle guiding it. The poem tries to locate its inquiries through

- Purely physical categories in a Cartesian frame,
- Expands further into notions of subtle and subtler bodies breaking those frames pushing the inquires into states of transcendence.
- It also tries to move from emotional to cognitive categories, in the process coalescing or collapsing categories through juxtaposition.
- In locating *porosity* in the mystical state of consciousness, *ānanda*, a particular leap is made in the poem, connecting it to a transcendent category.

While the poem was written with intention, a free flow of categories was done unconsciously and not in an intellectual manner. Intuition, and cultural memories were allowed to flow freely for an emergence of ideas. One may pursue any one of the questions of the poem, a chain of them, or the underlying matrix of paradox that supports the very question. This is the delightfulness of the question – 'When is something porous?' Now if one were to place this question in the realm of logical

meaning making exercise, one may end up in complete failure. But positioned in an aesthetic paradox of sorts, it offers very many creative possibilities.

The following poem written to engage with the two categories that enable aesthetic paradox was written in the form of a metaphysical-philosophical poem to emerge the essence of the question – 'What is real and what is imagined?'

Meeting (*Aug 11, 2016)*

What is real?
What is imagined?
Where do the two meet?
Breath- Hot, cool, rapid, slow, gentle
appears out of the nostrils
out of pores; fine skin
disappears into wind;
wind into fiery space;
space into nothingness.
Which is real;
which imagined?
The breath of the body
or that of thought?
Endless space
or the emptiness?
Where do they meet?
The real and the imagined!

5.6. Aesthetics, Creativity and *Porosity*

The *porous* state also corresponds with aesthetic consciousness states of *rasa* that are considered equivalent to the state of *Brahmānanda* in Indian thought. (Hiriyanna 1954; Dehejia 1996). These states maybe more ephemeral of fleeting and yet they are capable of transforming us through the experience of *rasa*. (Hiriyanna, 1954).

In *porosity*, one is in an absorptive state, where emotions, experiences and actions are absorbed into both involution and dissolution. When the contemplation of the natural world and human experience lies at the heart of a creative moment for an artist in a state of *porosity*, she is immersed in the moment and the experience. In such absorption three events happen,

1. There is an internal re-ordering of the individual self of the artist
2. The artist becomes an aesthete and there is a complete oneness with the experience, the natural world, the emotional states and heightened sensitivity emerges
3. The artist discovers a resonance with the cosmic order of harmony (*ṛta*) in the resonance of the external being with the beating of one's own heart.

These three events open the heart of the individual artist to the cosmic heart beating as one. Creativity then emerges out of this new order that recognizes plenitude and oneness. *Pūrṇa* and *śūnya*. Being able to be open to a highly aesthetic state of transcendence and oneness, allows for a *porous* being to exist without inhibitions and boundaries. And such an aesthetic state opens the doorway to dynamic creativity that is intrinsic, like an *urṇanābha*, a spider who weaves from within herself, the incredible web of life. It is through a self-reflexive, contemplative practice that seeks

out the transcendent that an active state of *porosity* can be entered, endured, and dwelled in.

Porosity here is parallel to and resonant with *rasa*. However, as a theory that seeks to unify diverse concepts of consciousness, *porosity* draws much from the theory of both *rasa* and *dhvani* and integrates them with other concepts of consciousness, to evolve a integrated environmental aesthetics theory.

The mountains lament through me,
I dissolve as they are mined
And rise elsewhere, the torment-
merely a churning of the ocean now.
I lament through the mountains…
As they find me asleep.

5.7. Direct Insight in *Porosity*

Direct Insight, *pratibhā* / intuition is a guiding framework in practice. Oftentimes a poem acts as a revelation. The poem given below arose out of reflection, reading and practice intersecting with each other. Written in the style of Annamayya's *padam* poetry, it is addressed to the audience/ reader, however in the act of writing, I am writing it to myself. The moment when I realize that it is a simple knot to unravel and how to do it, is a flash of insight. The refrain 'It is a simple knot to unravel...' reiterates this flash of insight as an action that I must perform in my consciousness. The insight also helps me find the connections in the Indian tradition between *ṛta. dharma. satya* and *nāṭya. citra. kāvya,* drawing the interconnections between

philosophy, spirituality, ecological consciousness, concepts of reality, ethical framework and artistic practice. The interconnections and insights are instantaneous. However, from this point onwards, I have a clearer idea both for my research and my practice. I realise the organization of my curated journal emerging from this flash of insight. It also leads me to new directions in my research practice.

Porosity

It is a simple knot
to unravel...
The self dissolves
its illusions
and becomes one
with the formless
and then with the many forms
and then with itself.

Out of this one act
rises all others
ṛta. dharma. satya
nāṭya. citra. kāvya
The self is here and now
the performance
unfolds
and slowly goes back

into bud

and bīja.

This is the true nature

of sādhanā

This is the language,

the vāk of my ancestors,

the way I remember them

in the thrill of my body.

Like underground water

they have seeped through

me, in porous rock, mud, sand

and tree root.

I celebrate with form,

formlessness;

as we have done for millenia.

It is a simple knot

to unravel...

Stay with the self

and let it shatter...

the deer in alertness

and the kingfishers

talking to each other

will then draw them into you

as will star studded skies

and distant planets.

It is a simple knot

to unravel...

The path seemingly long,

the methods colourful and

decked, illusory.

It is a simple knot

to unravel...

Over a period of time, I learn to use intuition with thoughtfulness and to extend it in imagination.. It does not stay as the overwhleming flashes of insight that lead me into ecstasy alone, it is more sustained as a practice, where I learn to look for clues, make connections, explore them further in theory, extend tradition into new original thinking and directions.

5.8. *Porosity* as Symbol and Nuance

All of the above diverse yet unifying dimensions of the inquiry into *porous self* tend to become both unwieldy and too vast to contain. However, as an artist, this allows me to use another construct – the symbol as a terse, compression of a complex idea. In order to find a strong container to develop it as a framework, I then position *the*

porous self as an inquiry into symbol where symbol is, as Raimon Panikkar (2005, 12) says "not an objectifiable reality." The idea of *porosity* as presented here does not seek to unravel it as a concept, but seeks to unfold or unfurl it as a symbol. "The symbol reveals the symbolized in the symbol itself, not outside, transcending thus the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism" (Panikkar 2005, 12).

Artists across time work with symbols and myth. The *porous self* is a symbol for diverse concepts, principles, actions and practices. It is a symbol for a state of being that allows the relationships between oneness, duality and multiplicity to emerge as a fluid dynamic. The *porous self* is also a symbol of time, space and time-space where time and space are also the material in which the self unfolds and the self is a material created out of time and space. *Porous* and *porosity* are firmly located in the notions of void and fullness/ completeness as the primary material for investigation of the self. Void and fullness are not opposites, but complements, one residing within the other, one dancing with the other, one becoming the other, one, no different from the other.

In this light, *porosity* is principle, but also action, it is dynamic in nature, the changing states of void in the self. *Porosity* is the action of the *porous.* When there is *porosity* in something, it allows for exchange, transfer, transmutation, transformation, integration and passage. In that, *porosity* is the very nature of the self across all its sheaths and it becomes the verb of the self.

So the reader is invited to read this thesis as a participatory action of creating a symbol of the *'porous self'* for a contemporary ecological consciousness rather than

comprehend it as an intellectual concept, the frameworks of which, it defies, in approach, method and practice.

Balkrishna Doshi (2017), legendary architect, in the 27th Annual architecture lecture that he delivered at Royal Academy of Arts says in a short film at the end:

> "We never notice light. We just assume it. But when an object is created around it, it creates a nuance."

Porosity is a framework, an object around the light, our self that we just assume and never notice. As an artist crafting consciousness, I see this framework as something that will allow me to create a nuance.

6. Summary of Transdisciplinary Framework / Theory of *Porosity*

Based on the discussions above, the following principles emerge as essential to the practice of and inquiry into *porosity*. They are also a system of ideas that allow for emerging a transdisciplinary theory of *porosity*.

i. *Porosity* as a theory rests best within the paradigms of an integrated theory of environmental aesthetics, ethics and philosophy. It is only as an integrated theory of all three fields that it can emerge as a theory of practice, value and action.

ii. *Porosity* is a theory of consciousness, and needs to be unraveled in multiple dimensions and layers to bring out its principles as a state of intrinsic ecological consciousness, and to develop actions that emerge out of this state.

iii. *Porosity* is an aesthetic consciousness state, in resonance with the concept of *rasa*, and its, values, actions and practice are best resolved in the dynamic spatio-temporal state between the mundane and the transcendent.

iv. *Porosity* is a state of being where perception alters notions of reality

v. *Porosity* cannot be completely comprehended through intellectual arguments, and requires to be studied as a symbol in order to unravel intuition, insight, and states of reality that emerge in this metaphysical state of being.

vi. *Porosity* needs to be studied equally through practice, as practice unravels layers that cannot be cognitively unraveled without the experiences, insights and intuitions of practice.

vii. *Porosity* needs to be reflected within an embodied ecosophy, where the concept of body needs to be extended beyond what is currently understood in the field.

viii. In order to investigate *porosity*, notions of reality need to be suspended, and active inquiries into paradox emerged.

ix. Values as inherent in *porosity* or extrinsic to but required for active states of *porosity* need to be emerged in context-sensitivity.

x. *Porosity* can be an active state of dwelling for an artist, however it requires continuous self-reflexive, contemplative practices and codes of conduct in alignment with *ṛta*, *dharma* and *satya* for the doorways of *porosity* to remain open.

xi. In a state of absorption, flow, dynamic exchange and openness, *porosity* is a principle of consciousness that emerges in the states of being between mundane and transcendent.

xii. To stay in a state of *porosity*, play, *līlā* becomes the path and the means of engagement with the world.

xiii. The artist is first and foremost the aesthete, *sahṛdaya* with a brave, courageous and expansive heart and it is such a heart in which openness and dissolution become possible. To be *porous*, one must be an aesthete first, with a heart that can resonate with the cosmic order.

xiv. *Porosity*, as emerged through Indian philosophy, ethics and aesthetics in tandem with contemporary concepts on environmental ethics, philosophy and aesthetics is transdisciplinary as a new set of concepts, vocabulary, actionable knowledge and practices are emerged drawing from the richness of varied traditions that draw from both reductionist and holistic paradigms, past and present, current environmental crisis and cosmic order.

xv. *Porosity* is a complex theory and is non-linear in nature, allowing for plurality and multi-dimensionality, relational and context-sensitive values as its attributes.

xvi. *Porosity* is a principle of consciousness.

Chapter 5

The Porous Self: Tracing Lineage

As indigenous people, our languages are those of the earth and it is those languages that we use to speak with our mother…We lose our connection and our ancient ways of knowing of the earth when our languages fall silent… the sake of future generations we must ensure they too can speak the language of our ancestors.

Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock, a Mohawk community Bear Clan Chief from Kahnawà:ke
International Year of Indigenous Languages,
Inaugral Address at UN Headquarters, New York, 2019

https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/social/international-year-of-indigenous-languages-2019.html

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I am an artist; Art-making is my practice. I am an educator; Teaching is my practice. I am an artist-philosopher; Philosophizing is my practice. I am a designer; Designing is my practice. I am a naturalist; Observing and being in nature using art as my tool is my practice. However, the mystic in me is curious of the 'I" that proclaims itself with such audacity in its multiple roles and questions the very nature of the 'self'.

***The Porous Self*: Tracing Lineage**

1. *I am Folklore*

Whom shall I choose - the God or the Goddess; the man or the woman or perhaps should I choose the androgynous Ardhanāri? Does gender matter if I am child? Perhaps I should choose between the strange animal forms I see in my dreams. Should I choose the horse or the elephant, the crocodile or an amalgamation of animals, the yāli, which fuses the horse, the elephant, the lion and the crocodile into one form? What is my identity, a twelve-armed goddess or a ten -headed demon? What is my identity- the three breasted Mīnākṣī or the one-legged Śiva . Whom shall I choose to perpetuate the myth of my identity, the village Goddess Māriyammā or the powerful Karuppaṇṇa? Does it matter who I am if I have a modern identity? Maybe I should be content with being Indian; being a woman in the 21st century. Maybe I should be content with being an artist; being a designer. Maybe I should be content with a single image of myself as all the other images I think of, are merely disguises. But who am I between me and myself? A ten armed goddess or a decorative pillar? Am I an "it" or a "she" or a human?

Whom or what shall I choose to perpetuate the myth of my identity in the centrality of the 21st century?



Fig 1: The Village God Karuppaṉṉa watches on protectively as the villagers wind down for the evening, Watercolours and Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 17 in X 7.25 in, 2018.

Dear reader,

Where are you from? Have you been to the south of India; to the land inhabited by the people who speak Tamiḻ? Maybe if you have not been there, you will skip the first paragraph because you cannot understand my choice of identities. I want to speak to you in a visual language, but maybe you have never seen my visuals. Maybe you have never smelt the fragrance of turmeric and kumkum which I smell each time I pass by a sacred temple. I wonder what is sacred about a temple. It doesn't matter anymore that I choose not to believe in religion. But I still love temples. Do you find my voice to be strange and confusing or does it remind you of your quest for identity?' (Kalyan 2007)

I am a contemporary practitioner. My genetic code is as old as the first archaeabacteria. My cultural memories span into thousands of years and move beyond frames of *Vedic* and *Āgamic* traditions into the spirit worlds of ancient tribes. It moves beyond folk dances, and huntresses, to the elemental sensuality of existence. I have

co-evolved with the earth and share relationships, conversations with all that is biotic and abiotic, which are embodied in the ritual of my living. I have memories that go far back into the *yugās*. It is primordial wealth and ancestral embrace. And my ancestors are 'more-than-human' (Abram, 1996)[1]. Sometimes when I tune in, I can feel the tectonic plates shifting, the tug of disappearing species and water enfolding me. Past and present coalesce into a continuous living present within my frame. And then, I quietly ask – What is contemporary for a practitioner? Who is this practitioner, individual yet driven by a fine sheath of cultural memories and practices? Which of those past traditions belong to her? What could be her lineage?

While my own practice and form is contemporary, my artistic process and approach, intuition and imagination are traditional, rooted in ancient cultures, if such a differentiation is even possible. Pan-Indian yet context-sensitive, these cultures I refer to range across the speculative thought traditions, lived daily rituals, art forms, landscapes, seasons, languages, diverse people and their beliefs and perceptions and worldviews that arise from these. In unpacking these cultural layers of my artistic process, I fumbled upon the *porous self* as an essential aspect of my creativity.

As described in chapter 1, I repeat here - There is an instance in which life corresponds with life without the weight and boundaries of form separating it. The knowledge of distinguishing between the human and the other is temporarily suspended in this time-space. The general rules that keep us separated as distinctive forms break to create a visceral fluid exchange of energy. There is a deeper awareness of identity that stays in the background but does not disturb the more immediate

[1] David Abram has coined the term 'more-than-human' in his book, Spell of the Sensuous – Perception and Language in a more-than-human world, 1996.

resonance of life that is happening with a sharp immediacy. Both space and time turn subtle, and sublime teasing out nuanced relationships that otherwise seem impossible in what we deem as everyday reality. This experience of time, space and energy as they collude with each other is what I perceive and represent here as *porosity*.

The ability of a person to experience such states of reality and being lies in their ability to be a *porous self*. In the following poem, I seek to find my intrinsic connection with my experiences in the natural world. The experiential principles that begin to emerge as I intuit, imagine, engage and meditate are those of dissolving, coalescing, amalgamation, transforming, transcending, simultaneity, being and becoming. The stage is the *dvāram*, the doorway between the inner and the outer. I begin to understand through the writing of many such prose and poetry pieces, painting and walking in nature, the frames of interiority and exteriority and the relationship between the two.



Fig 2: Intrinsic, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 32.75 in X 45.75 in/ 2.7 X 3.8 ft, 2016. (Painting described in greater detail in Chapter 13.

Intrinsic

From the Nābhi

the lotus blooms,

deep within

the cosmic bond

unravels

into subtle relationships

Intrinsic

this connect with

flowing time and space

in all its multiplicity, season,

form.

Emotion plays with

reason

and tree roots

soaked in mountain

sea river

entangle with

heart sky

ravines

and the gait of the

serpent eagle

embeds

into swaying

kamalam

rising from the

navel.

Interiority-Exteriority

The interior cannot be measured or related to in terms of the exterior unless these universes are aligned by virtue of the material they are made of. The interior and exterior must have the capacity to be one and the same, at the same time diverse and different. Now how is that to be achieved - clearly we need a physical universe, a moral universe, an emotional universe, a metaphysical universe that are well aligned with each other in which creative and aesthetic universes can reside. And in turn, it is the aesthetic, creative universe that lends corporal reality to the speculative, metaphysical vision of reality that is embedded in perception as well as inference and insight. If I must experience the mountain or the tree, I interiorize them physically by embodying them in dance and theatre, I use metaphors and other linguistic devices in literature, I internalize their lines and transmute them into human forms, textures, planes, abstractions in visual plastic arts, and in music I draw in their rhythm. And this can only happen because both these worlds - the interior and the exterior are one and the same - *Aṇṭamē piṇṭam, Piṇṭamē aṇṭam.*[2]

This is the distinctiveness of the integrative system of Hindu epistemic/ *pramāṇa*; A highly evolved crafting with the human self and consciousness cognizing itself in its multifarious relationships with all life, at once existential and metaphysical. However the human self is not in the centre of the physical reality of this universe. Instead it is a reflective/ reflexive self in relationship. And reflection in its very nature is *porous.*

[2] The idea extended by the Tamiḻ saints (*cittars), Aṇṭamē piṇṭam, Piṇṭamē aṇṭam,* furthers the concept that the universe is the individual body and the individual body is the universe.

Indian aesthetic theories of *rasa* (essence,flavour) and *dhvani* (theory of suggestion), the concepts of interiority brought alive through *akam* (inner) and *puṟam* (outer) categories of *Caṅkam* literature, other artistic devices of subjective, objective and inter-subjective experiences that the Indian arts explore offer us many ways to build reflexive and *porous* relationships with the exterior and our own interior. Human, culture and nature are in a continuum, indivisible wholes that are enclosed in permeable concentricity. It is in this context that aesthetics in India becomes the praxis of alternative forms of experiencing reality, transcendence and spiritual evolution, as well as a wonderfully sensuous materiality. In the nature of artistic practice that rises from this sensibility lies subtle intelligence interwoven with life in all its forms and a rich understanding of interconnectedness. In Ramanujan's words, "in the Tamiḻ poems, culture is enclosed in nature, nature is reworked in culture, so that we cannot tell the difference" (Ramanujan, 2014a).

2. The Nature Of Creativity

In researching the nature of this artistic mind and its creative temperament, the practitioner's point of view is a critical window; as also the lost roots of a philosophical contemplative tradition and its coherent and all-encompassing worldview.

In this tradition that in some senses is pan Indian, the practitioner embodies the practice and in that embodiment, new meanings emerge. These meanings are often intuitive and inspired. How does one prove or disprove except through deeper creative engagement with the intuition! It is in the deliberation between a rather unconscious idea and its counterpart that is yet to emerge; the image, that the artist reconstructs the

meanings of her intuitions. In this conversation between the form and the formless (*rūpa and arūpa*), lies the secret of the artist. It is in this sheath that her insights are drawn out, worked on, sculpted and polished into creative production. This sheath is mystical, metaphysical, rooted in reality, intensely physical and always contemporary whatever the historicity.



Fig 3: Hirna, The inner metaphysical metaphors of senses, an illustration for Kabir's song Hirna which speaks of the 25 senses and our need for awareness and discrimination, Photocolours on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2014.

The artistic processes that frame an understanding of what propels the artist to create and the forms that she chooses to engage in then become the playground for the researcher that she also is. The artist takes recourse to myth, mysticism, and symbolism to support her in the traditional world and to interpret in the many layers of subtle and gross realities. She then revels in the paradoxes that these create. The

paradoxes then become her boundless boundaries and she creates within the grammar of her chosen form, be it poetry, performance, sculpture, or visual art.

The grammar itself rooted in philosophical and metaphysical sensitivities emerges from a deeper science/ mental model that does not differentiate matter and spirit, while continuing to engage with their differences. The artist can now play on a vast canvas embedded in a vibrant, complex and fluid mechanics. The ritual of art making then becomes a sacrifice and *yoga*- meditative, contemplative and transcendental, yet rooted in the physical-material, sensuous-erotic, paradoxical realities and unrealities.

What is the value of this conversation, one may wonder? Why must one seek artistic lineage at all? In an economy where art is commodity and politics or intellectualization and certain mindlessness has taken over both its production and marketing, is there even a role for this quest? And yet as Chimamanda Adichie (2009) argues in her TED Talk 'The danger of a single story' of any culture is not that it is untrue, but that it is incomplete. And the quest of contemporary Indian artists lies in having to negotiate a complex political space where they have no language to claim their many stories, evolved from diverse cultural and environmental landscapes and memories as they are forced to fit into singular frames. The traditional artist has been forced to become a 'craftsman' and his work, a substitute for beauty to be mass manufactured, often destroying both dignity and spirit of the individual artist/community. Each artist's process and language are unique and while some may be touched by a certain traditional framework there maybe others who are not. However the power and impact of cultural nuances that direct our artistic processes will continue to be the propelling forces of our art making.

> "I would like to suggest the obvious: that cultural traditions in India are indissolubly plural and often conflicting but are organized through at least two principles, (a) context-sensitivity and (b) reflexivity of various sorts, both of which constantly generate new forms out of the old ones. What we call Brahminism, *Bhakti* traditions, Buddhism, Jainism, Tantra, tribal traditions and folklore, and lastly, modernity itself, are the most prominent of these systems. They are responses to previous and surrounding traditions; they invert, subvert, and convert their neighbors. Furthermore, each of these terms, like what we call India itself, is "a verbal tent with three-ring circuses" going on inside them. Further dialogic divisions are continuously in progress. They look like single entities, like neat little tents, only from a distance. Reflexivity takes many forms: awareness of self and other, mirroring, distorted mirroring, parody, family resemblances and rebels, dialectic, antistructure, utopias and dystopias, the many ironies connected with these responses, and so on." (Ramanujan 1989a)

Through my quest for tracing lineage came an unshakeable insight that the Indian art tradition is unbroken through millennia. The lineages continue through the deep recesses of a cultural consciousness, perhaps unconscious and invisible, nonetheless, within oneself, it is a palpable reality. And in light of Ramanujam's (1989a) frames of 'context-sensitivity' and 'reflexivity', I often find my art to be a continuing and ongoing dialog with cultural aesthetics, worldviews, inspirations, myths, philosophical inquiries that build on, question, invert, subvert, re-contextualize and reinterpret. It is in this space that my art is at once contemporary and yet culturally rooted and, in the very nature of time as it is seen in Indian worldviews, recursive, ahistorical, mythical and cyclical. I can comfortably locate myself in the worlds of

Annamayya, Kabir, the 12th century Chola sculptors, potters and weavers, bards and wandering minstrels, dancers and *Ṛṣis* and continue my artistic practices in tandem with their worlds in the 21st century. And yet, there is historicity to these cultural roots as well, creatively layered in a paradoxical sense of time and metaphor, to be unlocked by each participant. It is in reading cultural roots as textures of time in aesthetic sensibilities that a new appreciation of creative processes begins. (Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2003)

3. The Ecological Roots Of Cultural Aesthetics

Those who see all beings in themselves,

And themselves in all beings,

Relinquish hatred.

How can the seeming diversity of life

Delude the one who has seen its unity?

Īśa Upaniṣad 6–7

Translated by Donna Farhi (Farhi 2008,56)

Our creative self is our umbilical cord to the universe in which we reside. We draw our nourishment through it and express ourselves in relation to it. The universal womb, both cosmic and terrestrial is an extension of our own integral bodies by virtue of the cord that connects us. Even severed, this cord remains invisible constantly nourishing us and drawing from us, a sacred bond that human growth and development in all its diverse gentle or virulent forms cannot break. And yet in this growing period of distress when our insistent demands on the planet are endangering

all life on it including ourselves, it is essential to pause and ask ourselves harder questions about the spirit of this bond that we share with nature. And in that process, reframe our connection with our own creative selves.

As we teeter towards the edge of an environmental collapse, initiated by our own actions, there are several actions desperately needed if we seek to save our own species and any other. Of these, closely intertwined are perception of our self and our sense of creativity that emerges from it. It is in challenging the nature of our consciousness and crafting a new one, that we can find alternative ways of rebuilding our relationship to the earth.

Cultural layers of the self are often deeply rooted in the unconscious emerging from time to time in a global space. Our ecological connections and roots are also deeply embedded and often invisible or over-layered with current paradigms of a materialistic understanding of the world. And yet, beneath these many selves that we inhabit, there is also a distant memory of a primordial nature consciousness that each of us carry.

Having grown up with an innate and intrinsically *porous* sense of engaging with the world around me, art was my chosen field of engagement to unravel this deeper sensitivity that I had to life. In art, I found ways to resolve this strange paradoxical relationship I shared with life in all its many forms through contemplation, reflection and creative expression. As discourses on the ecological crisis deepen, I began inquiring more consciously into the *porous self* that I am familiar with to unravel it in research and artistic practice. Through my work and workshops, I have begun

inquiring into how artistic processes can unravel this deep primordial self, embedded in nature consciousness as integral to creativity in our contemporary world. For those environmentally inclined, my pursuit is to redefine – art, artist, artistry, artistic process and creativity in the realm of a dynamic, integral, intrinsic and *porous* consciousness as discussed in chapter 1.

> *Which viewpoint we adopt—seeing the world from the perspective of connection or separation—will determine all our interactions and how we interpret and give meaning to even the most ordinary moments. As long as we see the world from the viewpoint of separateness, we are doomed to a life of conflict and suffering. Or as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad declares, "The universe confuses those who regard it as separate from the Self " (4.6).*
>
> *The text explains:*
> *As long as there is separateness, one sees*
> *another as separate from oneself, hears*
> *another as separate from oneself, smells*
> *another as separate from oneself, speaks to*
> *another as separate from oneself, thinks of*
> *another as separate from oneself, knows*
> *another as separate from oneself. But when*
> *the Self is realized as the indivisible unity of*
> *life, who can be seen by whom? (4.14)2*
> *When we do not experience this unity as the truth of our being, all*

our thoughts and actions are propelled by a kind of involuntary ignorance.

(Farhi 2008, 29)

Porosity as a principle is one of the ways that allows us to experience our environment as a related whole rather than as a divisive multiplicity. Our sensorial interactions with the world are continuously an exchange of energies, whether tactile, tacit or imperceptible. The simple notion that our breath is not an individualized phenomenon of self, but that with each breath the entire universe is participating in a primordial ritual of life challenges what we deem as the 'human self' in the contemporary world. Further our notions of body, mind, intellect and spirit and the divisive definitions of these in common parlance are also challenged when we ask our questions through the lens of *porosity*.

Many of us do not realize that we are disconnected from the "sensate reality" of our own bodies and that this disconnection implies that we are also disconnected from our "source of aliveness" (Farhi, 2008, 81). One of the important ways to do this is to re-connect with our bodies and become alive to our "feelings, sensations, intuitions and instincts" and begin to inhabit our own bodies consciously (Farhi, 2008, 81). And in connecting back with the body, the artist finds direction to his art. In the words of Ganapathi Sthapathi, the body is melded together with the creative process as well as the work of art that emerges out of an intensely physical-metaphysical journey.

All of me is on fire

My body, my voice, my hands

I tremble with the need to express

Out of the earth I celebrate

Out of the skies comes my answer

Out of the earth I create his body

Out of space his abode

This beauty and this bounty is my source

My body is the instrument of my expressions

- *Ganapati Sthapati* (Kailasam 2004)

The privilege of an artist is to be able to live a life of seamless transparent partitions through which emotions, sensitivities and experiences seep through. What makes it possible for the artist to be like a gossamer web, rice paper, sheer fabric, allowing for intensified transitions sometimes in rapid simultaneity, at other times in long drawn seasonal shifts? The artist's training lies in this sheerness of her skins, the physical-physiological, the intellectual, the emotional, the psychical and the metaphysical. Aesthetics and consciousness come together in practice as the artist crafts herself through form, energy, space and time. According to Hiriyanna, one of the most important concepts that advanced Indian thought was the assertion that man and nature are in a "kinship"(Hiriyanna 1954). Further the intertwining of the ethics and aesthetics in Indian thought is another critical framework that allows us to unravel and inquire into art, artist and aesthetics within ecological consciousness (Hiriyanna 1954, 3).

According to Vatsysyan (1992, 33-34), Indian aesthetic theories are framed in the relationship between matter and energy as perceived in the Indian worldview. The notion that it is possible for the transmutation of matter into energy and vice versa allows for one to become many, to be manifest or unmaifest and the many can returen to one. The Indian notion of nature is one in which while all living matter is

individual and distinct, it is also capable of transcendence. This conceptualization is at the heart of both aesthetic theory and practice.

This inherent understanding of multiplicity, oneness and possibilities of transmutation between forms and beings allows for an inquiry into *porosity* within Indian categories. Further as Ananda Coomaraswamy articulates in his book, *Transformation of Nature in Art,* the ability of the Asian/Indian artist to "perceive all things imaged in himself" further allows him to practice a *porous* principle of consciousness. (Coomaraswamy 2014, 55-57)

4. Uncovering The Artist

My work in visual art, poetry and movement is an inquiry into transience and permeability to craft an intrinsic ecological consciousness using *porosity* as principle and practice using art. As a practitioner, I have often been flummoxed by how to frame myself in the contemporary art scene. Today's stage is the elusive information age, where the local and global collide in new media. The seeking for roots in the ephemerality of data allows for new interpretations of the simultaneous past and continuing present that one lives through in many parts of the world, particularly India. The challenge however lies in the textures of the interpretation. The contemporary artist works at the amalgamation of west and east, digital and traditional forms, inter and transdisciplinary directions, in multiple ages and times and cultures. The multiple dimensions of the stage and time in which she works keeps the possibilities of defining her work through a singular principle of aesthetics/ creativity impossible and elusive. In many ways, the subjective space of creative work makes it impossible to categorize a work in the contemporary frame through specific cultural,

social, political frames. Often much like people from all other disciplines, artists simultaneously live in many frames and hence their creative process is informed in all these layers that they reside in.

Some of the key questions that emerge from this context of contemporary art is - what is the underlying consciousness of the artist that drives her creativity? How do her creative processes work? How does her imagination work? What are the cultural roots of creativity and imagination? And how does one read artistic work in all its forms?

In a self-reflexive process of observing my own artistic work and processes and nature of creativity, I have been trying to trace my lineage to an aesthetic consciousness that seems to emerge from a different time and age, a different texture of being. And it is in these textures, that I ruminate on the ideas as well as beingness of *Porosity*. Kak articulates the sensibility of the artist/ *kavi* as someone "who sees the underlying vision" and artistic processes as part of a sacred ritual and aesthetics as an ornamentation of a central principle in his article "Art and Cosmology in India.". These are the approaches to my creative processes that I often slip into unconsciously,

> "Aesthetics is *alamkāra-śāstras*, that is ornamentation of the central synthesizing principle by means of the particular medium. The poet, kavi, is the inspired seer who sees the underlying vision most clearly. Dance, painting, and sculpture, just like poetry, have their canonical ideals, which are the visual equivalents of meter, rhyme, alliteration and the tropes of poetry.

> The ritual is organized as sacred theatre that engages the senses to facilitate an epiphany that represents an experiential "rebirth." Great art has the same capacity, and often it is a part of ritual. Not only is the temple a work of art, so is the sculpture that goes into it, and the dance and music performed in its hallways, and the paintings that hang on its walls." (Kak 2006)

To the Indian artist, art was a discipline *(sādhanā),* a *yoga* and a sacrifice *(yajña)* (Vatsyayan 1997, 5). At the heart of the creative experience, be it the artist or the *rasika*, lies the concept of repose/ equilibrium; *Hṛdayaviśrānti* (Vatsyayan 1997, 5). Art creation, for the traditional Indian artist was a discipline of realizing the Universal Supreme Being within his individual self, a way to suggest, reveal or recreate the Infinite divine self (Vatsyayan 1997, 5). While my work is often not embedded in the religious, the ritual sense of the sacred, the idea of self-transformation in a sacred *yoga* and *yajña* remain a principle of my working practice as does the concept of repose from which my visions and ideas emerge into form.

Shulman uncovers the experience of *rasa* and *dhvani* as he investigates the qualities of imagination in Indian poetics and aesthetics. Of particular interest to my work is his unravelling of the correlation between the particular nature of consciousness that is capable of an intense aesthetic experience and the nature of the experience itself.

> "Poetic *bhāvanā*, the very heart of the entire enterprise, is the production of this enhanced, intensified, nonliteral, nonindividualized, linguistically motivated, densely continuous consciousness."(Shulman 2012, 62-75)

His extrapolation of the theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* as articulated by Abhinavagupta and Bhattanayaka's expositions on "*bhāvanā/bhāvakatva which depends primarily on acts of imagination on the part of the spectator or listener*," give us clues to how Indian poetics and their aesthetics nurture and theorize aspects of experiencing in ways that are *porous* bridges between one being and another, one reality and another (Shulman 2012, 62-75).

Through both research into Indian arts, aesthetics and philosophy and my practice of visual and performing arts, I was able to locate a working consciousness for an artist who could simultaneously live in ritual, mythical worlds while contemplating on the philosophical nature of both reality and existence. And I was able to see the nuanced mind, which could then translate these complex patterned worlds into form, both static and dynamic. The depth, versatility and rich diversity that such an artistic mind could endure, interpret, engage with and create was an insight that has helped me build my own practice. The ease with which this mind could traverse time and space, spiritual and secular, form and formless, myth and ritual, different dimensions of thought and science, humour and gravity, sensuous, erotic and sacred were mind-boggling in the devices used, in the worldviews and insights that drove this mind and its integral vision of the universe. "*Sarvaṃ Sarvātmakam* – Everything is related to the whole", the philosophic dictum from Vyasa's *Yoga Sūtra Bhāṣya* indeed became a "magical key" to understanding this complex, nuanced, humorous, empathetic and intelligent mind-body-intellect system resting in a deeply evolved consciousness of *ānanda* (Baumer 2001, xiii; Dehejia, 1996, 78-80). And to this consciousness I began tracing my lineage.

5. Crafting Consciousness

As an artist-philosopher, I am intrigued by the nature of consciousness as a creative force. Of particular interest to me is the codifying of 'form' in Indian Speculative thought traditions. The individual human being is conceptualized in relation to his ecological environment and it is his ability to be aware of this intricate relationship through his consciousness and self-reflection which allows him to transcend his individual form, as well as the multiplicity of forms to arrive at the formless and that which is beyond-form (Vatsyayan, 1977, 11).

The very articulation of form in these rich, integral, intrinsic, physical as well as psychical and spiritual natures in the Indian speculative thought traditions draws me in to explore into the nature of consciousness that allows for such an inquiry into form through artistic practice.

As an artist, I dwell much of my time in the layer of forms in all its multiplicity, expression, materiality, process, and dissolution. As someone who grew up in a household which allowed for both observation of ritual practices and encouraged intellectual inquiry into the philosophical and metaphysical, I have also had a natural access to the Hindu traditions and practices. Hence the nature of consciousness that allowed for artistic exploration was intuitively located in this very speculative thought tradition. While art remains the visible practice, the crafting of consciousness was its underlying invisible practice. This dual mode of artistic practice has been a rather self-reflective and self-taught approach where the desire for transcendence created the discipline for inquiring both into form and consciousness. Subsequent research to unravel and understand this seemingly ancient consciousness within the more modern

one has been a complex yet fascinating journey over the years. The artist is an inspired seer in this journey and it is often through visions that the art evolves.

My current inquiries seek to unravel these boundaries of consciousness through practice. As I write and reflect through poetry and lyrical prose, sketching from nature, illustrating both realistic and symbolic images, my questions embed themselves more deeply into practice itself. I observe how consciousness emerges and dissolves in experience as well as meditative stillness. But this process is led by art as a contemplative practice. In many ways Hindu and Buddhist thought inform it. It is also keenly inspired by the aesthetic artistic traditions and the ideas of consciousness that reside within these. However, everyday practices, local cultures, South Indian sensibilities and traditions are also an inspiration. And as is inevitable other influences from beyond the Indian frame also shape my work.

Kak (2015) articulates three key notions that underlie Indian culture. As a practitioner, I have found intuitively that these three principles are key to my own practice. I resort to these key notions as a frame to build my inquiries into artistic ecological consciousness further.

> "The three notions that underlie Indian culture are that of *bandhu*, paradox, and *yajña*. *Bandhu* is the binding between the outer and the inner that makes it possible to know, and this is the basis of the pervasive spirituality in India; paradox is the recognition that the bandhu must lie outside of rational system, leading to the distinction between the 'higher' science of consciousness and the 'lower', rational objective science; *yajña* is transformation that the

> individual undergoes by participating in *Vedic* 'ritual' or any other creative process. The cosmology related to this framework is that of infinity and recursion across scale and time." (Kak 2015)

My inquiry is in understanding how we can each evolve for ourselves an intrinsic ecological consciousness that is not driven only by knowledge of the outer as a material world, but by inner beingness and relationship with all life. The answer that calls out to me is the practice of *porosity*, shedding the human frame to include all that is outside of it. And out of *porosity* rises my inquiry into form. How can the human quest for form become intrinsically ecological in its effulgent creative force? And in the ecological order (*ṛta*) on which the Indian tradition places the self in its cosmic continuum as one interconnected whole allows me to perceive form as a medium of transcendence, *yoga* and *yajña* (Boner, Sarma and Baumer 1996). And then *porosity* becomes a multidimensional, textured and layered approach to inquire into consciousness. What would *porosity* look like in practice between text and image guided by Indian categories of ecological consciousness? How would I invite the *rasikā*, the aesthete to dwell in this visceral inquiry that I have into consciousness?

Notions of an unfettered, unbounded self that was at one with the universe guided the artistic processes and creative principles of the Indian arts and aesthetics.

Boner, Sarma and Baumer (1996, 8) elaborate on the creative sensibility of the "ancients" by pointing out that they felt a sense of oneness with cosmic forces and felt integrated with the universe made of the same substance. Hence they did not feel limited by individuality, but empowered by the mystery of creation by transcending the very individuality that we hold to be of great value today.

> "There man discovered the fundamental relationship and connexion of all elements and recognized their correspondence within himself. The Earth was his body, the rocks his bones, the waters his blood, the Sun his eyes, the quarters his ears, the trees and plants his hair, and so at death he knew that he returned his own body to the elements of which it was composed, and his soul merged into the supreme *ātman*. He drew all his inspiration and his strength from the contemplation of the divine powers, by which he himself and the whole cosmos were created and sustained." (Boner, Sarma and Baumer 1996, 8)

By redefining our notions of self, we begin to rediscover creativity in an altogether different frame, that is free from the boundaries of individuality and restrictions of human self to one located in an unbounded liberated sense of unity with all life.

6. Practice

Truth, reality, myth and meaning are complex ideas that are churned into new understandings in the realm of the arts. Arts push the boundaries of what see as fact, and give shape and form to inner realities expressing the otherwise intangible and ineffable.

> "As everyday experience teaches us, the factual is not isomorphic with the true. To distinguish the fictive from the factual is, perhaps, the work of history; to distinguish the false from true is the work of poetry, or of logic, or of myth, and music. Still there are kinds of history, and great historians are open to that dimension of reality that we call 'myth', in the sense of being more deeply saturated with meaningfulness and also more creative of the

reality that they purport to describe than are other expressive modes." (Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2003,11)

My practice is to make visible the linkages between the exterior and the interior, the nature of *porosity* that allows for a fluid exchange between the two, that allows the transmutation of matter and energy in subtle consciousness. My work is about rooting the creative back into the landscape and gently drawing the landscape into the inner - moral, emotional, metaphysical and physical layers as a playful, sensuous exchange and interchange. And therefore the setting of this creative universe that I create lies in the ecological-physical- psychical continuum.



Fig 4: The singing banyan, Bandipur, Watercolours, pen and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2017. This ficus had the most beautiful musical structure and form and stood in solitary splendor in one of the farm lands of Bandipur towards Mangala Village. She drew me and all of the landscape into her, owning the landscape in her joy and brilliance of form.

It draws from the contemporary knowledge of ecology, of practices like bird watching, gardening, and composting. It is equally entrenched in subjective and

intersubjective experiences of landscape - Forest, Field, Sky, Ground, Valley, Mountain, Sea/Coast, Garden, River, City, Grassland. It is embedded in the multiplicity of life forms and beings, forces of nature, time and space. It is rooted in the inquiries into wilderness, rural and the urban and the delicate boundaries that bound and unbound these spaces. Last but not the least the creative universe is embedded in conceptions of self and consciousness and their pliability and malleability that allows for them to be recrafted. Inevitably, I take recourse to myth and poetry, in languages both visual and literary to be able to express dimensions of reality and meaningfulness that help see subtle truths invisible in other modes of reality perception. The following lyrical prose piece is a synthesis of several experiences across different spaces and times

There is this wingspan of the grey heron as she takes off from a branch close by. Grey. Orange. Black. White. Graceful flight. Camouflaged landing up in the trees. For a moment our forms are impermeable and then the boundary slips. She is heron and I human. She is wing and feather and lightness and I am hand and torso and much more solid... and yet when the boundary slips, it is only awareness that changes and imperceptibly form becomes a shapeshifting play. That wingspan is now mine as also the lift of her head. I walk. She flies. But her wingspan has changed my awareness...and therefore imperceptibly it has altered my form...

"The common pochard sleeps on a still lake and I feel rested.

The black headed ibis fly. The marsh shifts, air lightens. Another imperceptible shift; Space and time alter instantaneously. Why be stuck in human space-time when ibis can cleverly alter it!

The old heron rests in the forest... I watch him through the lacework of leaves and branches. He is old and I age with him in simple resonance. I walk away, but the ageing stays... as restful stillness."[3]



Fig 5: Black headed ibis in flight, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

Now, consciousness clearly alters with such ease...if we remain porous. Then the deliberation on form also takes on a different quality when appreciating subtle forms. Consciousness itself can be gross or subtle. But it is in the realm of the subtle that it

[3] These lines have been published as part of image description in Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184 and they are also repeated in chapter 10, which is a version of the same publication.

becomes mischievous porous dance. As usual it is baffling to articulate the subtle through the gross for their temperaments and qualities are different.

But then if I were to be the sahṛdaya[4] *to that grey heron on her fantastic flight, would it surprise you that I overflow in the rasa of that performance, so much so that our hearts meld... she is on her journey, I am on mine... but my consciousness is in alert fluidity immersed in the rasa.*

Rasa- is it then not only a theory of aesthetics but a theory of subtle consciousness. Is it not ripples and resonance that the sahṛdaya reaches? Lighter and lighter becomes the being. Wild gaurs sway and disappear in the thicket and the magpie robins flutter by. The elephant and her baby are silhouetted against the backdrop of the forest. The gross gives way to the subtle. But for resonance to happen, the material sheath must dissolve, the subtle sheath has to become lighter, finer, gossamer.... And then it doesn't matter for I can slip into heron time or gaur shyness with ease and at dawn, I can become dead leaf drifting, falling, crackling...



Fig 6: Magpie Robins singing. Pen and Ink, 8.27 in X 11.69 in, 2014.

[4] The *rasika* or the observer/aesthete in Indian art translates into someone who is one at heart of the performer, *sahṛdaya*
.



Fig 7: Hidden-Unhidden: The Mesmerising Gaurs, Acrylic and Indian ink on watercolour paper, 22in X 30in approx., 2014.



Fig 8: Gaur Mysteries, Photocolours, Ink and salt on Handmade paper, 22 in X 30 in approx., 2014.

My practice emerges through seven key principles: (Note: These principles are expanded in detail in chapter 12)

- Artistic reflection
- Ritual practice
- Philosophical inquiry
- Metaphysical embodiment
- Physical transience
- Mythological storytelling
- Aesthetic play

Through movement, text and image, through gardening, walking, pausing and listening, I build everyday practices that become my grounds for artistic inquiry and research.

Research itself moves into the realms of subjective, intuitive and imaginative as well as those of seeing and perception. In keeping with the nature of inquiry, the research approach looks at non-conclusive, uncertain possibilities of states of being, making and approaches to creating form. The quality of research then becomes an act of unfolding, unravelling and transitioning placed in diverse temporality and spatiality that allow for non-sequential, continuous, rhythmic and recursive ways of experiencing. This sensibility of artistic research allows for inviting the unknown, the tacit-invisible.

7. Significance

The practice of *porosity* does become a seamless exercise in word, image and movement; in creative practice with continuous engagement. However it is hard to

experience and enact this sense of being and principle of consciousness in every single action in the divisive urban materialistic reality. Yet, in setting smaller meaningful goals, it is possible to discover a meaningful relationship with life around us in all its forms and root our creativity within this connection to life. It is in remaining with important questions for reflection that one can stay reflexively in the *porous* space; Most important as humans is to ask deep questions about 'form'. From our houses, to our vehicles, washing machines, computers, hair-dryers, books, art, we dwell in the world of forms. When consciousness becomes *porous*, how does 'form' change? Does it become *porous* too disintegrating into elements, before it harshly destroys other life forms? Or does it become finely nuanced as an extension of natural forms as the living bridges of Meghalaya?

Porosity is a tough and arduous practice as it requires both a deep inquiry into self and an annihilation of it. In a fast paced world, *porosity* is challenging to practice, dwell in or contemplate on. But *porosity* as an artistic practice has the capacity to change two fundamental tools of our consciousness: Language and Visualization. Ancient myths, tribal and aboriginal stories and beliefs, ritual practices and symbolism in Indian traditions, all use tools that show the integrated consciousness we share with all life. The language as well as practice are multidimensional and layered allowing for deeper states of consciousness and relationships with all life to emerge. The understanding and perception of sentience is the key to these older traditions. And this very conception of sentience becomes the key to unravelling the *porous* consciousness.

Sentience

Earth Fire Air Water Space

Sentient

All that is born, sentient

All that dies, sentient

Sentience within

Sentience without

Sentience dissolving

Into senses

Into elements

Into dance of disintegration

Composting

With fine fungi

Dissolving into

Quiet crackling music

Of layered humus

Into perception

Alert reciprocation

Felt being

Watching snail

Frightened mouse

Escaping cockroach

Hovering mosquito

Dissolving into

Mountain crack

River silt

Driftwood

Hardened colourful shell

Crab elegance

Shifting into ungainly

Adjutant stork

Precision

Into woven

River

Light

Microbial mystery

Dissolving into

Sharp fever

Delirious wandering

Exhaustion

Deep rest

Sentience

Dissolve into space

Only to become

Sentience again

The challenges lie further in finding the strength and practice of *porous* consciousness in everyday creativity, in finding a culture to articulate, make and share, that is of ascetic simplicity and economy of consumption; that is of exuberant celebration that is respectful to life; that is of deep stillness of discovering oneness and unity with all life.

8. Summary

Through a tough muse, a lineage of *Gurus* (teachers) I have never met but who have driven me to a frenzy with their demands, and nature, whose ferocious enfolding embrace has been a constant place of rest and driving force, my quest has taken me through many paths; Paths in which I have negated all tradition, discarded many of my souls, only to find myself, even in utmost bareness, entwined by cultural memories embedded in body, mind, intellect and spirit; Paths on which, I have attempted to find contemporary language to engage with this contemplative tradition of the arts in art education; Paths on which I have found my solitude, friendships, expression and dissolution and sense of being.

The *rasikā* or the observer in Indian art translates into someone who is one at heart of the performer, *sahṛdaya* (Pillai, 1991).[5] Our ability to experience the immensity of life rests in our ability to open the space in our heart (Vatsyayan 1983).[6] And I extend that by reconnecting with nature, we can transform both our identity and our creativity.

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[5] As Shankara Pillai mentions, 'the Indian concept of the *sahṛdaya* is always as a very organic respondent of the subtleties presented before him.' [5] And in working with this sense of a *sahṛdaya*, an individual can find both equilibrium and a deeper connection to nature (Pillai, Sankara G. 1991).

[6] "The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* speaks of the ***antar****hṛdaya ākāśa-* space in the heart, which is the totality of the ideal space at the core of our being, where only the full content of life can be experienced. In the context of the arts that essence of life is the realization of beauty in perfect form, where a perfect concord exists between the viewer and the viewed." [6] (Vatsyayan, 1983, 41; Coomaraswamy 2014, 174)

The translation of this reflective, intuitive and creative process into contemporary space and time would be a challenge that requires new dynamic and fluid sense of form and grammar. This would also require trained aesthetes who are willing to engage with the "difficulty" of experiencing these "aesthetic encounters" (Corner 2016).

> "Certain kinds of artistic work require a greater degree of prior orientation and contextualisation in order to be appreciated than others, a fact sometimes neglected by those who believe that, for instance, the qualities of a particular piece of music, writing or painting will "connect" immediately with anyone regardless of their aesthetic biography to date. This is very rarely true. Of course, encounters with difficulty clearly change in the pattern and profile of their appearance over the course of a lifetime as new aesthetic interests are developed, new routes of aesthetic satisfaction opened up, within the framing terms of family, education, friendship and general experience." (Corner 2016)

The critical point to be noted in this quest is the understanding that it is not only in formal analysis can one locate culture, but cultural roots are nuanced layers of consciousness. And contemporary studies that look at visual culture, arts and artists, cultural ecologies of art must engage in deeper inquiry to reflect on the very nature of intuition and imagination that each artist brings into being. If one were to use Indian categories to deepen the inquiry, the questions would perhaps be –

- What is the *dhvani* of the artist – Individual as well as intertwined with environment? What is the cosmology, the consciousness and the model of the reality that informs the intuition, imagination and *rasa* of the work she creates?

- What is the historicity of her form if time itself is ahistoric, cyclical, mythical and recursive, allowing her expressions to be in simultaneous past, present and future?
- And must then the critic, the curator, the art historian too be *sahṛdayas* who can indulge in deep perception of both *context-sensitivity* and *reflexivity*[7]?

[7] Context Sensitivity and Reflexivity are terms introduced by A.K.Ramanujam (1989a)

Chapter 6

Boundaries and Relationships

Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything.

- *Rainer Maria Rilke*

Sunbeams : A Book of Quotations (1990) by Sy Safransky, p. 42

"Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth — our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human."

- *David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*

Sections

1. Premise/ Supposition
2. Questioning Form as a Boundary: Redefining Notions of Self
3. Moving beyond Mind-body Dualism
    3.1. Felt-Experience, Organic Embodiment
4. Interpreting and Imagining the Body – Complexity of Definition
5. Body in Performance
6. Body in Yoga
7. Body in Mystic Poetry
8. Aesthetic Experience in and through the Body
9. The Body in Relationship: Being and Becoming, Consciousness
10. Body in Symbol and Metaphor
11. Being and Becoming: Manifestation of Form
12. Examples from Indian Art

Chapter 6 develops the premise of the thesis by locating the *porous self* within the definitions of self to unravel the boundaries that we set for ourselves.

1. The body and self in phenomenological, aesthetic and ecological traditions is surveyed quickly to provide an international contextualization to the inquiry. A more detailed inquiry into notion of *ātman* and *śarīra*, *uyir* and *mey* are taken up from the Indian traditions. Body and self as a premise for environmental aesthetics will be explored. Drawing from broad philosophical frameworks and then extending these frameworks to position them within the arts will conclude the positioning of the body and self in relation to environment.
2. *Porosity* in and through the body
3. *Porosity* in subtle and gross body framework
4. The second aspect this chapter deals with is the problem of form. What constitutes form and the manifestation into form. Looking at the body as a culmination into form, as well as the artistic form in tandem with each other, the chapter interrogates into form and being as relevant to *porosity*.

1. Premise/ Supposition

The simple premise of this research is that the physical form of the human body in its gross or subtle states; physical body or mind, is not its boundary in relationship to self or life in all its other forms.



Fig 1: Painted Storks, Cormorants and Egrets and Me at Sea. The white space, and sparse drawings emerged as a style where the emptiness is a representation of one's own self and breath, breathing in and out of the landscape and all the beings inhabited in it, all of us resonant with the stillness and silence that pervades existence and life.

2. Questioning Form as a Boundary: Redefining Notions of Self

The intuitions that guide the *porous self* emerge from the deeper understanding that all life and diversity on the planet has co-evolved from a single organism. There is an inherent relationship that we have with life, that is obscured, elusive and sometimes completely blocked due to our values in contemporary times, which allow a complete exploitation of the natural world for human purposes.

3. Moving beyond Mind-body Dualism

3.1. Felt-Experience, Organic Embodiment

In an increasing world of technology, high-end sensors and probes that investigate the earth, industrial excesses and environmental pollution, our sensorial abilities are stripped of their physicality and *felt-sense*, as is our ability to delve beyond the senses to find other realities. In the words of Gendlin, "The felt sense is full of the excess of the life-world –its fleshly textures and abundances of meanings. Through a felt sense, meaning is apprehended in a holistic way that is more than its formulation in language and already-patterned thought (Gendlin 1992)." Gendlin's work advances the work of Heidegger and Merleau – Ponty and emerges out of experiential practice where felt sense in the lived body informs words, thoughts and representations that we create (Galvin, Kathleen & Todres 2007). "Focusing" is one of the experiential practices that emerges from Gendlin's philosophy and looks closely at the relationship "between language and the aliveness of what language is trying to point to, by grounding such aliveness in the lived body's felt sense (Galvin, Kathleen & Todres 2007)."

Edmund Husserl, in delving into the contradictions imposed by positivism and Cartesian epistemology, found that each body and the interactions it shares with other

bodies is in itself an essential phenomena as every moment of awareness is accompanied by the body. Husserl thus advocated a notion of intersubjectivity and rather than the hard boundary between the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ that positivist sciences follow, he saw this division as a purely theoretical construction (Abram 1996).

French Phenomenologist Merleau Ponty recognizes the centrality of the sensuous body in experience and denies the disembodied notion of ego/ self. In his work, the body is valued for itself as the true subject of experience and identified with the cognizing self. At the same time the living body that Ponty describes as ‘body subject’ does not become a boundary, but a porous membrane in constant exchange with all life (Abram 1996, 44-46).

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe was a polymath and is recognized for his critical contribution of Goethean science alongside his poetry and art. His epistemology that focused on participatory processes and conscious use of imagination is considered to be complimentary but incommensurate with Cartesian epistemology (Wahl 2017). Instead of separating the observer and observed, Goethe identified the observer as a participant and the Goethean epistemology centres on the idea of relationship encouraging intuitive perception of the world (Wahl 2017). Direct knowledge becomes possible with a focused attention on the dynamic relationships formed between observer and observed with respect to any phenomena(Wahl 2017).

Ecologist Paul Shepard takes a balanced view calling upon the need for maturity where the boundary of self is softer, allowing for reciprocity as well as insularity.

> "In one aspect the self is an arrangement of organs, feelings, and thoughts - a "me" -surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes, and insular habits. This idea needs no defense. It is conferred on us by the whole history of our civilization. Its virtue is verified by our affluence. The alternative is a self as a center of organization, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings, whose skin and behavior are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it. Both views are real and their reciprocity significant. We need them both to have a healthy social and human maturity." (Shepard 1969, 2)

The work of physicists also has expanded the boundaries of the mind-body duality introducing paradox into our perception. John Dewey (1934) discarded mind-body dualism and also proposes a relational understanding of life, explored with thoughtfulness in his work *'Art as Experience'*. In his work on aesthetics, and in making explicit the connection between aesthetics and art from 'normal' everyday experience, he attempts to reach into the elusive yet obvious aesthetics, art and form have with life and biological processes. He points out that the harmonious order that underlies flux and change in nature, and is active and balanced movement is critical to the existence of form, for

> "Form is arrived at whenever a stable, even though moving, equilibrium is reached. Changes interlock and sustain one another. Wherever there is this coherence there is endurance." (Dewey 1934, 15)

He also goes on to expand his idea to show how this sense of order and the relational participation of different organisms in arriving at their own most stable dynamic order

is in itself the essential component of what we identify as aesthetic.

> "For only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living. And when the participation comes after a phase of disruption and conflict, it bears within itself the germs of a consummation akin to the esthetic." (Dewey 1934, 15)

Dewey (1934), in drawing out the essential relationship between order, form and participatory dynamics of life with aesthetics, makes a critical leap in aesthetic philosophy and theory. Instead of separating art form life, he brings art back to the very principle of experience. By placing experience at the heart of art and aesthetics, he brings us back full circle to the indivisibility of a relational participating self with entwined mind and body, emotions and reasons, everyday life and the ability to be connected.



Fig 2: Self at Ruby Beach, Olympic National Forest, US, October 2017. Captures a moment of feeling oneness with the sea, and a complete immersiveness in the landscape-seascape.
Photograph Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

Body, and thus form in these conceptual frameworks thus emerges as a relational, sensuous and *porous* entity, in a dynamic and active state of interchange and flux, and at the same time, a consummation of equilibrium, indicate the heart of order in vulnerability and tenacity.

4. Interpreting and Imagining the Body – Complexity of Definition

The body is sacred in the Indian tradition, and is seen as the abode of the *Ātman*. To this day, in written as well as oral traditions, this link between the *Ātman* and the body are common and an accepted sense of being. The body is an instrument for the expansion of the *Ātman*, the *Puruṣa*, the cosmic soul within the individual soul. It is considered deeply by all systems of philosophy, all disciplines, mystics and artists and seen through different lenses, of bondage and liberation; gross and subtle; a means and an end. However, it is always an inseparable from *Ātman* and twinned with it. The word *śarīra* in Sanskrit is used for 'body' in its different connotations, and often has symbolic and metaphorical usage and understanding in the Indian tradition. The etymology of the word derived from the root *sr* - has been interpreted to associate with death and decay, and also alternatively, from the root meaning 'to burn', *śarīram* is interpreted in the *Garbhopaniṣad*, as that in which the 'fire of knowledge, seeing and gastric fire lie'
(Baumer (ed.) 2001, 89-90).

Synonyms and other metaphorical identifications to body are *kṣetra, aṅga, piṇḍa, pur-pura-purī* and *rūpa* among others (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 90). While all of these words are used to convey the meaning of body, there are subtle differences in the common usage as well as the etymology. In *kṣetra*, the body is conceived or

associated with the idea of the body being a field of inner soul/ *ātman*; In *aṅga*, there is an implication of structure of the parts and the whole, of that which moves; In *piṇḍa*, there is the notion of joining, uniting and assembling of various elements; *Pur-pura-purī* is associated with protection as in a fort or city, and the body is seen as a habitat of the *ātman*; *Rūpa* and *mūrti* offer the association of solidification into form (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 90-92).



Fig 3: Sketch of Mahisha Moksa, Mahisha Mardini subduing Mahisha Mardini in an act of compassion. In mythology, the varied categories of the body as understood in Indian thought come into being.
Being and Non-being, Existence and non-existence, eternal and transient, real and unreal, divine and earthly, subtle, gross and transcendental are all played out in the battle and dance of Mahisha – the demon buffalo and Sakti, the Goddess.
12 in X 7 in, Dry pastels and Charcoal pencil on handmade paper, 2018.

How we think about the body, opens up how we experience the world. In Indian thinking, the body's layers of meaning allow it to be perceived as organic, structural,

sentient through the *ātman* that acts through it, transient and composed of the elements. It is also transcendental and made of the intelligent principle, *Brahman* and inseparable from the *ātman*. Thus the very conceptualization of the body allows an inbuilt set of paradoxes, dual/ triad aspects in each dimension of its existence.

(This table is from *Kalātattvakośa: A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of Indian Arts.* Vol 1. (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 93)

Dimension	Two Aspects
Reality	real/unreal *sat-asat*
Time	eternal/transient *nitya-anitya*
Composition	subtle/gross/ transcendental *sūkṣma-sthūla -para/ kāraṇa*
Divinity	Divine/earthly *divya-pārthiva*
Genesis	Born from/ not born from the womb *yonija/ayonija*
Purity	Pure/impure *śuddha/aśuddha*

It is this paradoxical multi-layered approach to body that allows for a sensuous acceptance and exploration of the macrocosm through the microcosm in the Indian arts. The biological body is celebrated for its existence and also as a conduit for the symbolic and the spiritual, for the abstract, subtle and transcendental. Given the envisioning of the body in duality/ multiple aspects of different dimensions, it becomes possible for a fluid imagination of the body's functions, interactions, experiences (*bhoga*), relationships with everything around it and with itself. *līlā* (play) *and Māyā* (creativity/paradox) become critical categories to understand manifestation and creation of the body/ form.



Fig 4: Attuned to Landscape. The bodies and beings of night, wolves, forest and farmland, father and child, all merge as they each return home to rest for the day. Water colour and Chinesse Ink on watercolour paper, 17 in X 10 in, 2019.

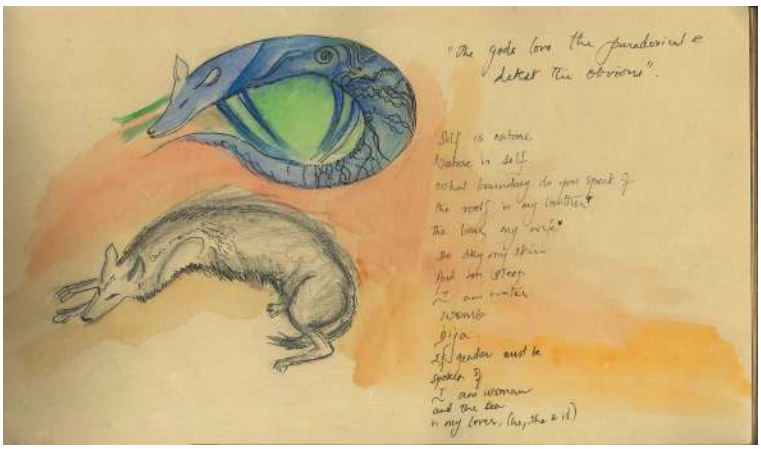


Fig 5: Dreaming Wolf: The form and beingness of the wolf emerged from earlier reflections and this sketch discussed in chapter 10, Mixed media on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.



Fig 6: Hawk and Wanderers at Twilight. Late evening, night and the shadows it forms blends our forms and brings us closer to other life forms. All senses are heightened in the night. The hawk is both external and internal guide in this vast landscape that the wanderers must traverse. Chinese ink on cartridge paper, 16. 25 in X 11.75 in, 2019.

In close tandem with the concept of the body, one has to consider the concepts of breath that is entwined and together the two concepts speak of a sensate live beingness.

The etymology of *prāṇa* derived from the root *pr-* meaning to fill, nourish and satiate indicating fullness, *pūrṇa* (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 124). *Prāṇa* is to be understood both in terms of its function, the process of breathing itself and its effect, what we recognize as life. The nature of *prāṇa* can be understood both in its physical nature and as an abstract idea. In its physical nature, it is wind, *vayu* and in the abstract sense, it is synonymous with *brahman*, *spanda* (pulsation), strength, vitality, the *Sāman* hymns and *indriya* (organ of senses) (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 124). *Prāṇa* is visualized in

metaphor as the sun or the *haṃsa*, indicating the pulse of the inbreath and outbreath and the rhythms and limits of movement of breath.

> "…*Prāṇa*, the cosmic life-breath is of the nature of universal pulsation but in its specific form it is the particular life-breath of every living being. The core of the heart from which it has its source, is the centre from which, through numberless radii, every being is connected to everyone else" (Baumer (ed.) 2001, 125).

Stella Kramrisch summarises the role of *prāṇa* in Indian sculpture in writing, "It is as though in Indian art the image is embossed from within by the movement of breath or circulation through the vital centres of the living being, unimpeded by the gross matter of the actual physical body" (Kramrisch and Miller 1994, 4).

Uṭampu, uṭakku, mey, uṭal, uyir, uṇarvu, are Tamiḻ words to consider in the light of body, breath and integrated perception/feeling. In Tamiḻ, even vowels and consonants are considered as coming together of body and spirit to form a whole, where *uyir eḻuttu*- vowels denote spirit/ life and *mey eḻuttu* consonants denote body.

The multiple layering of the dimensions, aspects and manifestations of body and breath lead to complex possibilities of being, connected with the root/essence of life, and with all other life forms and beings. *Prāṇa* becomes the connecting force between the cosmos and the individual. The *Śiva Sūtra* sees the link between the universal life force and the body as natural (Baumer(ed.) 2001, 140).



Fig 7: Entwining Breath – The flight of life, love and the journeys of prana, Created in response to the sound of piano and violin and one of the Four romantic pieces by Antonin Dvorak, played by Dan Sedgwick (Sonata, Work in progress 2016 -17) and Marjorie Gere. Watercolours in journal sketchbook, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

5. Body in Performance

Gestures, actions, use of limbs, facial expressions all of which come together to create an experience of *rasa* in performance, emerge from the training of the body and an understanding of the body in its multiple aspects and layered dimensions. The movement of breath through the body guides all training in performance traditions. In performance, the outer world and inner world are fused through the limbs, gestures, and physical expressions of the body. The body becomes an ever-unfolding conduit between diverse worlds of people, beings, celestial and earth worlds. Terse gestural language allows for creating rich and complex integration of these worlds using the body. For instance the single hand gesture of *Kartarīmukha* (used in *Bharatanāṭyam*) allows one to represent and also embody many different instances, beings, and emotions according to the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa:* A creeper, opposition or overturning,

stealing or rolling, corner of the eye, death, disagreement, lightning, In separation from the loved one, to fall down (Carroll, 2010). It is possible to map and embody a creeper, leaves shivering in the wind, the movement of wind through the creepers using this simple hand gesture and its variations. This kind of aesthetic embodiment allows one to experience another being in an act of resonance and relatedness. The layers of meaning that a small hand gesture is capable of representing allow the practitioner to process the outer world and reality through the body with even minimal movements. Every experience becomes immersive and possible to grasp and grapple with in the very limitations of the body, as vocabulary and grammar of any of the performing traditions allow them to consider. Imbibing an experience through the body opens both body and mind to different dimensions of the experience.

6. Body in Yoga

Yoga is about uniting the outer and inner; "to tie the strands of mind together"(Desikachar 1995, 5); bringing body, breath, heart and mind together. *Yoga* is also action, and being actively present in every action and moment. This attentiveness to being present is what defines the essence or heart of *yoga*.

The key to practice of *yoga* lies in understanding the challenges to perception, *avidya.* Perception and action are entwined as what we believe we perceive enables us to act in response to our perception. So the key to right action, lies in investigating perception and comprehending what limits/ distorts our perception. Mechanically performing actions based on misconceptions/ wrong perceptions tend to lead us towards forming habits of the mind, *saṃskāras* that cloud our consciousness. However, we can through the practice of yoga reduce the film of wrong perception

and reach into deep perception and correct understanding, *vidyā*. *Yoga* recognizes four obstacles/ aspects of *avidyā* - ego, greed or making demands, rejecting things because of bad experiences or even those that we have no familiarity with, fear (Desikachar 1995, 9-13).

Yoga believes that everything one sees, experiences and feels is real and not illusion (Desikachar 1995, 12). However, what we see or believe we see is bound to change with changes within us or in that which we see around us. This constancy of change is key to clarity of perception in *yoga*. And that clarity rests in something which is constant, *Puruṣa*, 'that which can see correctly' (Desikachar 1995, 12). Through the practice of *yoga,* it is believed that the body and mind can become free of the habits and patterns that limit/ distort their perception and bring about attentiveness and the ability to be present in every moment and action. The three means or steps to achieve this quality of consciousness of being present are through

1. Physical exercises (*āsana*) and breath work (*prāṇāyāma*) that allow for cleansing body and mind and good health;
2. *Svādhyāya* or self investigation that encourages reflection, reading, debate and discussion to clarify and free ourselves from *avidyā*;
3. *Īśvarapraṇidhāna*, that could translate as quality of action in our everyday lives, in everything that we do from a space of detachment to the fruits of the action, but a clear focus and attention on the action itself. These three steps together constitute what is understood as *kriyā* yoga, or the *yoga* of action.

Training the body in *yoga* is really training for action, attentiveness, alertness and steadiness *(sthira)* as well as training for ease and comfort *(sukha)*. Body training here

is not independent of perception, emotion and action. This united approach leads to a consciousness of being present, and discovering the essence of the self where body, breath, heart and mind are in a seamless flow with each other. "Rediscovering who we really are at our core opens the way to experiencing our most basic level of connection with others (Farhi 2008, 4)."

7. Body in Mystic Poetry

In mystic poetry, the body is imagined with great abandon and relish. Mystic poets have worked with different genres, describing the body in multiple ways. The body as a temple, a doorway, in constant metamorphosis, in erotic love, in affectionate embrace, the melded light when the life (soul/spirit) and body are infused in ecstasy with deity. The body is at once corporeal and incorporeal recording states of being that aren't often evident in everyday human experience. At the same time, much of the mystic poetry delves into the everyday experiences of human love and grief, anguish and desire, reverence and devotion using these heightened emotions as metaphors and metonymies to describe other ecstatic states.

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's work, a 5th century Tamil *Śaivaite* poet is considered to be the first of *Bhakti* mystic poets whose styles of poetry became eventually the ground and evolution of the vibrant *Bhakti* movement in India. She is also credited to have imagined the form of the dancing *Naṭarāja*. In Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's poetry, a terrible beauty of *Śiva* is evoked on the cremation grounds, where *Śiva* and his ghouls are embraced in awe and terror, to bring out the subtle joy and ecstasy of spiritual freedom (Prakash 2007). Ammaiyar makes the body of the ghouls too real, as

by legend, she chooses to transform from a beautiful woman into a ghoul herself in order to devote her time and being to *Śiva*.



Fig 8: Section of a sketch of Sakti in conversations with Karaikkal Ammaiyar as both celebrate and admire the dance of Shiva. Pencils and color pencils, Full Sketch – 12 in X 7 in, 2018

Ammaiyar also shares the profound relationship of being the time keeper to *Śiva's* dance as she is often depicted in the many sculptures. She shares a unique relationship with *Śiva*, where *Śiva* acknowledges her as mother and she takes great liberties in sharing the grace and terrifying beauty of salvation that arises from *Śiva*. In Ammaiyar's work, the body is the one suspended between life and death, between being human and being a ghoul in moments of ecstatic transformation. The originality and fiery imagination that she brings to the body of the devotee, of the ghoul and of *Śiva* himself are powerful and draw upon great intuition of a long continuing tradition (the *Śaiva neṟi*), that continues to be in practice as a way of life to this day in Tamil *Śaivaite* culture.

Sagging breasts; swollen veins;

A skeleton with a pair of sunken eyes;

Blood-red gums; teeth jutting out:

A long-ankled she-demon dwells

In a wilderness—where,

His matted hair scattered in all directions

His fiery but cooling body is dancing—

That is my Lord's home, Tiruvaalangadu.

*Translation by H.S. Sivaprakash (*Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and Prakash 2007)

Thirugnana Sambandar, a 7th century young Tamil *Śaiva* Poet, whose poetry continue to be sung today, writes with great fondness of *Śiva*, with terse symbolicimagery drawn on the body of *Śiva* in one of his well known songs *Toṭuṭaiya ceviyan* from the *Tevaram* collection. I take the first verse for discussion.

Wearing a ring in his ear,

He comes on the bull

He wears the crescent moon on his head

And smears ash on the cremation ground

The thief who steals my heart

The God who blessed Brahma (the one on the lotus)

In his journey of creation

He is none other than the lord of brahmapuram (Piramāpuram, Cīrkaḻi).

Thirugnana Sambandar. "*Toṭuṭaiya ceviyan*" *Thevaram.* Verse 1.1.

The earring symbolizes the *Ardhanāri* form of *Śiva*, to denote that he transcends both male and female forms, the bull symbolizes justice, the crescent moon, the cycle of time from creation to destruction and back again, the cremation ground symbolizes destruction. As the thief, his illusory nature, as well as his embracing of the devotee's heart are indicated with fondness. As one, who is said to have blessed and helped the Lord *Brahma*, during the process of creation, *Śiva* is also seen as the one who transcends creation and destruction too.

Annamacharya, 15th century *Vaiśṇavaite* poet who wrote on *Tiruppati Veṅkaṭacalapati* and his consort *Alamelu Maṅkā* wrote erotic poetry that captured the love between the lord and his consort, as well as self-reflective devotional poetry. In the first poem, that is devotional, he speaks of his body melding into that of the lord, inseparable.

There's nothing you don't know.
I do what you say.
I'm your man.
Where am I in all this?
You made eyes for seeing,
so why blame me when I look?
You made ears for beautiful sounds.
I act, but you've set me up.
Where am I in all this?
If it tastes good, I chew it.
It's only natural.

I didn't make up the rules.

If it smells good, the nose smells it.

Why tie me in knots?

Where am I in all this?

It's the nature of one body

to melt into another.

Why tell me I'm doing something wrong?

You've snared me, god on the hill,

but you're always inside me.

Who is to blame?

Where am I in all this?

nīv' ĕraganidi ledu nīy ājña mocitin' inte

Translation: Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Dean Shulman

(Narayana Rao and Shulman 2005, 46)

The fiery, feminist Alamelu Manga of Annamayya's imagination is a Goddess, who holds her own in tempestuous emotion and expressive love for her husband. Through this divine sensuous play, Annamayya brings out the dimension of ecstasy, *ānanda*. Shades of love are explored tenderly in his work.

When I'm done being angry,

then I'll make love.

Right now, you should be glad

I'm listening.

When you flash that big smile,

I smile back. It doesn't mean I'm not angry.

You keep looking at me,

so I look, too. It isn't right

to ignore the boss.

Right now you should be glad.

You say something, and I answer.

That doesn't make it a conversation.

You call me to bed, I don't make a fuss.

But unless I want it myself,

it doesn't count as love.

Right now you should be glad.

You hug me, I hug you back.

You can see I'm still burning.

I can't help it, god on the hill,

if I'm engulfed in your passion.

Right now you should be glad.

kopamu dīrina mīda gūḍe gāni

Translation: Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Dean Shulman

(Narayana Rao and Shulman 2005, 8)

The imagination of the body in mystic poetry in India is vast and varied and beyond the limitations of this thesis. The few poems discussed here have been chosen for the great variety that they represent. Having grown up reading and performing such poems as a dancer, my embodied understanding and reflections reside in how the body is a space of metamorphosis, imagination, intuition, and transcendence, even in its corporeal nature.

In this light, one of my poems written to *Bhikṣāṭanār*, the charming sensuous beggar-monk *Śiva*, I seek out a way to make sense of the torment and anguish of the physical body as it encounters the devastation of everyday life, and the states of ecstasy encountered in the creative splendor through erotic love poetry. The *Bhikṣāṭanār* form of *Śiva*, according to myths shows *Śiva* as a mischievous naked beggar who tempts women to the despair of their menfolk, sages who have become egoistical, all the while remaining detached as a monk with a begging bowl.

Bhikṣāṭanār – The sensuous beggar

Jan 20, 2016

This charming Bhikṣāṭanār

oh, he masquerades
as ascetic, as the great renunciate
handsome and sensuous
Oh he steals my body
as quietly as he steals my soul...

Infact, he does not even give

me time to revel in viraha

Endlessly, laughing gaily

he draws me into himself

Feisty woman that I am,

I frown, I fight, even in embrace

and he fondles and cradles

holds me together

as I fall apart

in his clandestine love.

Proclaim me, he taunts

as he leaves by day,

and I have a long leisurely bath

and he seeps into my body

as warm rivulets of water flowing.

This ascetic, this renunciate,

this Cuṭalaṉ

of the cremation grounds

with his ash covered body

will not even give me time

to revel in viraha

Ofcourse, Feisty woman

that I am,

I throw him out

one more time

and laughing gaily

he wraps me in embrace

in sky and wide open grassland,

in crimson sunbird and

the fragile dead humming bird

in dark dank ditches

and strewn ugly garbage

relentless, charming

he draws out my anger

my deep rooted fears,

he draws out my gay laughter

and my playfulness

he draws out my vulnerability

as if it were my strength

and he makes love to me

as if I were his one great love

Oh he steals my body

as quietly as he steals my soul...

Infact, he does not even give

me time to revel in viraha

Ofcourse I am a feisty woman,

and I won't trust this cheat,

this masquerading charming

lord of the ghosts...

And for all my defiance

this Cuṭalaṉ

of the cremation grounds

with his ash covered body

will not even give me time

to revel in viraha

8. Aesthetic Experience in and through the Body

In Ganapati Sthapati's work (2005), he talks about how the *śilpi* (sculptor-architect) follows the rhythm of the universe, through time-space calculations capturing the essence of the divine rhythm of life. It is in recapturing this rhythm that the works created by the *śilpi* too become divine and worthy of worship.

> "He (The *śilpi*) holds the forms created from this experience as Spiritual and Divine. He takes them to the people and evokes in them the same vibration, the same experience and the same joy. He re-moulds his *rasikā* (the spectator) in his own substance and order, it is re-creation in flesh and blood. This is *Vastu dharma,* the universal and eternal order.
>
> This response or resonance, he calls *Rasānubhavam*, and the communion *Bhakti*, the lover and the loved fusing into the one timeless, eternal substance, the *Vastu*." (Sthapati 2005, 104-105)

The practitioner, practice and the aesthete are interwoven in this experience of transformation of body and spirit. It is in resonance that the gross body too becomes *porous* along with the subtle body. Being itself is suddenly malleable, transparent, fluid and capable of transformation in many dimensions. *Rasānubhavam,* aesthetic experience, is an act of resonance that offers this gift of transformation of being.

Every aesthetic experience is a ritual, where the sacred and the sensuous flow seamlessly, entwining the body in rich sensate experience.

> "The ritual of the *yajña* indeed holds a key to the understanding of the Indian arts where a system of establishing correspondence was fundamental. In turn it also leads to the continuums which are constantly sought to be established between the sacred and the profane (Vatsyayan 1983, 36)."

Yajña is transformation of the inner into the outer and vice versa, an infusion or transfusion of energies and elements, states of being and consciousness. And aesthetic experiences are about transforming from one into the other, fluidity of forms and beings coalescing and emerging from within each other. The artist's own creative processes, journeys, practices and languages of expression as well as the aesthete's capacity for drawing in, relishing and experiencing the worlds that the artist unfolds are intersubjective experiences where narratives, myths, mysticism, and multiple realities can collide and create new possibilities for meaning making. One of the most powerful references to aesthetic experience as quoted in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* –

"The experience of *rasa* is said to permeate just as dry wood is enveloped by fire."

"śarīraṃ vyāpyate tena śuṣkaṃ kāṣṭhimivāgṛinā"

(NSVII.7cd) (Baumer(ed.) 2001, 117)

Cultivation of aesthetic perception and aesthetic sensitivity is crucial to such transformative experiences of *rasa*. However an artist who embodies a leaping tiger, the jaunt of a cow, the madness of an angry elephant, the ferocious fight of a vulture with a demon king, a mischievous bright eyed langur baby leaping up to eat the sun, invites the aesthete to experience embodiment. Whether these expressions are in performance or painting or sculpture, the vivacious line that guides the Indian artist draws in the aesthete to embody these beings through the flow of *prāṇa*, breath, the line that connects all life.[1]

Aestheticization and sublimation of emotion is neither negation of everyday emotion nor idealization or falsification as it is often misunderstood in studies of Indian aesthetics. It is heightening perceptivity, deepening experience, and enriching sensitivity; much like adding nuance, tones and hues to works of art to deliberate upon specific aspects in a work and bring out the overall mood. Aestheticization and sublimation as cultivated meditative experiences make emotion more visible and clearer to be read, comprehended and pondered upon. In relationships with nature, where our civilization has lost most of the co-evolved vocabulary of expressing emotional bonds, there is a need for renewal. The arts and concept of *rasa* provide the requisite knowledge for such revitalization of relationship with the natural world in an embodied and indivisible manner.

In Indian thought, *Upaniṣadic* understanding of body is seen as separating body and mind and ascetism as a hard boundary of withdrawal from the sensorial world. The

[1] All the representations discussed are from mythologies and epics - Goddess *Durga*'s vehicle is the tiger, the cow is often represented in narratives of *Kṛṣṇa* as a cowherd, the angry elephant can be shown in war sequences or Lord *Ganeśa* playing a trick, *Hanuman* is a langur, the vulture is *Jatāyu* fighting for *Sīta* against *Rāvanā*

dualist mode of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* as understood in *Sāṃkhya* is also referred when discussing the split between mind/ soul/ spirit and body (Bilimoria and Wenta, 2017). However, these are often limited interpretations of both schools of thought as mythology, folklore and ritual practices can contradict this understanding. And everyday practice blends several thought systems in Hindu life.

The challenge of theorization of Hinduism is that most people attempt to construct a master narrative of Hinduism, where plural ideas, and paradoxical positions that people resolve in multiple ways in their everyday practices as Hindus are often denied (Kumar 2010). When a holistic system is interpreted through reductionist paradigms, there is a clash of epistemologies and ontologies and the relationship between the two. Mysticism further blurs the boundaries of human experience and cognition allowing for more ambiguity.

Given the ambiguity of *Vedic* as well as *Upaniṣadic* writings, interpretations that invalidate the body-mind dualism are critical offering alternative ways to read the texts.

> In the *Upaniṣad*s there is no indication of this antagonistic relation of the body and spirit. On the other hand bodily existence was regarded as an opportunity for spiritual realisation. The body is not the prison of the soul but a habitat for it, or a temple in which the soul can work out its salvation by worship and meditation (Tiwari 1985: 178). (As cited in Bilimoria and Wenta, 2017).

Puruṣa and *Prakṛti*, often identified as *Śiva* and *Śakti* are also perceived as a sensual couple. The body is not denied, however it is definitely trained through both arts and

yoga, to extend its possibilities to resonate with the essential order of life, to find resonance. People may choose different paths or systems to find their own resonance.

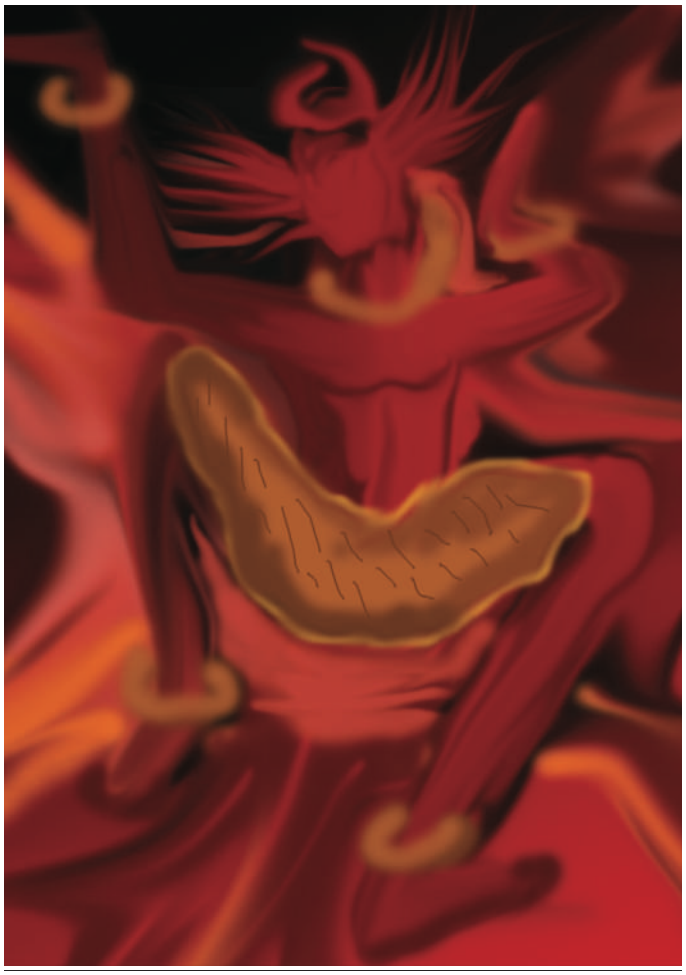


Fig 9: SivaSakti, The dance of the Ardhanari.

Great waves of energy
blend the earth
and the sky.
Two forces merge and
rise like a flame.
How strange!
Dance begins
in conversation and
ends in communication!

Digital Painting on Adobe Photoshop, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

In aesthetics, literature and art, the body is celebrated and the sensuous is also the sacred. In temple rituals too, the *paḷḷi aṟai cēvai*, which is the ritual of the bedroom for the god and goddess, ensures that every night, the *uṟcava mūrtis* (The metal sculptures of the gods and goddesses which are used for taking the deities around) are gently placed in the bedroom, and the great sensuality of life is restored. The following poem, that came as an insight ponders of how to interpret the Indian thought systems and their seeming contradictions in whether they are separating the body and spirit or seeing them as more fluid categories. At the same time the poem also mocks how the artist who is a sensualist and the monk who is a renunciate are interpreted, calling out the flaw in the interpretation by making visible the play

between *Śiva* and *Śakti*, where the line between the ascetic god and the sensual goddess dissolve into passionate love play.

The Monk and the Sensualist *(3rd Aug 2016)*

The artist celebrates.
The renunciate withdraws.
Like a swing,
they move in a rhythmic ocean
of waves, one bound,
recursively into the other.
One meditation,
resulting in the other;
One walk,
dancing into the other;
One embracing the other.
Pārvatī laughs sensually
and Śiva is drawn.
Pārvatī is the ascetic
and Śiva, her craftsman.
Who creates, who renounces?
Who plays with whose being?
Lo! Behold, one dissolving into the other,
this aesthetic splendour of surrender,
one sensuality, outdoing the other!

Hilarity ensues as Śiva and Pārvatī

mock debate against

the monk and the sensualist

as Śiva paints her body.

In Indian aesthetics, the ritual and practices of *yoga* and *sādhanā*, are as discussed before considered *yajña*, transformation. It would be impossible to be an artist without being a renunciate and a renunciate without being a sensualist in this system of thought because the sacred and the sensuous are woven together and in play between each other, to bring out *rasānubhava*, aesthetic delight that can lead us back to finding our own resonance with the rhythm of the universe. And the body in aesthetics is therefore both subtle and gross, the emotional and spiritual body as critical as the physical body as well as the subtle body of consciousness in any moment of aesthetic experience, for the experience of *rasa* cannot happen unless all of them are vibrating together.

9. The Body in Relationship: Being and Becoming, Consciousness

A seamless exchange of being and becoming between sentient and insentient beings, where consciousness and selfhood are flowing ceaselessly between one self and another is an essential feature of being *porous*. The nature of relationship in this shared self, is one where the connection between two beings and all other life around them is continuous and linked.

Christopher Wallis in his doctoral work unravels South Asian notions of Selfhood through *Tantric Śaivism*, and perceives selfhood as

> "not only mutable and fluid but also porous and permeable: it can overlap and intermingle with other beings, powers, and energies. Selfhood is never single, and subjectivity is always inescapably intersubjective: on this view, we share ourselves with other beings or other aspects of Being, whether we know it or not. Since human persons in constant interaction with their environment will never successfully erect an impermeable psychic barrier around themselves, and since all attempts to do so will necessarily be fraught with anxiety *(śaṅkā)* as one compulsively patrols that artificial boundary, the question of real significance for a *tāntrika* becomes: who or what are you going to share yourself with? Self-induced salutary possession is really nothing more (or less) than choosing to share one's self with a deity or divine power that has the qualities that one seeks to internalize. Indeed, it is the most powerful way to attain those qualities. Thus the *Tantric* self is multidimensional, multivalent, and polysemous, yet it has an integrity as well, for in essence it is a field of awareness that, however much it is colored by different experiences or influxes of energy, still retains certain essential characteristics: its autonomy, its *porosity,* its dynamism, and its capacity for enjoying self-awareness (ĪPK 1.4.13-14) (Wallis 2014, 367-368)."

In aesthetic perception, *Bhakti* traditions, mystic traditions, *Śaivism* and *tantric* worldviews and even *Vedica* worldviews (though Wallis positions '*Brahmanical'* monism in opposition, in practice monism also subsumes the concept of *porous selves* in relation to each other), the notion of a shared self is commonly practiced. This nature of a fluid *porous* consciousness that can intuitively experience other selves and beings within itself while retaining its own identity is central in much Indian thought

and everyday life to a way of cognizing the world, reality and the very nature of physicality. Each system/ school of thought has its own methods to evoke, iniate, practice and experience this kind of selhood. The simple gesture of holding hands together in a gesture of inviting another into one's space and saying *Namaskāra*, widely practiced across India, is a simple acknowledgement of the shared self, invoking the presence of one within the other in salutation and celebration.

Wallis further continues,

> "Whatever form it has contracted into, whether compelled by influences it *(the self)* considers foreign or not, it retains the capacity to release that contraction and expand back into the domain of infinite possibilities. As it cognizes and absorbs various sentient and insentient phenomena that arise and subside within it, it oscillates dynamically (*spandana, sphurattā*) between contraction into particularity and expansion into possibility, becoming active (*udita*) and quiescent (*śānta*) in turn. This capacity of consciousness to remain aware while being dynamic and porous, and remain dynamic while being aware of itself, is its essential feature. We here argue that this permeable, porous, and mutable self is simply a philosophical refinement of the dominant discourse of selfhood in South Asia. (Wallis, 2014, 367-368)"

Wallis emerges the porous and mutable self out of *Tantric Śaivism* and locates it in the dominant discourse of selfhood in South Asia. As I have traced discourses of aesthetics, diverse philosophical systems, positions of consciousness and action across the first six chapters, the *porous self* is an all pervasive concept in Indian thought systems. As Vatsyayan (1992, 33-34) has suggested, it is located in the worldviews

that look at the relationship between energy and matter and the transmutations between the two to create multiplicity, plurality and at the same time oneness of forms.

Touch in relationships is a manifestation of subtle consciousness and gross body, interweaving them in a sensual spin that allows for *porous* experiences to happen between beings. Touch is the physical manifestation of *spandana*, vibration that helps us resonate with other life around us. Rediscovering the experience of touch helps us engage in more conversations that will discard the body-mind duality. In lyrical prose, it becomes possible for me to engage with touch through metaphor and draw out the felt-sense with thoughtful articulation.

Touch is the most profound of human connections that we form with the world. The way we touch with our eyes, the scents that touch us, our breath, the way we touch with our hands, with our heart- the things that are close to us and yet far from us. The gentle romance of touch in being human, warmth and kindness flowing between lives. One forgets the simplest things that we need… the gentleness of touch that comes out of love not bound by relationships and the boundaries we draw around them, but kindness, a̲npu, fondness, nēcam, affection, pācam and the deep well of loving another through joy and sorrow. But there is a tacit right between people, and between all life that allows those moments of touch to be gifts of being, an embrace that is like golden moonlight shimmering on ocean waves, unfathomable, endless, and constantly flowing between beingness. And when we forget that tacit right which allows touch to flood us with light, we forget how to touch, and how to be alive, how to be human. Touch, when it is freed from all that blocks it opens us to embrace life,

in all its darkness and terrific beauty, still glances and swaying branches, whispers of wind and monsoon breeze, sweet joy and twilight blue sky.

10. Body in Symbol and Metaphor

How do we think about the body – is it a sheath that houses the self/ spirit/ soul or is it entwined with the self/ spirit/ soul? Do we always look at the body and mind as separate units or do we consider it a body-mind complex? How do we look at moments of unified body-mind experiences and find ways to articulate the same? The body, as that which decays, and dies, while remaining integral to the identity of a person, its ephemeral and elusive nature makes it also the most intriguing aspect of human existence. The body that we are, is so intricately linked to our sense of identity, to our relationships, to the way we feel, touch, see, hear, taste; the way we bond with other people or beings, the way we hug, or experience intimacy, our laughter and our tears.

This tremendous vital experience of being alive that the body brings into being is uncontestable. Every sense of the integrated mind-body complex is *porous* to everything around it. While one may discuss variances in the degrees of *porosity*, we exist because we are *porous*, because we breath, we eat food, and we make sense of the world through each of our senses, with the mental images and connections that we form. Our ideas permeate as much as our physical experiences do in continuous infinite forms of exchange. When we meditate on the possibilities and realities of these infinite natures of exchange, it is rather easy to find ourselves in the web of life, in intricate complex relationships with everything else around us.

A simple meditative exercise that I do in many of my classes on 'nature and self' involves breathing consciously with a simple guiding question –'Whose breath are we breathing?' I start with the confines of the room I am in, the people surrounding me, and move the consciousness out beyond the doors and windows to visualize this breath exchange between me and the trees, and then go further beyond to the limits of the city and then continue this exercise into other landscapes, people, all the way to the sea. This journey of breath emerges through three different practices within it - creative visualization, intense awareness of the breath and opening up the doorways of consciousness to subtler experience of relationships we share with other beings. This exercise often creates a space for insight and intuition in participants, into how *porous* we really are and how imagined our boundaries of the body are.

Training the body in different forms – *yoga*, martial arts and classical performing arts (theatre, music or dance) leads to very different understanding of the body. *Yoga* brings in fluidity and restraint, body and mind awareness, martial arts, a high degree of alertness, and the classical performing arts, a deep reflective understanding of emotion. Music trains the body for resonance through sound. While all of them share many common roots in the Indian traditional systems of knowledge, they also open very different possibilities in one's experience of the body.

Discussing from my training in *Bharatanāṭyam*, the experience of *rasa*, arises from aestheticization of the body-mind complex, for the artist as well as the aesthete. The aesthetic emotional experience that the artist creates in her performance arises from careful training, deep intuitive as well as reflective study of emotions, characters,

gestural language, grammar of the form, the very physicality of the body that has emerged from years of training.

Let's for example discuss a possible choreography for the vision that transpires between the mother *Yaśoda* and her son, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* as she has a cosmic vision when he opens his mouth, and she can see the whole universe swirling within it. The mother in all her deep love, and concern for her very mischievous child is caught between admiring his mischief, teaching him to stop stealing butter from the neighbors and marveling that her child is the lord himself. The mother's love is naïve enough to remain unchanged even after such a cosmic vision, as to her, he is still a playful kid whom she hugs, threatens, cajoles, disciplines and loves.

Eṉṉa tavam ceitaṉai, one of Papanasam Sivan's Tamiḻ compositions and Purandara Dāsa's *Jagaḍōḍhārana (Kannada composition)* capture this experience and are often performed in *Bharatanāṭyam* recitals. I choose this moment and these two songs for choreographic discussions as they personify the relationship between mother and son, while embedded within this moment lies another cosmic narrative of a deeper love for the universe through a divine/ cosmic play. The mother who loves this small son, is inevitably falling in love with the very universe that he embodies in his tiny little mischievous, playful self and being; Somehow now the universe can be held in her embrace.

An artist performing this piece is depicting human love between mother and child while simultaneously showing a cosmic vision and the entirety of creation. A tall order, and yet with the powerful gestural language, terse well thought through

sequencing and representing of emotions, and switching between these two worlds, the artist manages to fuse these permeating worlds with one other, creating an experience of rasa, that emerges in great vastness contained within the love of mother and child. The narrative allows one to embody an otherwise abstract, immense and ineffable experience. The gestural language, lyrical composition and musical rhythms, the grammar of the form, are all conducive to embodiment of ineffability.

11. Being and Becoming: Manifestation of Form

The manifestation of form is a critical link to the creative process of the arts and how it is connected to the ontology of the body in Indian thought is essential to understand in order to unravel the approach to practice of *porosity* as I define it in the next section.

Niharranjan Ray's seminal work 'Idea and Image in Indian art' allows us to reflect on Indian art through the idea and image of "*Bodhi*, Matter and life and flux (1973)." Niharranjan Ray (1973) uses the Sanskrit term *Bhava* to interpret the word 'idea.' *Bhāva* as he describes from its Sanskrit root "*Bhū*, to be 'Being' and 'Becoming', of something which has a life of its own and is always in a process of change."

The conception of form or *rūpa* is critical to artistic work. The relationship between idea and the artistic form that it will take is at the heart of the aesthetic-philosophical inquiry of any creative process. The relationship between form and meaning follows in tandem with this. In both religious and secular traditions in India, *rūpa* has a range of meanings and both aesthetic and philosophical interpretations (Sharma (ed.) 2002, 71). "Its connotations have a bewildering multiplicity, rich in content and magnitude, and it eminently meets the essential premise in regard to the constituted 'form' in

Indian art, its aesthetics and philosophy specially, as it re-invents and transcribes experience into a visual structure or a representation (Sharma (ed.) 2002, 71)." *Māyā* is considered an essential faculty that provides the ability to create form (Sharma (ed.) 2002, 73). Form is considered to arise from the formless in tradition, and the artist 'renders the experience of his creative consciousness into representational reality' following principles of composition (Sharma (ed.) 2002, 116).

Closely entwined to the relationship of idea, form and meaning is consciousness. There are several layers in which consciousness must be acknowledged in creative process:

- The consciousness required to create a work of art and the training of the artist,
- The consciousness of the subject of study
- The consciousness that emerges in intersubjectivity
- The consciousness that emerges from study, practice, cultural lineage and the constraints of a given form/ style of art
- The consciousness expressed in the form/ image
- The consciousness that is not independent of corporality and sensuality, but embodied
- The consciousness that is actively socio-political

Symbolic form that captures the illusions and nuances of form, diversity and unity, multiplicity and parameters that connect the inner and outer worlds all influence compositional decisions of the artist in Indian traditions. While a longer discussion of

this is beyond the scope of the thesis, all these are part of the intuitive lineage of creative process as discussed in the earlier chapter.

The pursuit of complexity as the essence of creation, its appreciation and recreation is at the heart of the Indian creative enterprise. Complexity however is not multiple, but the singular *Brahman* that multiplies. Unity is the fundamental root of complexity in this epistemology. Unraveling this complexity, a unified multiplicity into a highly evolved set of symbols, has its own grammar in each style of representation. Complexity is pursued as consciousness in Indian thought. (*Brahman* is consciousness). Consciousness itself is seen as subtle, gross and transcendental. Consciousness of the individual is also mapped on in correspondence with the universal/ cosmic consciousness *Brahman*, allowing one to be expressed in terms of the other. This idea of understanding consciousness as the subject of all inquiries provides a framework for understanding Indian aesthetics and creative expression from a different vantage point from that of art as a study of beauty or expression of form alone. Consciousness becomes then pliable subject, practice and preparation of self, media, tool, subject of study and end goal.

Consciousness is pure mathematical geometry, abstract and free of figurative-narrative on one end. At the same time is also organic, free flowing, multiplicity of narrative in its transference into creative form by the Indian artist; *Yantra* and *maṇḍala* or sensuous sculpture, the heart of the enterprise remains a continued ceaseless engagement with consciousness. For the artist, the creative dictum is to express consciousness as complexity with intimacy and simplicity. The power of terseness in Indian creative expression comes from multilayered meanings that are

condensed through grammar of form. Decorativeness is both embellishment and nuance for consciousness. The *sahṛdaya* unravels these layers with ease and an intimate knowledge of the grammar to experience *ānanda*, relish and enjoyment of consciousness. Traversing states of consciousness with sweet intimacy, the Indian artist and aesthete reflect and meditate on the primordial creative act as a way of honoring life. Vatsyayan succinctly captures the essence of form and being as the interrelationship between the outer and the inner drawing out the philosophical positions that drove the principles behind evolving form in Indian art. She maps the paradigm of (*Puruṣa*) and the the paradigm that arises from the metaphor of the Charioteer to show how an inter-related and inter-dependent ecology of the microcosm and macrocosm have been created (Vatsyayan (n.d), Accessed 23rd June 2020).

12. Examples from Indian art

I discuss a few examples from Indian art, (sculptures from Lepakshi and Konarak) to throw light on the unique and symbolic forms and the idea of being that they represent. The forms are in a constant state of being and becoming, with inherent dynamism in a constant state of flux. They draw from symbolic, metaphysical and philosophical paradigms into structure and composition that is manifest. They also draw upon the rich experience of inner worlds and how subtle and nuanced experiences can be expressed in form. The essence of sacred art as envisioned in traditional India seeks to "penetrate into the essence and truth of Being", "evoking a vision of ultimate Reality (Boner, Sarma and Baumer 1996, 5)." Form, in this sense is always evolved at the interpenetration of the cosmic, terrestrial and individual self (*ādhidhaivika, ādhibhautika* and *ādhyātmika*), allowing for cosmic, metaphysical,

mystical, divine and mundane worlds to merge, converge, coalesce and manifest in symbolic form.

The *Yāḻi/Virāla/Vyāla/Śārdula*, is a mixed creature, that is a combination of lion, bull, elephant, horse, crocodile and several other animals. It is a symbol of word and the creative power of the word. It represents at one level the incredible clarity that emerges in consciousness, with the powerful lion representing *Vāk* (primordial word/ speech)[2]. At another level it is also representative of chaos and evolution (Kailasam 2004). The pearls that are often found flowing from the mouth of the *śārdula* are considered to be words being strung together. *Vāk* is visualized as a lioness and seen as universal consciousness that manifests itself in stages, "first as articulate voice in man called *dhvani*, then as the word or *vāk*, and finally as substance or body of universe or *rupa* (Kramrisch 2015, 332-337)." A mythological episode from the *Sathapatha Brāhmaṇā* (III 5.1, 21-23) showcases a playful attitude that the *śārdula* adopts and manifests as rhythmical utterance and the sport and play of metres, and this aspect is visible in how the *yāḻis* are portrayed in rhythmic sequences across temple pillars and in the string of pearls that flow from its mouth (Kramrisch 2015, 332-337). Language as consciousness becomes dynamic composite form in fluid rhythm drawn from the essence of animal movements. Metaphorical, as well as symbolic, layers of idea, experience, thought, manifestation of subtle and gross are captured in this process of creating form.

[2] "Saraswati Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda* says that *Vāk* or word is of four forms – *parā* (eternal), *paśyanti* (experienced by seer in a state of deep consciousness),, *madhyama* (when it translates as idea in the intellect) and *vaikhāri* (when it is verbally expressed)." http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Sri_Vidya



Fig 10: Sardula, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.



Fig 11: Yāli pillars in the prakara, Bounding Wall,a Vijayanagara period addition, Bhoganandisvara Temple, Chikkaballapur District, Karnataka, 9th - 13th Centuries CE.



Fig 12: Śālabhañjikā, Veerabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Vijaynagara Style, Andhra Pradesh, 16th Century CE.

Śālabhañjikā (*Yakṣa & Yakṣi*) (dryad) – The tree spirits, their forms entwined with trees are a representation of an intimate loving relationships between a human or spirit, *yakṣi, apsaras*, even a *rākṣasi* (demoness), and plant forms as well as other natural forms and elements. Sometimes these *yakṣis* are standing on other vehicles like elephant, crocodile, tortoise, horses and other riverine vehicles. They are also seen adorning themselves, carrying a child, and holding a branch, or resting a foot on a tree. Usually mango, *aśoka* and *sāla* trees are represented alongside the *śālabhañjikā* (Coomaraswamy 1993, 83). The touch of a woman is connected to the longing of the tree, who cannot flower until it is satisfied by the touch of a woman, a *śālabhañjikā* in these instances, signifying a deep connection between "tree, tree spirits and human life (Coomaraswamy 1993, 86-87)."

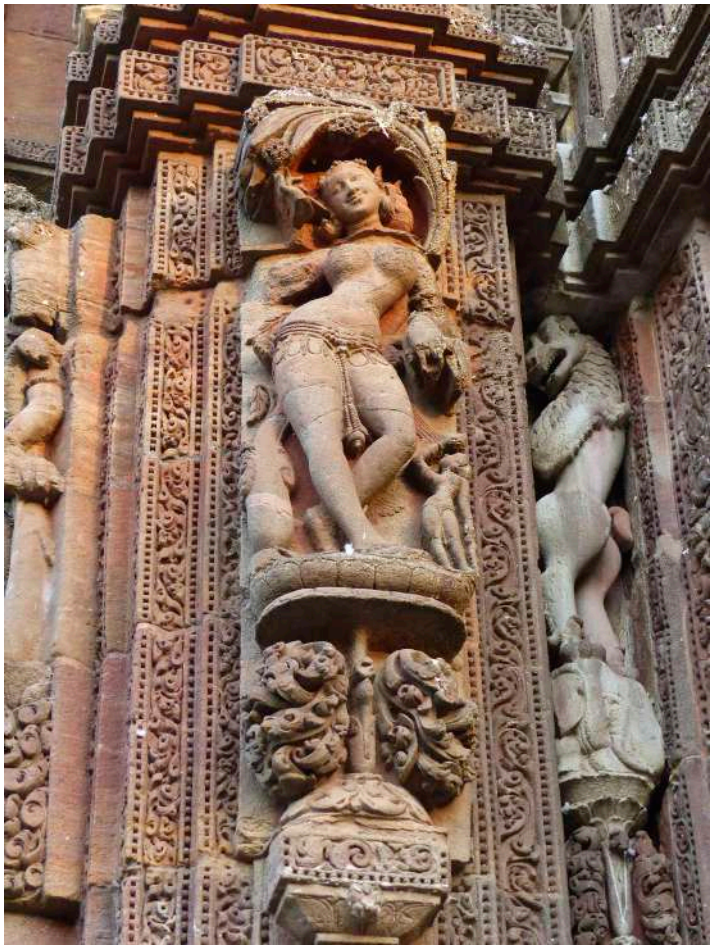


Fig 13:
Śālabhañjikā, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.

Dancing figures in Indian art represent ceaseless rhythmic continuity of a world constantly in flux, representing both timelessness and the ceaseless motion of time. This is also the representation of "nature's law of eternal life (Ray 1973, 115)." The dance of *Naṭarāja* sets the stage for complex philosophical interpretations of space-time, consciousness, self-transformation and the eternal cycle of creation, destruction and balance. The very conceptualization of time-space-consciousness continuums are represented in Indian art through dance, where whether in performance, or in plastic arts, the body in movement becomes a symbol of flux and ceaseless continuity of life, the very essence of nature's principles.





Fig 14 and 15: Dancers and musicians, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.

Lovers in Indian art represent erotic, sensual affectionate warmth. Abandon and ecstasy woven into deep embrace and love of human, animal, and celestial beings. Love is an expression of sensuality, fertility and the ceaseless continuity of life. Great depth and range of emotions associated with love are explored through gods and goddesses, mythical beings, and humans. *Kālī* dancing on *Śiva, Śiva* and *Śakti* in competitive dances as well as harmonious ones, *Kṛṣṇa* in love with *Radha* and *Krṣṇa* in love play or *līlā*, serpents locked in sensual dance, *apsaras* and *gandharvas* flying together celebrating love – the expressions of lovers are myriad in Indian art.



Fig 16: Lovers, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.

The four examples of concepts in Indian art are barely representative of the infinite forms and possibilities that have been conceptualized. However, they showcase how principles of form, being and becoming are represented and how cosmic, terrestrial

and human worlds are interconnected in these representations allowing for consciousness to emerge in multiple representations through creative imagination. The approach to emerging form thus shows a complex blending of mystical, metaphysical, cosmic and mundane worlds where the artist plays with concepts of materiality, body, composition and invisible, subtle essence simultaneously. This approach is what I see as essential in the pursuit of *porosity,* discussed in later chapters. Without the comprehension of body and form and the nuanced, diverse and complex ways in which Indian tradition appreciates these concepts, it would be difficult to imagine artistic practice that draws from both richness and complexity. Both the epistemology and ontology of body and form are integral to the evolution of perception, creativity and practice in culturally bound artistic practice as well in intuitive modes of practice that are informed by culture.



Fig 17: Śālabhañjikā and Naga Lovers, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.



Fig 17: Close up of Naga Lovers, Sun Temple, Konarak, 13th Century CE, Odisha.

The next three chapters will lay out some of the creative works in the plastic arts, in literature and in movement and dance forms to look at the manifestation of artistic

forms, practice and process. The choices of these creative works are based on those that influence my own work over the years. By delving deeper into the works of other artists, I glean out principles of technique, creative process, conceptual and compositional possibilities that then inform my creative work which will be discussed in the final section.

Part 3

The Practitioner's Framework

The Practitioner's Framework: An Outline

"Informed encounters with works of art are always new beginnings. New perspectives open in experience; new possibilities of seeing, hearing, feeling are revealed. When individuals are released to be personally present to paintings or poems or sonatas, when they learn how to let their energies go out to the works in an enlarging perception and a focusing of attention, the fields over which their imaginations can play deepen, diversify, and expand."

(Greene 1986)

The next three chapters - Image, Text and Movement consider questions of practice, build on stylistic, symbolic, conceptual and textual analysis of works of different artists, writers and dancers in a quest for languages of expression for *porosity.*

The choice of images, dancers, and poets/ poems are based on the following factors

i. Styles, forms that have influenced my work and artists whose work has inspired or influenced my work
ii. Show strong evidences of *porosity*, principles of *porosity* or methods and tools relevant to *porosity*
iii. Show methods/ tools that are relevant to transformation of consciousness
iv. Show evidence of ecological consciousness as a subject of artistic inquiry and practice.

In Image – I detail out

- Principles of transformation of nature into classical Indian art
- *Gond* Art
- *Kalamkāri*

The chapter will additionally provide an overview of eco-art in India in the contemporary context and a glimpse into other artistic influences that include Miniature Paintings, Santiniketan movement, Santiniketan School and the Bengal school of art, Impressionism and Romanticism, Wildlife Art, Chinese brush painting

In Text – I detail out

Caṅkam poetry and embodied landscape language

Bharatiyar's Poetry

In movement, I do a broad survey of *Bharatanāṭyam*, Dance of *Śiva*, and select dancers like Alarmel Valli, Malavika Sarukkai, Tamil film dancers Kumari Kamala, Padmini and Vyjanthimala, Modern and Contemporary dancer Chandralekha.

Questions of Practice

Questions of Practice that are common to all three chapters consider philosophical inquiries into form, materiality, and aesthetic experience. The questions are generative and lead to critical discoveries in gaps in language and expression, as well as creativity, aesthetics and making. Keeping these questions as guiding inquiries, specifics aspects are studied in Image, Text and Movement.

- In what ways do we go about redefining our sense of self? How can art help us extend our identity?
- How does one evoke aesthetic experience in self or in audience that can extend to transformation?
- How can the artist arrive at a form that can represent multiple relationships with nature? Is it one form or many integrated forms?
- What role do intuition and spontaneity play in the act of creativity and expression?
- When does the creative practitioner allow for flow of consciousness to guide practice?
- How are training, discipline and mastery of craft relevant or critical to building new practices?
- How does one play with the slipping of space and time from one being to another in visual or textual form? Does it need to be a layered and complex

form that is nuanced to interpret and enjoy or can it be a simple form that is instantly evocative to the discerned?

- Can language be physical-gestural, oral, visual, textual, tacit-subtle? Can dual or multiple languages be used to construct evocative landscapes?
- Can the final modes of interaction with audience too take many forms from seeing/ viewing, reading/ listening to interactive workshops, educational modules and curricula, interactive theatre play and performance arts?
- When the audience is presented with various means of engagement with the artistic material, does that allow for increased depth of perception, specificity of attention, increased aesthetic perception?
- How do we look at questions of beauty and aesthetics as ethical concerns within the artist's paradigm?
- What does the artist's approach to reality and cultural background allow for in unfolding ecological consciousness?

The intention through these three chapters is to draw out clear principles and techniques for practice of *porosity* in art making. At one level, the chapters clarify cultural factors that influence creative intuition and process. At another level, they provide a clear understanding of tools and techniques for creative process and art making.

Chapter 7

Image

"The real craft of stonecarving is a 'visual song' which cannot really be planned or repeated, because the vibration of the stone itself tells the carver how it should be shaped. The carver must become one with the stone, and then the music of the stone expresses itself through him."

—Ganapati Sthapati

https://www.himalayanacademy.com/monastery/temples/iraivan/bangalore/vgsthapati

Sections

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    3.1. The Purpose of Art
    3.2. Symbolism
    3.3. Iconography
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4. *Gond* Art
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6. Other Influences
    6.1. Miniature Paintings
    6.2. Santiniketan movement, Santiniketan School and the Bengal School of Art
    6.3. Impressionism and Romanticism
    6.4. Wildlife Art
    6.5. Asian Painting
7. Summary

Chapter 7: Image will address questions of practice, build on stylistic, symbolic, conceptual and textual analysis of works of different visual art forms and artists in a quest for languages of expression for porosity.

1. Introduction to Image

Our relationship with the natural world and how we represent it through the visual arts open up several questions of style and technique as well as conceptual approaches to representation.

> "Barbara C. Matilsky noted that ecological art is rooted not only in natural sciences but also in cultural history.[12] It is through culture that nature and natural sciences can enter the view of artists and art historians. Cultural factors influence different artists to engage in environmental and ecological issues, such as how to reflect on specific ecological issues; how to choose their breakthrough points and methodologies; finally how to decide on the themes, content, and imagery of ecological artworks; and how to have those works considered and distributed in society." (Yang 2016)

The choice of artists/ art works have been made based on their representations of the natural world and the relationship of human and the natural world. These are the forms that have had strongest influence in my own practice among several others. In tracing the evolution of my practice, I have looked at my inspirations more closely to unravel the language, artistic processes, formal and conceptual elements and analyzed them to understand how I can draw from as well as build new practice for myself.

For this chapter on Image, I have done a survey of contemporary eco art as practiced in India today to provide context. Following this, I look closely at the complexity in the representation of *porous* experiences through 8 major styles of art through the ages:

1. Traditional Indian art is selectively studied through particular motifs ahistorically, to bring out symbolism and philosophical interpretations and the transformation of nature in Indian art. The integration of myth, consciousness and philosophy is discussed as a framework.
2. *Gond* Art practiced by the *Gond* tribes of Madhya Pradesh, a style originally developed by artist Jangarh Shyam, In particular, I analyse Bhajju Shyam's works.
3. *Kalamkāri* as a style for both its formal stylistic elements, technique and use of natural dyes and how they are intertwined with landscape and local water source.
4. Miniature paintings for how space and time are handled.
5. Santiniketan / Bengal school of art to look at how the traditional values of being one with the environment were translated at the time of transition of Indian art and in the ushering in of the modern art movements in India.
6. Impressionism and Romanticism and artists Claude Monet, J.M.W. Turner and John Constable to look at influences that have impacted in the development of my styles as well as how their perceptions have contributed to representations of the natural world.
7. A selective look at wildlife artists Robert Bateman and William T.Cooper to raise questions of realistic, naturalistic studies of nature and their relevance to building a style for *porosity*.

8. A look at the works and methods of Karl Martens to look at technical and conceptual approaches in blending meditative practices and close observation of the natural world alongside Chinese brush painting.

2. "A Background to Environmental Art / Eco-Art in India[1]

Indian modern and contemporary visual and installation artists have looked at the ecological issues from different vantage points (Sultana 2015). In the early period of nationalism, revivalism and the rising modern Indian art, creating art that resonated and drew its inspiration from the local environment was seen as a key aspect of ideas that rose from the Santhiniketan and Bengal movements. Tagore who set up the Santhiniketan school of art firmly believed in closeness to nature and set up his institution in rural India, planting mango orchards and other local species to create an outdoor learning space that was interwoven with nature. He also set up secular nature based festivals that would be celebrated in the school. Many of the artists looked at nature-culture as an interwoven whole and their representations of landscapes, communities, tribal life, followed from within this framework. We see this in the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij, Binode Bihari Mukherjee from the Santiniketan School and others. Later, there are artists like A.Ramachandran who have been drawn deeply by mysticism and beauty in Nature, and been inspired by the simple life of Bhils, traditional representations of the lotus, and found a way to draw the essence of nature through the lotus as a symbol (Kumar 2018). Others like Vivan Sundaram, have taken on the impact of mindless

[1] A shorter version of this published in Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 (2020) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020]. https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184

development and its impact on society to highlight environmental degradation and its impact on the poor. “Sundaram's recent ensemble rehearses the discursive construction of the city-as-waste, by representing an urban whole, through elaborate and exaggeratingly ordered arrangements of garbage. Working collaboratively with waste-pickers associated with the non-governmental organization Chintan, which is an environmental and research action group based in New Delhi. The artist sorts, re-assembles, re-arranges and scales the found-objects of trash into detailed models of a monumental urban landscape. Through a close reading of its formal aspects, the entry examines trash's reflection on logics of planned obsolescence which governs both the work as well as fantasies of economic nationalism premised on dualistic images of the notions of a mega-city (Artsome, Vivan Sundaram).” Contemporary Artists like Suresh Samuha experiment with composting as community engaged art (Personal conversation with artist, October 2018). Contemporary artist Surekha in her long observation, association and documentation of Jakkur Lake looks at community engagement in revival as an extended inquiry of art. (Personal conversation with artist, 24 September 2018)

Delhi based artist Manav Gupta has been engaging with environmental issues and climate change in the form of public art weaving pottery, poetry and music together (Dey 2018).

Tribal artists and craftspeople as they engage in contemporary art spaces, also bring the rich worldview of environment from within their cultural paradigms, usage of materials and practices in the consumerist world that can be ecologically responsible. Bhajju Shyam, *Gond* artist’s work revels in the link between nature and self in metaphorical ways (Shyam, Rao, and Wolf 2018). *Kalamkāri* artists working with

natural dyes and other crafts communities working with natural dyes raise environmental awareness in terms of production techniques, local ecology and health (Ranipeta 2018). Artisanal practices and Vernacular traditions are being studied, reviewed, revived and also becoming a part of artistic practices as artists and designers borrow techniques, methods and ideas from these to build new work. Festivals that connect, art, ecology and the public like 48C http://www.48c.org/, open the space for public engagement with the ecological crisis and local environmental issues through the arts.

In the works of traditional architect and sculptor Dr. Ganapathi Sthapathi, living spaces constructed from the flow of the five elements remain a highlight to encounter nature in everyday life (Kailasam 2004). In the work of Architect B.V.Doshi, who uses *Porosity* as a key framework of his design, there is a conscious understanding of how the natural world would interweave with the architectural space as well as the human soul. He says in his talk on IIM-B campus which he designed, "Can you 'see' IIMB as a building? It is not visible because nature has taken over so you see a wall here, a pillar there. It has scale and density but also *porosity*. What is architecture? What does it really mean? When we 'inhabit' a space (consciously), architecture becomes the body to our soul. Then it is alive…it can talk to us." (Doshi 2014). In his work there is a contant inquiry into transforming the traditional into the contemporary with a depth awareness of environment and community.

Artists who work with the scientific ecological paradigm and scientific forays into conservation are into wildlife art, photography and filmmaking as well. Some of them follow the path of early naturalists to discover their creative forms of expression.

Bengaluru-based Prasad Natarajan, is a wildlife artist who seeks to capture Indian wildlife in different landscapes in India. His current work brings together Wildlife artists from India and across Asia through an online platform AWN - Artists for Wildlife and Nature (personal conversation with artist). Maya Ramaswamy, another wildlife artist from India, has contributed to several children's books published by Katha, illustrating the Western Ghats, grasslands in the North East.

Mike Pandey, environmental filmmaker specializes in films that have nuanced discussions on wildlife, biodiversity and environment. His acclaimed and award winning television series 'Earth Matters' brings discussions on Indian biodiversity and conservation issues to the forefront. Wildlife filmmaker and conservationist Shekar Dattatri's early works were careful studies of Indian wildlife capturing intimate portraits of wildlife and landscape. His most recent work over the last fifteen years are hard hitting short documentaries that are issue specific and contribute towards conservation work. The work of environmental filmmaker Sanjay Barnela captures the complex interrelationships between humans and their environment, the politics of urban consumerism, corporate industries and power dynamics, resilience and challenges by communities as climate change and rapid degradation of landscape takes over traditional beliefs and practices (Bhattacharya 2014).

Collaborative spaces are being created between art and design institutions with scientific institutions like Indian Institute of Sciences, National centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore, Science Gallery Bangalore and Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology collaborating on projects to bring changing scope of environmental

thinking, science-art communication and public engagement on the ecological crisis forward. There are rich debates and discussions and traditions of practice that look at environment from cultural, political, social, creative and scientific standpoints.[2] Design thinkers in India too have richly drawn upon traditional as well as contemporary environmental concerns and understanding in their attempt to emerge a design identity for India (Balaram 1998). Dancers and musicians are engaged in developing new conversations of form and engagement for raising ecological consciousness and awareness about the ecological crisis.

According to environmental artist and activist, Ravi Agarwal, "The idea of nature has deeply influenced the way we have seen and reacted to the world. Today, it is understood to have been the cause of the carving of nation state boundaries, cultural practices, or of migration and displacements. We are speaking of fundamental shifts [in our] understanding of how the world has been shaped and the role which the idea of nature has in its making, politically as well as culturally. The idea of what constitutes environmental art is in the making today" (Aggarwal 2018).

3. The Transformation of Nature in Traditional Indian Art and Thought

Creativity and aesthetics in relation to environment help us to understand the long history of human relationship with and as part of the natural world. Different cultures have different aesthetic principles that drive their expression of this relationship. Symbolism and Iconography have played a key role in traditional Indian art, in how nature is transformed into art. This section inquires into the key principles that drive the perception and transformation of nature in art through symbolism and

[2] (http://srishti.ac.in/schools/school-of-new-humanities-and-design, https://artscienceblr.org/index.php/about/, https://bengaluru.sciencegallery.com/)

iconography in Hindu art and thought and how these perspectives are valuable and critical to ecological consciousness, cultural ecology, Ecojustice and artistic creativity today.

As Hiriyanna (1954) points out, nature and man were seen in "absolute kinship" and ethics and aesthetics were interwoven in Indian thought. This kinship and complex understanding of aesthetics that emerges through its entwining with ethics forms the crucial base for how nature and ecological consciousness are interpreted and transformed in Indian art as well as thought.

According to Bharata, *nāṭya* and *yajña* are equal. Every act of creativity is seen as synonymous with the 'primal creative act' (Tripathi 2004, 211). This primordial act of creation is perceived as *yajña,* sacrifice, thereby connecting the notion of creativity to one of primordial sacredness that is repeated again and again (Panikar 1977, 348-9). Creativity by extension of *yajña* is seen as a process that enables the transformation of human consciousness: Individual Consciousness of the artist through participation in creative process, and Collective Consciousness through experiencing as a *sahṛdaya*, a highly attuned aesthete(s) (Kak 2006; Sankara Pillai 1991). The creative process itself is tuned to *ṛta*, the cosmic order/ law of harmony. 'The notion of 'order', 'motion' and 'stillness' inherent in the concept of *ṛta* are the foundation of Indian moral ethical and aesthetical thought' (Tripathi 2004, 214). This attunement to and emphasis on transformative states of consciousness through creativity forms the essence of Indian aesthetics. However, these notions of creativity and aesthetics are embedded in everyday ritual, in mundane acts of living with thoughtfulness. This heightened awareness to personal individual life in relation to its cosmic creative dynamism

emerges as the moral-ethical core. This is further imbued with universality of emotion and form, creating a space-time for transcendence and transformation of consciousness. According to Vatsyayan, the metaphor of a lotus which recognizes that the centre which is the "inner landscape of man" is expressed in the outer forms the basis for the plural world, "all webbed together in one wholeness" that exists in India (Vatsyayan (n.d), Accessed 23rd June 2020).

The core principles of Indian thought (ritual, medicine, art…) emerge from the notion of the five elements, *pañcamāhabhūtas* –Air, wind, water, earth and space represent both the macrocosm and the microcosm. "The traditional vision of man… is cosmocentric. Man is made up of four or five cosmic elements. The cosmic order that governs the dynamism of all reality, envelops human life, creates awareness, and signifies patterns of culture. As a result, the cosmic equilibrium is maintained both in nature and in culture." (Baumer 2001, 8)

3.1. The Purpose of Art

- How did the Indian artist pursue this abstract, subtle, and transformational journey in art?
- How did these principles dictate/ impact the evolution of form?

While there are several aspects to consider in order to unravel these questions, the key inquiry of this section is to understand the need for symbolism and iconography as essential elements of form in Indian art and the abstract philosophical principles that drive the aesthetics of form.

According to Vatsyayan,

> "The more deeply we penetrate the technique of any Indian art, the more clearly we see that what may seem spontaneous, individual, impulsive and natural to the lay spectator is in reality well-considered, long-inherited, minutely studied and imbued with a highly symbolic significance" (Vatsyayan 1977, 8).

Unpacking the conceptual, philosophical and technical principles of how nature is transformed in Indian art by looking more closely into the artistic forms then becomes critical in how we engage with tradition arts and crafts.

Arts and artists provide the necessary bridge of perceptivity by reflectively making visible human emotion, experience and transformations through varied forms of art, and the grammar and techniques that are specific to each art form.

The evolution of form, grammar and technique emerge at the combination of intuition, reflection, practice, technical skill, unexpected insights and continued pondering. Transformation of consciousness happens in subtle realms. Subtlety needs its own vehicle for expression. Moments of shift in consciousness are leaps of high-energy states occurring in deep stillness that can contain these states. And each artistic outcome, be it in the plastic visual arts or in the performing arts are repeating these moments of transformation. The purpose and meaning of experiencing the arts as an aesthete lie in being able to resonate and revel in these vulnerable moments of human experience and transition. These moments of transition are often invisible and difficult to grasp without perceptivity.

Each civilization defines its own philosophical values in relation to what constitutes *form* and how we can evaluate it within the aesthetics of that civilization. In spiritually inclined understanding of form as in traditional Indian arts, stillness is the essential boundary where form emerges, as the potter moves the wheel of life in motion. And this stillness is bound to breath, the inner and the outer breath that happen in quietude in the inner sanctum of the body. There is a rhythm and vibrancy to the stillness that is connected to the essential active principle of life – breathing. Form is bound to breath. Breath is bound to cosmic law. Perpetual motion is bound to the stillness of order. The individual is bound to the cosmic. Ethics and aesthetics are bound to each other. Through this subtle yet abstract set of connections, Indian aesthetic forms establish the inherent transformation of nature in art. The result is epiphany yet terseness, the correspondence between square and circle in *yantras* and *maṇḍalas*, a tight geometry or of flamboyant organic flow as in the form of a *haṃsa* that symbolizes the in-breath and out-breath in great flourish.

3.2. Symbolism

A symbol offers the space for a terse, complex and layered expression. It also offers a rhythmic loop, meditative and bound in a highly accelerated awareness state in which the viewer can reside and tune into. The symbol has all the elements that are essential to unfolding into infinite expanse. A singular consciousness state that a symbol signifies can also become a recursive form that can expand infinitely. Much like a Fibonacci sequence that expands, or a genetic code that forms the basis of life, a symbol offers growth of singular form. The form is highly concentrated and even as it may depict the fullness of a cosmic concept, it remains one variation to a theme that can be represented or expressed in multiplicity of other forms; a perfect analogy to the

principles of life itself. A turtle is as different as it can get from a *pīpal* tree, and yet pulses with the same mysterious core. One awareness/ consciousness state is as different from the other, and each have an expressible form that the symbol provides a container for. This form inheres meaning intrinsically and transfers the same to the *sahṛdaya* or sympathetic aesthete. A symbol is directly accessible to the discerned viewer, not requiring interpretation or secondary reading.

Both Panikkar and Snodgrass emphasize the power of a symbol to counter a reductionist approach to perception. According to Panikkar a symbol and the symbolized are integrated in each other and hence they transcend the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism (Panikkar 2005, 12).

Adrian Snodgrass (1992, 8) reveals 'symbol' as something extensive and infinite in the Indian worldview. According to him, the Indian view of symbols allows for "open" meaning rather than a "closed hypothesis." He also iterates that symbols defies reductionist approaches.

Moving away from reductionism, symbols allow us to traverse experiences that move beyond the gross everyday into subtler intangible experiences, and they allow us to experience multiple meanings simultaneously. This simultaneity is critical as a key principle of symbolism and iconography as it drives the emotional, intellectual and physical training of both artist and aesthete. Training one's self both subtle and gross to cross their liminal boundaries into transcendental oneness requires the ability to experience deeply and richly, in sensuous realms, as well as cognitive, intellectual ones. A single hand gesture, a single stance carries such multiplicity of meanings that

one can traverse a thousand years, move gently across the threshold of a lover's glance, dance across the cremation grounds where death calls out to infinite creativity or find oneself in oblivion. The ability to move in a fraction of time through such diverse emotional layers, feelings, allowing each to suffuse, mature and capture one's heart transforming it deeply can only come from a heightened sensitivity and a calm meditative state of absorption. The reading of symbols is often done in isolation from this instant in which it is experienced by the sympathetic observer, which detracts us from the simultaneous whole of possibilities.

India with its diverse thought, ritual, philosophical and artistic traditions allows for unique nuances and responses to how the complexity of our individual relationship to the cosmos can be imagined. In Tamil *Śaiva Siddhānta* (philosophy), one encounters 36 *tattvas* - elements or principles of reality. The symbolism that emerges from the complex interconnections across these 36 tattvas has led to rich poetry and imagery in South India.

In Adrian Snodgrass's work on symbolism, he draws out the rich network of connections that a culture and its philosophical positions can create in order to create its symbols. He discusses how myths, iconographic elements, story structures, aesthetic principles are all part of a complex web that allows for a symbol to emerge, reside and expand its possibilities reaching out to its audiences like an endless ripple (Snodgrass 1992).

> "The Symbol also has a plurality of meanings on the horizontal level (Eliade and Allen as cited in Snodgrass, 1992, 5); Every symbol forms part of a schema of interlocking referents; it forms part of a pattern of concordant

interrelationships. It does not stand in isolation but interconnects with other symbols, which fit together to form a mutually reinforcing web of meaning. A deeper understanding of a symbol is gained by studying the grid or net formed by its symbolic homologues. The pattern of meaning that emerges from the juxtaposition of cognate symbols does not exhaust the significance of symbol, which as we have seen is ultimately beyond words, but it reinforces its intimation of the all-pervasiveness of Principle." (Snodgrass, 1992, 5)

However the key to all reading of these symbols lies in training consciousness, in the capacity of *uḷḷam, ātman* to be *porous* to experience, to be capable of transmuting and transforming; to melt into the experience blending into the multidimensional subtle reality that the symbol opens in its fullness. This ability to read symbol is best exemplified in the way the *rasikā* or aesthete is understood in Indian aesthetic traditions, as a *sahṛdaya*, someone who is one at heart with the poet or artist. A *hṛdayasaṃvāda* – subtle and intangible conversation exchanged between hearts is critical to reading inner meanings which escape purely intellectual reading and it is in this sense that aesthetic education is highly revered in Indian thought.

3.3. Iconography

The seamless transfer of symbols into icons, developing the matrix/ system is done through an intricate set of links formed across the cosmic, terrestrial and individual. Traditional grammar helps in establishing correspondences. Iconography of deities for example are complex philosophical, ritualistic, aesthetic and value based concepts integrated into form, ritual worship, and extended into ways of life for followers of the particular deity.

3.4. Drawing out the Essence of Traditional Indian Art

Art in traditional India was closely entwined with everyday life. The flexible paradigm of the arts allowed a constant flux, change, adaptation with time and place, while certain underlying principles remained constant. This flexibility allowed for a continuity of tradition with diverse movements of 'styles, schools and artistic expressions', that emerged from a 'still centre' (Vatsyayan (n.d), Accessed 23rd June 2020). Contemporary debates consider each art or craft form in a more siloised framework rather than the interrelationships. The arguments for this approach allow for nuanced discussions about specific artists, techniques and individual experiences. However, it is also important to consider the interrelationships that emerged out of shared world-views in order to look at rich connections and aesthetic philosophies that emerged in this approach. In Vatsyayan's words,

> "The contemporary debate of the autonomy of the specific arts vs. the inter-relationship and inter-dependence of the arts has to be viewed from the point of view of the arts which were bound together as emerging from a shared world-view and shared aesthetics and those others which were and are expressions of an individual experience through a specific artistic media." (Vatsyayan (n.d), Accessed 23rd June 2020)

Comprehending traditional Indian art through this interconnectedness of a shared centre and a kaleidoscope of possibilities allows for a deeper understanding of its motivations, intuitions and approach to form. The cosmic approach to art where the inner world of the human and the outer world were fused into one continuous whole, as a complex ecological system provides the essential framework and foundational grammar to the arts.

> ‘Indian Art, both conceptually and in practice, is embedded in a world-view and cosmology, which is based on the fundamental elements (*mahābhūta*): earth, water, fire, wind and ether (space). We find a system of correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm, linking the gross and subtle levels, as is evident in the *Vedic* as well as *Āgamic* traditions. This conception finds its immediate application in ritual, which can serve as a key to these relationships and to the rich symbolism implied. The correspondences between the elements, in their gross and subtle aspects, sense-perceptions, and human emotive states have been elaborated at all levels of the Indian tradition. All these conceptions and practices have influenced the Indian aesthetic theories, and have found expression in the different media of the Arts. Taking the *mahābhūtas* as the concrete starting-point, these interrelationships can be examined in the case of each art-form. They appear at different levels: at the level of the material, at the level of the creative process and artistic articulation, at the level of communication and aesthetic receptivity.’ (Baumer and Vatsyayan 1995, Vol 3)

A broad survey of what Indian art invites in the *sahṛdaya* (sympathetic aesthete)/ and the aesthetic principles that drive it are

- The inner and the outer as one ecological system
- Communion with the inexpressible
- Universalised emotion, that has traversed the human experience to that liminal space/ boundary where transformation can happen
- Paradoxical play of the mundane and the sacred entwined together

- Narrative structures freed by the power of myth, where inner truth rather than ephemeral reality provides the construct
- Drawing in the essence of form, where human and nature become indivisible in the choice of line/ rekha, transmuting one into the other.
- Great terseness of expression
- Experiencing oneself as the other, becoming the other (*Tādātmya*).
- Individual transformation to find universal oneness, experiencing *ānanda*
- Cosmic interplay and exchange
- Deep reflection and action in the interconnected web
- Doubt and denial of the gods in favour of riddles, and a hearty paradoxical love for multiple dimensions, and 33000 gods and goddesses; Gods who can thieve our souls away, we who can entice the gods with our love; we find and lose them, we create and dissolve them in a continuous *yajña*, a ritual of death and life.
- Death as much at the centre as life, celebrated with sensuous splendor, to return back to the very elements of the earth; the mundane entwined with the sacred in provocative simplicity.
- Paradox and Wonder threaded together with mirth and merriment, to tease and taunt, to flamboyantly declare the fine shattering of the human beingness into cosmic oceans with a simple melting of the heart.
- *Rasa* embracing the existential questions with quiet fondness and the understanding of an old friend.

3.5. Understanding the Intimacy of Rasa

Rasa is an intimate friend of the aesthetician, like an old lover, tempered, seasoned, yet full of surprises. The aesthete must have gentleness, good humour, for he is to embark upon the mysterious stage, a new drama will unfold there; but he takes her, the enchantress with him, to be sly, to be sensuous, to help his senses linger, to sharpen their intensity, to heighten his perceptions; *rasa* is his fond companion, she will let him rest in her quiet wisdom and turn the tables around, for suddenly she will be the aesthete, and he must transform into her beloved. There is a passionate play that pulls the aesthete into the charms of deepening the human spirit, losing it to find new meaning, shattering it to find a great resonance with all life, burden it to sink slowly into the earth in grief, grief that can teach one to rest quietly in the earth, in death, only to find the gentleness of blossoming, of first lush grass after heated summer, after monsoon rain. *Rasa* is an inherent essence in our hearts that can be evoked. It cannot be shaped or fashioned anew, rather something must be chipped away for *rasa* to emerge within a person.

Who can do it better than an old friend, someone who has the right to charmingly demand to chip away the non-essential, the baggage, the thoughtlessness of soul. *Rasa*, the old friend will masquerade as *bhāva* and *anubhāva, vibhāva* and *sañcāri*, calling out sweetly, screaming like a virago, feisty, sensuous, broken, welcoming, serene, embracing, moving around with stealth and mischief. The calls will come piercing in through the soul, no door or entry barred on account of the memories of intimacy. She will enter as if the walls of the soul are invisible to her/ perhaps permeable. She will walk in without your permission. That is *rasa*. She commands her own kingdom, and in that you are invited to walk with her in twilight and

moonlight, in early sweet sunrise on the banks of great rivers and oceans to speak of truth and beauty, hidden in inner speech, in voices of *uḷḷuṟai*, you partake of her gift of love, for in giving, she draws you out of your lonely bodily confines and you are flung into the farthest star, only to be embraced in fondness by a tempered, seasoned lover full of surprises.

3.6. Key Principles that Drive the Transformation of Nature in Art

Aesthetic attitude/ perception is the key element to consider in deriving the principles that drive the transformation of nature in art. Persipience, comes from aesthetic contemplation, a disinterested engagement in reflection and perception of objects / works of art as well as life as a whole. To the artist, life becomes that which she transforms through her aesthetic contemplation into a work of art, the aesthete, brings to this work, his own aesthetic contemplation, both disinterested from different vantage points. In order to perceive nature, the Indian artist and aesthete are in an interesting position, as the cosmological as well as socio-cultural worldviews suffused human emotion and life with all nature and its events. Time and space of human and 'nature' are diffused in order to express, heighten and even perceive human experience. For instance, the lotus metaphor that depicts the transformation of consciousness in Indian art, is not the biological lotus that one encounters, however its properties of remaining detached in all kinds of water, are abstracted to apply to the transformation of the human soul (Coomaraswamy 2014). The transmutability of nature in art therefore comes from principles that abstract patterns of experience, and this ability to experience itself arises from aesthetic contemplation and perception of life.

3.7. Aesthetic Contemplation

What is so special about aesthetic contemplation/ different about it?

While this question itself is vast, here is a quick attempt to make sense of the context in which this section interprets aesthetic contemplation. This is a question that I revisit throughout the thesis, as I open out each of the possibilities that aesthetic contemplation offers to experience, memory, perception and creativity. Both in theory and practice, aesthetic contemplation offers alternatives to human capacity to experience the world.

As S.C. Malik observes

> "…normally at a psychological level, knowing and communication are operational at three levels,
>
> 1. Images, symbols, concepts, language, analysis, in short, thought process.
> 2. Emotions, feelings, intuition, in short experiencing; and
> 3. Insight, attention, awareness, consciousness; in short Beingness or presence (NOW)
>
> The above is stated for analytical purposes since in the moment of total holistic functioning of the movement that is no movement of the mind, the three segments are fully interrelated simultaneously." (Vatsyayan (ed.) 1996b, 503)

The primary function of aesthetic contemplation is holistic perception as conceived in Indian aesthetic thought. It is a state that is emerged when the artist/ aesthete are not bound by personal emotion, are able to be sympathetic to the experience/ work of art

and what it has to say (Saxena 2010, 418). *Rasa* is that moment of aesthetic contemplation where simultaneous holistic experience occurs, and thinking, experiencing and being come together.

A realistic viewpoint/ socio-cultural viewpoint cannot quite substantiate what emerges from an aesthetic perception. The qualitative nature of aesthetic contemplation; experiencing of *rasa* lies in restfulness *(Viśrānti)* (Saxena 2010, 428). Restfulness maybe perceived as an aesthetic category or as a requirement of aesthetic perception, which emphasizes clarity of perception.

> "Nature evolves according to law (*ṛta* in Sanskrit), but it has a paradoxical relationship with the consciousness principle. Art associated with this conception must communicate recursion, paradox and oppositions concerning ordinary experience of the universe. Aesthetics, as a philosophy of art, is best understood from the point of view of *dhvani*, which communicates, by suggestion, the universals of the outer and inner worlds. Indian thought highlights the connections between these two worlds, and its art presents visions of the cosmos." (Kak 2015)

As observed before, the perception of nature embraces cosmic as well as biological perceptions. In establishing correspondences with individual self and the web that connects all of us at the elemental level of the *māhabhūtas*, reality is no more objective reality. But this perceiving self, is more than the individual, it is consciousness. This integrated perception and conception of the world hints at a more diffused reality that is beyond the visually perceptible.

The fascinating and unceasing cycle of the movement from the inner experience to the creation of form, which would incorporate the five elements and the employment of a methodology of ritual, is outlined in the agamic texts only to achieve the end experience of the transformation of the gross to the subtle.

> …the arts deal with the process of transmutation and mutation of the subtle to the gross, and the evocation of the subtle from the gross, in other words, the process of the abstract and the concrete suggesting, stimulating and evoking the abstract..." (Saraswathi and Vatsyayan 1995, foreword)

The languages of expression that must correspond to such a reality emerge from this perception that accepts the paradox and intricate tapestry of life as the natural order, and therefore the truth that guides the way of life. In order to transform this perception into artistic expression, aesthetics has its own key principles and elements that are then given form and expansion in each art form/ media as applicable to that media.

Having looked at some of the key advantages that symbolism and iconography provide to enable to spiritual, emotional, intellectual, cognitive outcomes of Indian art and aesthetics, it makes us wonder about what are some of the principles that can enable such a complex matrix/ vocabulary. Poetry and mythology complement this worldview giving it form and language.

3.8. Principles of Transformation

In this section, I suggest the following four key principles that could be used to study the transformation of nature in art through symbolism & iconography. In classical

Indian thought, the world-view perceives the relationship between matter and energy as one of ceaseless transformations from one into the other. This understanding also works with an understanding of one becoming many and many returning back to one echoing the ideas of *Brahman* and *Puruṣa*. Oneness, nothingness, plurality and multiplicity are concepts that are drawn into a nuanced woven relationship nested in paradox as the essential frame of reality. In paradox, transformation opens to innumerable possibilities. Kapila Vatsyayan's draws out the connection between aesthetic theories and philosophical theories and how transformation is understood in Indian thought.

> "Repeatedly the aesthetic theories take us back to a basic postulate of the Indian world-view and that is the relation of matter to energy. If the Indian world-view had not looked at the possibility of the transmutation of matter into energy and vice-versa, it would not have been possible for an *Upaniṣad* to speak repeatedly of multiple forms and one single spirit or the unmanifest and the manifest. The *Upaniṣad* then articulated on this specially the Katha *Upaniṣad* as Agni, Vayu, and Surya entering the universe assuming multiple forms. The aesthetic theories also speak of one breaking into a multiple and the configuration of the multiple invariably returning to the unity of the one. This was the Indian world-view on environment. While all living matter was distinct, and specific and plural, it was capable of transcendence. The aesthetic theory in practice replicates this." (Vatsyayan 1992, 33-34)

Four principles that provide aesthetic perception and theories with cognitive and creative tools for transformation of nature in art are:

i. Simultaneity

ii. Plurality and flexibility

iii. Correspondences

iv. Relationship, Experience and Paradox

3.8.1. Simultaneity

It is possible to simultaneously experience multiple meanings that symbols and icons make possible. Time and space are processed in a terse and instantaneous manner for simultaneity of meanings to occur. Layering of meanings into symbols, and then layering of multiple symbols together leads to complex meaning making exercises. Multiple memories of different times can also be layered together.

Time can be paradoxical, non-linear, cyclical and simultaneous through imagination and myth, and conceptions of reality in Indian thought. Space too can be cosmic, internal, terrestrial.

The *rāsa līlā* is an interesting image to consider under simultaneity where *Kṛṣṇa* manifests as the many, while each individual gopika is dancing with *Kṛṣṇa*. This dance of life is continuous and cyclical, it is playful and generative unfolding. Another example is the dancing *Naṭarāja* where the five fold activities are fused into a single image, taking place in the time-space hall of consciousness and cosmos simultaneously.

The third example is that of the image of *Narasiṃha*. *Narasiṃha* is an example where the form is simultaneously human and animal. It is a form and myth that considers the

liminal, looking closely at the in-between spaces and in-between times where an event occurs.

3.8.2. Plurality and Flexibility

What characterizes the *Vedic* knowledge system(s) is "plurality and flexibility" in the design of its system. Reversibility and transmutation are always possible. This system(s) recognizes "fluidity and flux" (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x).

Puruṣa sūkta (hymn 10.90)[3] of the *Ṛgveda* is dedicated to the *Puruṣa*, the "Cosmic Being". Over the years, I have pondered about its visuality and mythical paradoxes, metaphors and mystical meanings constructed liberally within structural poetry. This hymn in all its dimensions celebrates *porosity* of beings in the body of the universal being, *Puruṣa*. The vast encompassing image that the hymn draws of the *Puruṣa*, allows us to imagine a dynamic, massive body that captures in its entirety the cosmic and subtle worlds of stars, planets, galaxies, animals, seasons, humans and all the elements that make life possible on earth. Written also as a verse for meditation and reflection, the hymn, by showcasing the oneness of all beings, drives us into a transcendental moment of crossing the borders of our limited selves.

> *Om sahasraśīrṣa puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt*
> *sa bhūmiṃ viśvato vṛitvā'tyatiṣṭhaddaśāṅgulam* (Baumer(ed.) 2001, 32)
>
> *"A thousand heads hath Puruṣa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.*
> *On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.*
> Translation by Ralph T.H. Griffith (1896)

[3] Note on the caste issues and reading of this *Sūktam* have been discussed in the section on Positionality in Chapter 2

In reading through Griffith's translation, one finds it as much a creation myth as a pondering about the desire for life's existence. However, the *Puruṣa* here, an abstract being personified in human form startles the reader with its propensity for vastness. In describing the cosmic world, the earth, the elements and the perpetual force of creativity, the original writer of the hymn takes recourse to giving a human form to these multifarious abstractions as a way of sense-making this enormity. Also, paradoxically, in containing everything within one human form, the writer discards divisions of spirit, matter, body, boundaries of self and the state of being an individual. It is in this absurdity and paradox that the essence of this hymn lies. As Swami Krishnanada writes in his commentary on the *Sūktam*, the idea is revolutionary that there is no division of an individual self and we are one Being. Thus, neither illusion and ignorance nor desire for the world can stay, for we in our individual manifestations are nothing but this greater oneness (Krishnanda, January 27, 2019).

The primordial being that the verse describes engages with a landscape that is voraciously creative. In ritual language, it is sacrifice, where the *Puruṣa* is both creator and victim, sacrifice and sacrificed, death and birth. Space, time and form collide in this vision of the *Puruṣa*, where the all pervasiveness of space is woven into time as seasons and this being rises, engages, sacrifices, is sacrificed and perennially takes the form of the *Puruṣa*. The ritual of the events as creative splendour and agonizing energy constructing itself into form is a constant reminder of the *porous* nature of life. In another sense, it is the early origins of the thought of ecosystem thinking. The inseparable and intertwined nature of the larger ecosystem in relation to man, the individual and nature is drawn very cleverly in metaphor and poetry, ritual and sacredness, imagination and ingenuity.

One of the visual forms that figuratively shows the idea of plurality and flexibility is the form of *Viṣṇu / Kṛṣṇa* as *Viśvarūpa* (All encompassing form). In *Viśvarūpa Darśan*, indicating universal form, an all-encompassing form is often depicted in paintings with multiple arms, legs and heads. Multiple universes are woven together into one image as gods, rishis, deities, flora and fauna are all represented as part of a single being.

3.8.3. Correspondences

The essential grammar of the traditional Indian system plays an important role in defining the structure of this thesis as well in the Indian categories and ways of constructing knowledge. Time and space, nature of being and its qualities, the gross, subtle and transcendental aspects of being, and the connections of all these to creation, preservation and destruction form a complex grammar that open up to a central stillness of concepts that can be interpreted in diverse ways.

Vatsyayan (1999, v-x) draws out this complex grammar by looking at key triads and twin concepts that are woven together in Indian art and aesthetics and also form the basis of much Indian philosophy. An edifice of dimensions, levels and processes forms the fundamental grammar. The triad of *ādhibhautika, ādhidhaivika* and the *ādhyātmika* frames the interrelationships between the material, non-material and inner self, also interpreted as terrestrial, cosmic and personal (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x). *Guṇa* and *doṣa* are twin concepts that look at quality. The next triad of *rajas, tamas* and *sattva* indicate activity, inertness and balance in objects or beings. The other triad that adds to this grammar is *sthūla, sūkṣma* and *para* that allow us to look at embodiment and disembodiment in an inter-connected manner, as all objects and

subjects have subtle and gross aspects to them (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x). The culmination of all these concepts happens in the fundamental triad that consists of evolution, balance and dissolution; *sṛṣṭi, sthiti,* and *pralaya* or *saṃhāra.* The idea of change as an unceasing cycle is the central subject and principle that guides Indian myth and art and all forms of art and narrative have emerged to communicate the dynamics of change at their core (Vatsyayan 1999, v-x).

Each work of art may establish correspondences across the system, or between specific categories. A plethora of work becomes possible in the permutation and combination of this grammar.

The image of *Ardhanārīśvara* is interesting to consider under drawing correspondences. This image attempts to establish the balance, transfer of energies, and connections between the male and the female principles, grapples with the gross and the subtle simultaneously as well as stillness and dynamism.

3.8.4. Relationship, Experience and Paradox

Nuanced study of relationships and a range of subtle, gross and transcendental experiences that are integral to relationships form the crux of another principle of transformation. Relationship and Experience are nested within paradox forming a complex layered sense of reality.

In light of the first three principles that have discussed – 1. Simultaneity, 2. Plurality and Flexibility, 3. Correspondences – the worldview that emerges is one of paradox. There is fun and playfulness to paradox, a sense of mischief and humor, that one

constantly finds in myth, story, poetry and even philosophical texts in the classical Indian context. Riddles are a way of creating startling contradictions to enter states of paradoxical reality. Understanding how relationship and experience can dwell in this paradoxical reality becomes in itself an inquiry into transformation. According to Kak (2015), *bandhu*, paradox, and *yajña* are three notions that form the basis of Indian culture. *Bandhu* refers to the relationship between the inner and the outer while the notion of paradox within the Indian thought traditions recognizes that this relationship between inner and outer lies in the science of 'consciousness' and is outside rational systems. *Yajña* refers to individual transformation that can occur through any creative process. This framework drawn across the inner and outer, through transformation of consciousness has a cosmology "of infinity and recursion across scale and time (Kak 2015)." Temple *gopurams*, *Śrī Yantra*, dance rhythms are all examples of infinity and recursion across scale and time.

While there is much symbolic representation in Indian art, there are also fine examples of realism as the sculptural representation of monkeys in Mahabalipuram, elephants temple reliefs and friezes, all of which show a close study of the form and being of these animals. There is a fluid blending of subtle, gross and transcendental realities, creating a composite reality of relationships.

3.9. Section Summary

The principle of correspondences shows how an integral view of the natural world and human relationship is established in Indian thought. Layered and nested in paradox, relationship and transformation become a ceaseless, infinite action for the individual. This transformation occurs in a cosmology that is a densely woven

network of energy and matter, and of the inner and outer in perpetual interactions with each other, one becoming the other, one transfusing into the other, and one melding and melting into the other. At the heart of this cosmology, the artist becomes the creator, mimicking the grand creative process of life, in resonance with its principles, pulsing with the same beat that drives the creative force of life. It is through this alignment that the aesthetic theories come alive in creative process, artwork and aesthetic experience. As Ananda Coomaraswamy articulates in his book, 'Transformation of Nature in Art',

> What are probably the most significant elements in the Asiatic theory are the views (1) that aesthetic experience is an ecstasy in itself inscrutable, but in so far as it can be defined, a delight of the reason, and (2) that the work of art itself, which serves as the stimulus to the release of the spirit from all inhibitions of vision, can only come into being and have being as a thing ordered to specific ends. Heaven and Earth are united in the analogy (*sādṛśya, etc.)* of art, which is an ordering of sensation to intelligibility and tends towards an ultimate perfection in which the seer perceives all things imaged in himself (Coomaraswamy 2014, 55-57).

These four principles show how a work of art can be conceived to look at nature from diverse dimensions and create art that allows for complex relationships and transformations. In essence, the artist melts into the voids that reflect the outer to his inner, creating a *porous* whole that is reflected in her artwork. This meditative process and journey of creativity is both sensual and sacred. Plural dimensions, levels and processes can occur in simultaneity when the world-view, epistemology and ontology are rooted in the infinite possibilities of paradox. Relationships can be born anew in

this cosmology that emerges from paradox. Transformation is the most natural act that becomes the very subject of every creative act of the artist, because it is the heart of the creative process that occurs in consciousness. The artist celebrates her own consciousness, that holds the cosmology of the infinite as both symbol and reflection. At the same time the artist celebrates the infinite consciousness that is mirrored in her, enabling her to hold vastness in a terse language that is enabled by symbolism, iconography, myth and poetry.

In this light Nature-culture is a fused whole, that has created an Indian aesthetic of complex forms. Ecology is at the heart of Indian aesthetic as the natural world became motifs and symbols in myth and translated into literature, theatre, dance and the visual arts.

> "Cutting across historical developments, philosophic debates, scientific controversies, religious sects and cults, the one principle which underlies and provides unity as also continuity of vision and perception is the assertion that Man is only one among all living matter; in short, the notion of the *Jīva*. Man's life depends upon and is conditioned by all that surrounds him and sustains him, namely, inanimate, mineral and animate, aquatic, vegetative, animal and gaseous life. It is, therefore, Man's duty constantly to remind himself - in individual and collective fear; it is wisdom contained in the language of myth and symbol. Their efficacy lies in their capacity of multiple interpretation at the biological function, societal, philosophic and religious levels. The pivot around which Indian myth moves, not unlike that of other parts of ancient world, is ecological balance."(Vatsyayan 1992)

Balance thus becomes the essence of the story of human existence, experience, survival and creativity. A constant seeking to find a state of consciousness that can imagine, and enact in the spirit of balance, thus is key to both aesthetic and philosophical inquiries in the classical tradition. A *porous* state of consciousness, that allows for flow, transmutations, and balance becomes an essential way of being in mystical traditions as well as aesthetic traditions. Creativity and creative expression thus become an experience of wholeness rooted in paradox.

4. *Gond* Art

The *Gond* or *Gondi* people are an indigenous *ādivāsi* tribe that speak the *Gondi* language and in recent years have become highly recognized for the *Gond* art, in particular a style developed by artist Jangarh Shyam. The tribe is spread around Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

Gonds follow a folk Hinduism, animism and with nature and ancestor worship (Mehta 1990). My first encounters with *Gond* art were through the Dastkar exhibitions and Dilli Haat in New Delhi. I later encountered Bhajju Shyam's books. I found the works mesmerizing, deeply moving, highly creative and a sense of wonder and childlike perceptiveness in them. There also seemed to be an innate joy and celebration that drove these works, in the ease with which they fused the human and natural worlds together seamlessly, in everyday life, in metaphors and symbols and forms which grew entwining breath and being of animal life, plant life, and humans integrated in a highly woven tapestry.

Jangarh Singh Shyam (1962–2001) belonging to the *Pardhan Gond* community is credited with starting a new school of art called the *Jangarh Kalam*. He was among the first *Gond* artists to use paper and canvas, from the original wall and floor ritual art of the *Gonds* and bringing the art form into a contemporary space. The *Pardhan Gonds* did not have a specific painting style and are traditionally considered musicians who flourished under the patronage of *Gond* kings. Jangarh was invited by artist J.Swaminathan to work in Bharat Bhavan in the 1970's (Shyam and Nath 2016). It is here that Jangarh's work exploded onto paper and canvas bringing out his memories, intuitions and rich cultural world into stark visuality. Jangarh's pictorial world is vibrant and pulsating with life. Filled with patterns drawn from the natural world and symbols from daily life, or cultural memories, his compositions as well as forms are entwined with the life forces of different beings, one merging into the other, twisted into the other, emerging from within each other, creating an intense flow and rhythm. Hervé Perdriolle is collector, art critic and curator writes of Jangarh Shyam's works bringing out the vitality of his style.

> "From his hometown, where he created murals paintings to his last works before his sudden death in 2001 in Japan, the work of Jangarh Singh Shyam has continued to evolve and surprise with creativity and mastery worthy of the greatest names of contemporary art. His early works show a rare primitive force, his last works show a fabulous graphic mastery. A feeling of intense vibration is the hallmark of his style, the cohesion of his work in constant metamorphosis, which reveals both the animist culture of the *Gonds* tribe, where he is originally from, and one of the foundations of Indian thought. (Perdriolle 2011)."

Patterning in this idiom is rich and acts as a signature for each *Gond* artist as they draw from imagination, their everyday life, the natural world and environment around them, cultural memories and myths to create highly intensified abstract symbol/ marker (Wolf, Shyam and Yamakami 2010). These symbols or markers then proliferate in the painting into continuous dynamic pattern and form, undulating line, and pulsing rhythms to deepen the vitality and allusive qualities of this art form. The careful consideration paid to in choosing a pattern and how it is then intensified into the creative flow of composing a work is a critical aspect in studying the *Jangarh Kalam. Signature-Patterns in Gond Art* (2010) brought out by Tara Books, provides a close look at the works of forty-five *Gond* artists and the considered idea in their choice of a pattern providing a window into the creative process involved.

A simple dot, cross, line, circle could be patterns drawn from rain, fire ceremony, sheaves of wheat, the path of a plow, the crescent moon, spiders, dancers, a procession weaving through the village. This ability to abstract and simplify a complex event, myth, memory, or element from the natural world, is transformed into a powerful artistic tool in this style creating vivid, original works of art, dynamism and force, fluidity and freedom of expression that are unique to each artist.

"*Gonds* believe that tattoos are the only permanent marks of our own creation that we carry with us through life and even after death," says Bhajju Shyam and it is from the ancient tradition of body tattooing that the dots and lines used by contemporary *Gond* artists emerge (Shyam, Rao and Wolf 2018). In describing the pattern chosen for his image of a tree, Bhajju Shyam says, "My pattern is made up of a linked chain of dancers, seen from above (Shyam, Rao and Wolf 2018)." Envisioning a tree through

the image of linked chain of dancers forming the canopy provides a small window into this artist's creativity and perception of the world around him. Trees and the human world of celebration and dance, leaf and human body are entwined with ease into a singular work of art in Shyam's vision. While these patterns are 'decorative fillers' as Shyam calls them, they are also a technique in themselves drawing the human and natural world together in and through intense abstraction.

In his interview with Bhavna Kakar in "Take", an art magazine, Bhajju Shyam discusses how art is a medium of prayer for the *Gonds* and they believe that one would beget good luck if one viewed good art. As forest dwellers, the tree in the *Gond* visual lexicon, is perceived as the "giver of life" (Shyam and Nath 2016).

Bhajju Shyam is Jangarh Shyam's nephew and art historian and curator Jyotindra Jain describes him as "One of the most important and innovative artists to emerge from the explosion caused by this idiom created by Jangarh (Shyam and Nath 2016)." He has built a strong association with Tara books. His books *The London Jungle*, *The life of Night Trees* are highly acclaimed and won him International awards. *That's how I see things, Creation, The Flight of the Mermaid, Alone in the forest* are other remarkable books by Bhajju Shyam.

The London Jungle book is one of his most iconic works and I will be studying this work more closely along with a few of his paintings. Shyam's work as Jyotindra Jain notes is full of a "sense of wonder, adventure, humor and directness of expression." (Shyam and Nath 2016)

In *The London Jungle Book,* Shyam weaves together an exceptional visual and textual narrative that allows urban London to collide with *Gond* tribal beliefs, values, myths and perception creating a unique story that immerses as well as transcends both worlds to form a newer one. It captures the story of his trip to London for two months to paint in a restaurant and captures his perceptions and sensemaking of London through the imaginative eye of the artist, as well the rich *Gond* cultural worldviews.

I take two works from the book to explore his style further.

In the narrative '*Time*' Shyam brings together Big Ben that he perceives as the temple of time and fuses it with the *Gond* symbol of time – a rooster. Shyam writes of this composition, "Symbols are the most important thing in *Gond* art, and every symbol is a story standing in for something else. So this painting was the easiest for me to do, because it had two perfect symbols coming together (Shyam, Rao and Wolf 2018)."



Fig 1: Artist- Bhajju Shyam, "Time" Narrative in London Jungle Book, Tara Books, first edition, 2004. Source: https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/06/20/london-jungle-books-bhajju-shyam-tara-books/ Retrieved 20 Nov 2019

A huge rooster fills the page, with simple diagonal line patterns filling its body and feathers. The eye of the rooster is a clock showing time and from the eyes below, the wattle of the rooster is the body of Big Ben and its crown, the top of the tower. Small strings of bead like patterns cover the legs of the rooster and the structure of Big Ben/ wattle. Richly colored in earthy tones, the rooster is crowing heralding a new day. Patterns, symbols, and perception come together playfully to create vivid form that connects two very different worlds together.

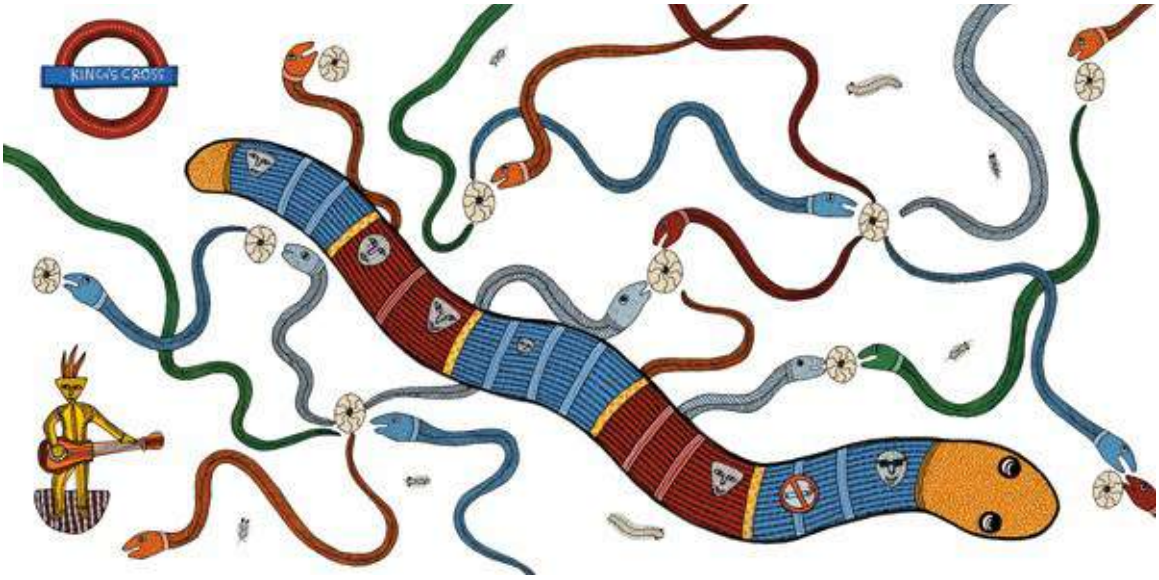


Fig 2: Artist- Bhajju Shyam, "Subway" Narrative in London Jungle Book, Tara Books, first edition, 2004. Source: https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/06/20/london-jungle-books-bhajju-shyam-tara-books/ Retrieved 20 Nov 2019

In the narrative, '*There is another world below us*', Shyam finds a visual interpretation to capture the London Subway system through *Gond* symbols. He arrives at the earth worm, considered as the King of the underworld in *Gond* mythology as a parallel to show the underground world of subway systems. He portrays the tube as the earthworm, king of the underworld of London. Shyam describes the elements of his composition thus "Snakes signify earth in *Gond*

painting, and here I have used snakes for the criss-crossing underground routes of the train. Between the snakes are the stations, like spiders sitting on their webs. I wanted a busker in the picture because I like buskers. To me the busker appeared to the only human being who was relaxed in the underground, bringing happiness to people with his music- everyone else was trying to move on and get to some place above the ground again (Shyam, Rao and Wolf 2018)." The King's Cross station marker, the busker with a guitar, the No smoking sign of the modern London world vibrantly play with people, spiders, snakes, spider webs, earthworm and other insects of the *Gond* world in this image. Maria Popova's words help to build a summation of these colliding worlds. "*Gond* art is a form of prayer, using its intricate lines, geometric patterns and symbolic vocabulary to connect the human experience with the cosmos (Popova 2014)."



Fig 3: Artist- Bhajju Shyam. "Untitled". Inches : 22 x 30, Painting, Acrylic, Pen & Ink on Paper
Source: https://www.artalivegallery.com/artists/bhajju-singh-shyam/unititled1222.html

In this painting, Bhajju Shyam captures a moment of fine crab hunting by a bird, possibly a heron. As shoals of fish swim in the water and surround the crab, the heron deftly catches hold of the pincers of the crab dragging him out of the water current. The spread wings indicate that the heron has probably just swooped down from its flight, or that it is getting ready to fly out with the crab. Densely patterned with lines, the density, thickness and thinness of lines create a highly graphic vocabulary separating each of the elements and also allowing clear definition of the fish, heron and crab. The fish are around the crab, but also become seemingly patterns on the crab's body as they weave in and out of the water, creating a current and rhythm around this rather insignificant yet spectacular natural event. The fish flitting and turning, provide the force and dynamics of the current and show the hunt in all its vibrancy. The heron with its wings spread dominates the image located in the centre against an empty sky taking up one-third of the space in the work, covering the top. The two thirds below are covered in the movement of the shoal and the crab being lashed against them in its sudden capture. Shyam controls the space in his composition allowing the heron's flight to contrast the energy of the flitting, swimming, moving fish, each with its own kind of force, providing density and starkness to support each other.

Highly symbolic and full of metaphorical imagery, abstraction, narrative strength, compositional and graphic play, rich colours, as well as high skill in playing with monochromes, dexterity in working with line, are some of the key elements in Bhajju Shyam's work. In his own words, he perceives the natural world with reverence and says, **"**Though Badadev is the primary God but I usually paint flora and fauna as revered subjects (Shyam and Nath 2016)." His ability to look through the 'mind's

eye' bring rich new perception that is playful, childlike, full of wonder, mischief and laughter and at the same time philosophical and profound. He captures the natural world, which forms one of his main subject matter over the years and his most preferred. He moves between worlds easily using the language of symbols and patterns to transition from one world into another. And these techniques, perceptiveness and artistic processes add to my own as I quest for other pictorial worlds of *porosity* for my own artistic inquiries.

5. *Kalamkāri*[4]

Kalamkāri is art of drawing and painting with pen. The term is used for both hand painting and block printing on textiles. Traditionally the style uses natural materials and vegetable dyes for dyeing as well as for painting. Continuing to flourish in the port town of Masulipatnam, known more for the block prints and the temple town of Sri Kalahasti, known more for the narrative panels of free hand drawing, *Kalamkāri* is a fluid style of textile art that draws it vitality from the natural world in both form and technique.

During the colonial period, *Kalamkāri* faced a lot of difficulties and the art form came close to dying out. The revival efforts of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Pupul Jayakar, Martand Singh, Nelly Sethna, Vinnakota Venkataswamy, Gurappa Chetty among others has given it a new lease of life (Rao 2017).

[4] This section is developed on the basis of a trip I went on in 2016 to Sri Kalahasti and Pedana to understand Kalamkāri better with textile artist Meera Curam, who was working on her book The Song of Kalamkāri. I later worked with her as a book designer helping her bring out a coffee table book. I met the artists mentioned here in person and was part of some of Meera's interviews while also conducting my own and studying their work and creative processes.

My interest in *Kalamkāri* with reference to this thesis is two fold. 1 – the visual style and line quality. 2- the use of natural dyes and fabric and the process itself. However due to constraints of time as well as need for greater depth of practice, my focus on natural dyes and *Kalamkāri* process is limited to few experiments. However, I hope to expand this area as I build further practice. Therefore I have chosen not to expand the technical process below in detail, instead focusing on the stylistic elements primarily with a short overview of process.[5]

The Sri Kalahasti style originally evolved as part of the temple art for rituals and used as panels in temples is textile narratives that depict epics and myths using a hand drawn style. Today it has moved beyond temple walls though the inspiration is drawn from temple murals and has been adapted to sarees, blouses, other garments, wall panels curtains etc. Continuous narration as a technique is typical of this story telling art form, where one scene from a myth or epic may take central space and the remaining events may unfold in panels flowing through the fabric. A single event, god or goddess could also be the subject of a work. Decorative, intricate and highly stylized forms with a dynamic flowing line characterize the Sri Kalahasti Style. A bamboo reed that is finely sharpened to a fine tip becomes the *kalam*. Small pieces of woollen rag are rolled over the sharpened bamboo reed and tied together with fine cotton twine. The wool helps to hold the liquid dye that will flow to the fine tip.

Block printing style followed at Pedana additionally has the block making as an important part of the process. While a great many artists have moved to mass production and chemical dyes, the traditional practice of working with natural dyes

[5] Meera Curam's book "The Song of *Kalamkāri*" has a detailed study of all the processes involved in both the Sri Kalahasti style and the Machilipatnam style

and a process of material and technique that is gentle on the earth is practiced by some. Pitchuka Veera Subbaiah, one of the four people who was instrumental in learning the craft and revived the *Kalamkāri* style at Pedana. His son Pitchuka Srinivas and grandson Varun continue the tradition now (Curam 2017, 119). Pitchuka Srinivas has stayed true to tradition being outspoken and strong in the values of creating with natural dyes. A labour intensive process, his production unit, Syamala Arts and Crafts at Pedana ensures that high skill, tradition, quality and natural dyes come together effectively. Two of the block makers/ carver K. Gangadhar, a national award winner and his brother Narasaiah are integral to the Machilipatnam style today (Curam 2017, 118). His fine craftsmanship of the wood blocks brings out the fluid line quality of the *Kalamkāri* style to life in the block printing.

The entire process of *Kalamkāri* is natural, and sustainable, even though the water usage maybe high. Of particular interest to me is one of the final stages of the process where the dyed fabric is washed in the local river. The minerals in the river water are said to bring out the actual colour of the natural dyes on the fabric. This cloth itself goes through treatment with goat or buffalo dung, milk and running water. Iron acetate and alum solutions are used for mordants. The preparation of each of the colours used in the process also involves natural processes of extracting colour from plants. Much of these processes are common to both the Sri Kalahasti style and the Machilipatnam style, however there are important differences as well.



Fig 4: Syamala Arts and Crafts, Block Printing studio at Pedana near Machilipatnam, October 2016.



Fig 5: Master Block Maker K.Gangadhar at Work at Pedana near Machilipatnam, October 2016.



Fig 6: K.Gangadhar's blockmaking studio at Pedana near Machilipatnam, October 2016.

Artist Talisetty Mohan in Sri Kalahasti, one of the artists whom I met had a collection of hundreds of his works at his home. I had the good fortune of seeing his complex and intricate Sampoorna Ramayanam as well as Vishwaroopa Darisanam, large works that spread out across his entire studio and many variations of the Tree of Life.



Fig 7: Artist T. Mohan, Deer, Small Panels of Tree of Life, Kalahasti, October 2016.



Fig 8: Artist: T. Mohan. Sampoorna Ramayanam Detail in Kalamkari, Kalahasti, October 2016.



Fig 9: Artist: T. Mohan. Sampoorna Ramayanam spread, continuous narration. Kalamkari, Kalahasti, October 2016.



Fig 10: Artist: T. Mohan. Detail of Sampoorna Ramayanam, Kalamkari, Kalahasti, October 2016.



Fig 11: Artist: T. Mohan. Vishwarupa Darisanam, Kalamkari, Kalahasti, October 2016

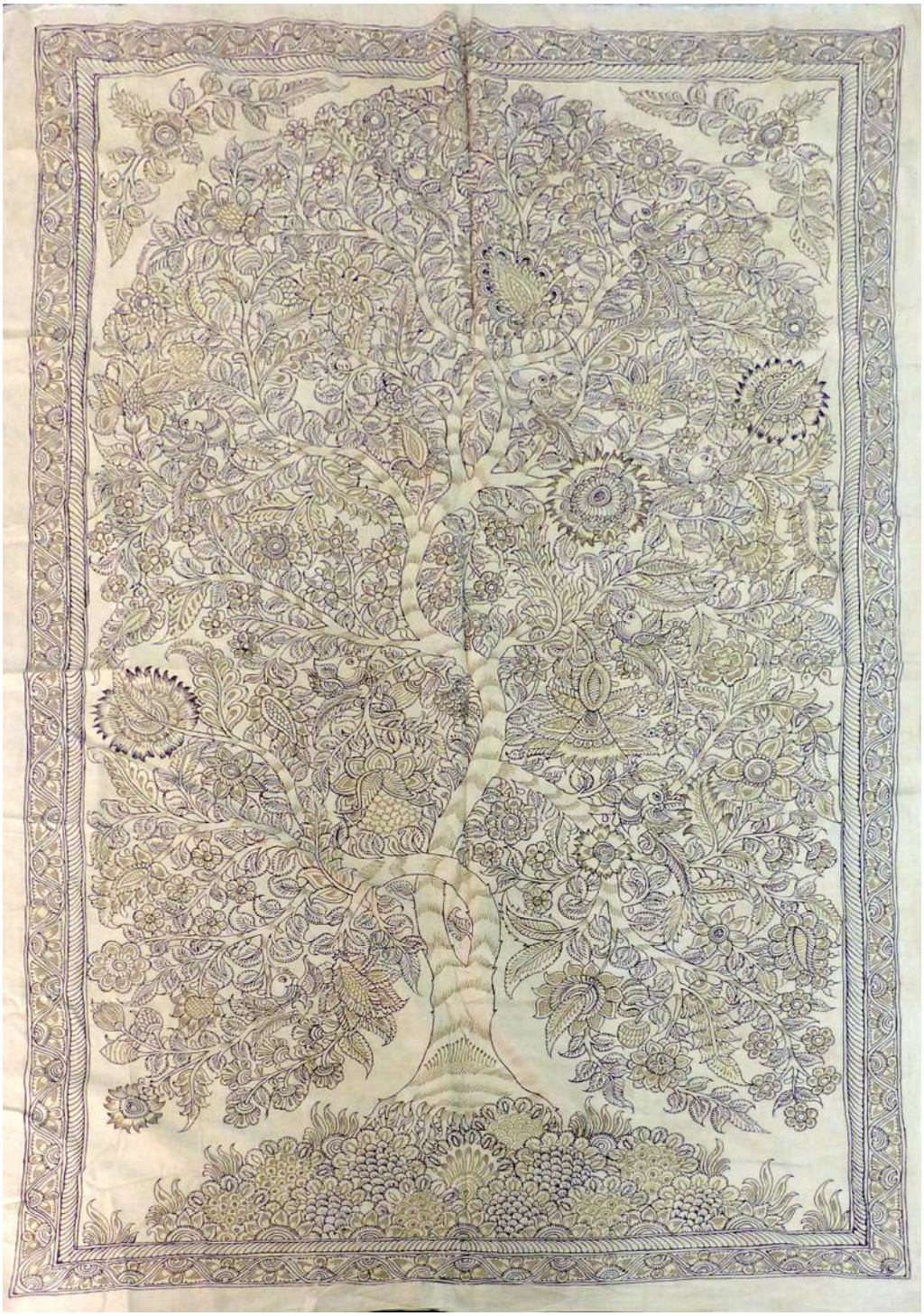


Fig 12: Artist: T. Mohan. Tree of Life, Kalamkari, Kalahasti, October 2016.

Of particular interest to me were his treatments of nature, particular the symbolic *Tree of Life*, a favourite motif in *Kalamkāri*. I choose the work that I eventually bought for my collection for a closer study. This is one of his pieces of the *Tree of Life* that was not coloured and was in outlines with grey black with filled in yellow shades in select

sections. Without the colour, the flow of line became a riveting, ceaseless experience for me. Densely packed with leaves, flowers, fruits, parrots, peacocks, and twisting turning branches, the piece is contained within a floral border that sets the boundary. Shrubs grow at the base of the tree, providing a good balance to the foliage and canopy. As is traditional, the tree of life represents an integrated form of a tree that has many different species of fruits and flowers growing on it as well as different birds (and sometimes animals, though there are no animals in this piece). The dynamic line of flow, bursts into what is probably spring, with the tree in bloom, each branch brimming with abundance and life.

As I observed artist T.Mohan working on one of his new pieces, another tree of life, I saw how his *kalam* moved through the fabric unwaveringly and without pause for long periods of time. A line that was begun, evolved and grew, fluidly guided by the artist's intuition moving in multiple directions in organic curves. Any mistakes that the artist might make, were immediately turned into another decorative element, with playfulness and no fear of a blotch, a heavy thicker line in the place of thinner one, or an unexpected curve. It seemed Mohan had complete command over the organic flow of line, like a creeper or a plant is aware of its growth in response to the environment around. The lines flowed with wild abandon, and at the same time seemed to have inner rules and limits. No line went beyond what its central trunk or branch could hold, and yet the central branch itself is lithe and supple, creating energy of lightness in the dense painting. Growth and abundance, joy and emergence seem to be the principles that operate within this *Tree of Life* painting. Simple patterning with lines helps to add richness. Curves dominate, breaking into unexpected pathways throughout the picture, yet comfortably contained in their own little frame, a

blooming flower contained in a contrasting curve with a peacock looking down, and his tail feathers curving in an opposite direction. Each curve has an opposing curve, whether it is leaf, or seed or branch, the unit containing the dynamism of the lines in a rhythmic pulse that emanates throughout the work; pulsing in and out to a steady beat.

This organic flowing line is the essence of *Kalamkāri* both in the hand painting and the block printing. A continuous never-ending line whose origin or end cannot be completely fathomed, creates a ceaseless unit of life energy within the work. The line itself is strong, confident, musical, dynamic and yet calm, seemingly at rest with itself. It is dynamic, but not agitated and these qualities of the organic line of *Kalamkāri* is a key aspect of how the natural world unfurls in this art form. The narrative style, additionally as in the Sampoorna Ramayanam piece allows for complex storytelling. Symbolism and myth continue to support layering of complexity and multiple worlds are created in a single work of art.



Fig 13: Artist T. Mohan at work on a Tree of Life at his home/ studio in Sri Kalahasti

6. Other Influences

6.1. Miniature Paintings

In miniature paintings, multiple times and spaces are represented simultaneously in a seemingly 2-dimensional perspective. Many scenes or events that are happening across space and time and represented simultaneously in a single painting. This particular feature of the miniature paintings is very valuable in creating vast inner landscapes corresponding to outer experiences. The techniques used to create these complex and layered space-time narratives in intricate small format works allow for many moments of consciousness and transformation to be captured in a dynamic and terse frame.

6.2. Santiniketan Movement, Santiniketan School and the Bengal School of Art

The Bengal school of art, the Santiniketan movement and Tagore's ideas and vision of the Santiniketan School played a critical formative phase in developing my painting styles as well as inquiries into what constituted a style or technique as a contemporary artist with rich cultural roots. Politically the Bengal school and the Santhiniketan movement ushered in Indian artists into the era of the modern art movement, raising critical questions on what it means to be an Indian artist, in a time of colonial influence and change. Nationalism and Revivalism had key roles to play in the shaping of a new modern Indian art. The role of the intellectual Indian artist was new and different from the traditional artisans and craftsman and the guilds and societies that they belonged. Art schools opened by the British had shifted the role of the artist. This period in the Indian art history was a time of rich inquiry into form, style, technique, content and meaning for the artists involved. Art Historian R.Siva Kumar locates Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Ram Kinker Baij and Benode

Behari Mukherjee at the heart of the Santhiniketan art movement and frames this movement as the making of contextual modernism in India.

According to Sivakumar,

> "Santiniketan artists did not believe that to be indigenous one has to be historicist either in theme or in style, and similarly to be modern one has to adopt a particular trans-national formal language or technique. Modernism was to them neither a style nor a form of internationalism. It was critical re-engagement with the foundational aspects of art necessitated by changes in one's unique historical position" (Sivakumar and Kabir 2013)

The Bengal school drew inspiration from traditional Indian art forms and pan Asian styles to construct a new identity for Indian art. Drawing from Mughal miniatures, Ajanta murals, Patacitras and Indian mythology, these artists worked with the sense of form and line that were essential features of traditional Indian arts. Asit Kumar Haldar, A.R. Chugtai, Kshitindranath Majumdar and others were noted artists of this movement. While Sivakumar locates some of the artists mentioned above under the Santhiniketan movement, other art historians have been categorized them under the Bengal school.

6.3. Impressionism and Romanticism

Impressionism and Romanticism – two movements in Western Art History played an important role in the development of certain aspects of my style. Romanticism rose as a reaction to the industrial revolution in late eighteenth century. Individuality, emotion and appreciation of nature were central to the artistic work that emerged with this movement. John Constable, J.M.W Turner and Claude Monet's work left lasting

impressions on my practice. Capturing mood, and the fleeting sense of time and space that are essential aspects of the works of these artists, the quiet beauty, stormy wildness, and the ever-changing dynamism of the natural world are brought to light. Studies of landscape as well as impressionistic studies of the natural world, fleeting glimpses of the entwined worlds of the human world amidst the fury of nature that these artists worked with impacted my inquiries into how the natural world can be approached as a subject matter and how feeling can be evoked through impressions.

6.4. Wildlife Art

To me, the work of wildlife artists Robert Bateman and William T.Cooper raise questions of realistic, naturalistic studies of nature and their relevance to building a style for *porosity*. Looking closely at nature, form, landscape, habitat and ecosystems while painting, capturing the behaviors of different species in their habitat opens up a whole new world of possibilities of painting. Bateman's work is highly influenced by impressionism, abstract expressionism, modernism even as his works are highly realistic wildlife art, and others show the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Cooper focuses on scientific accuracy and realism, and uses renaissance techniques like chiarascuro to capture light in his work.

Both their works, capture diverse species in their respective habitats and displaying behaviours that are specific to the species, bringing out the magnificence of form, interdependences, mysteries and nuances of the natural world. They both create

sensitive images of wildlife, telling intimate stories of other life forms, bringing us into a closer communication with the more-than-human worlds.

6.5. Karl Martens and Chinese Brush Painting

Artist Karl Martens technical and conceptual approaches in blending meditative practices, Chinese brush painting and close observation of the natural world provided a form and technique that is a cross between Asian philosophical and aesthetic practices and wildlife art. His long experiences in bird watching helped him internalize the characteristics and behaviors of birds over time. He focuses on capturing the sense of being and presence of a bird through large format ink works. He practices meditation and archery to bring himself to a sense of flow in the moment, and from this intuitive space of consciousness, allows himself to create freely. His work blends a close observation of species and the natural world, with Asian meditative ways of making.

Working with realism, and close studies of nature is a different process from engaging with symbolism, iconography, mythmaking and working with fantasy. These studies are rooted in the real world interpreted with the lens of a naturalist, or ecologist. While the depictions of the wildlife are sensitive and nuanced, they are not anthropomorphized in any manner. Works by these artists have been crucial to grapple with different styles and techniques that emerge from close observations of the natural world and how these can support evolving methods for representing or experiencing *porosity.*

7. Summary

Through this chapter exploration of conceptual frameworks, aesthetic principles, principles of form and transformation, styles and techniques, content, blending of myths and stories with visual narratives, visual tools to indicate states of consciousness and transformation of being have been considered. In chapters 10, 11 and 12, these methods are extended and adapted to develop the principles of my practice for *porosity*.

Chapter 8

Text

He who with his words draws out the subtle and the beautiful attributes hidden within things, he who can by his mere words incarnate them externally in a beautiful form, these two great poets I salute, and indeed I salute more the (connoisseur) who knows the labour of the above two and is a fit person to receive the burden unloaded by them.

Vakroktijivita (p. 129)
Translated by T.N. Sreekantaiya

(Seturaman, 2017, 234)

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6. Chapter Summary

Chapter 8: Text focuses on language, poetry and lyrical prose to engage with *porosity*. Our relationship to the natural world is bound to our languages of expression. Earlier, we looked at image and visual language. Textual, oral, and poetic language and the relationships between human and the natural world as observed in the usage of these are key to how we reframe our relationship today.

In this chapter we will look at some of the broader concepts of eco-literature, eco-criticism and eco-poets followed by a closer study of Nature in *Caṅkam* poetry. A theoretical framework of embodied landscape language is introduced here. The Tamil poet Bharatiyar's works are studied more closely as his work left an indelible impact on my own. I imbibed the versatility, love for nature and abundance of styles that he explored into my own over the years. In this chapter I analyse Nature in *Caṅkam* poetry and Bharatiyar's work to trace roots to my own work.

1. Eco-literature: Influences

Eco-literature includes a whole range of work that look at environment or the ecological crisis closely and can include poetry, literary fiction, non-fiction, sci-fi and several other genres.

Ecocriticism is the study of such literature and its connection to the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where analysis of texts to examine how literature inquires into subjects of nature is delved into. It is an emerging field and there are diverse interpretations of methods and scope of ecocriticism. It is intentionally broad in its approach and informed by several other fields.

I have been drawn to eco-poetry and eco-literature by different authors over a long period of time. Tagore's work was always a point of inspiration. The two lines

"Be still my heart.

These great trees are prayers" (Mehta and Tagore, 1990)

from his work echoed my own feelings. The Romantic poets, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge also inspired my own poetry in my teen years, providing me with vocabulary and imagination. Tennyson's poetry left much cherished perceptivity. Two of his poems, 'Eagle' and 'Flower in the crannied wall', remain life long inspirations. However, it is Ranier Maria Rilke, the German poet whose writings that have a strong hold on me. I discuss two of his works here to bring to light what is deeply meaningful about his work and how it supports in shaping my own.

In the first poem *"Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower"*, Rilke's voice speaks to intense transformation of the self through tough times. However, it is also a conversation with the natural world in the way it concludes calling out to silent earth and rushing water. Rilke's work is fused in this manner with direct conversations where the natural world is an intrinsic part of human life, emotion and consciousness. His metaphors of suffering, joy, pondering and wonderment are woven into the rich tapestry of nature. There is a ceaseless exchange of form, meaning and conversation that speaks of intimacy with nature. A theory of *porosity* is shaped as much in darkness as in light and to me, this poem that speaks of darkness and transformation holds the most important experiences that one encounters in delving into a relationship with the natural world as much as with other human beings. His work is replete with heightened senses and nature mysticism.

Quiet friend who has come so far,

feel how your breathing makes more space around you.

Let this darkness be a bell tower

and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.

Move back and forth into the change.

What is it like, such intensity of pain?

If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,

be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,

the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,

say to the silent earth: I flow.

To the rushing water, speak: I am.

Sonnets to Orpheus II, 29 Translation by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows

(Rilke, Macy and Barrows 2006)

In this poem, "Dear Darkening Ground", he already forewarns us of the ecological crisis and yet his grief is embraced in love, providing a tension of possibilities in how we can interpret and experience the disaster we have wrought upon the natural world. The words are wise, and yet heartbreaking and yet again a conversation with the vast earth.

Dear darkening ground,

you've endured so patiently the walls we've built,

perhaps you'll give the cities one more hour

and grant the churches and cloisters two.

And those that labor—let their work

grip them another five hours, or seven,

before you become forest again, and water, and widening wilderness

in that hour of inconceivable terror

when you take back your name

from all things.

Just give me a little more time!

I want to love the things

as no one has thought to love them,

until they're worthy of you and real.

Book of Hours, I 61

Translation by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows (Rilke, Macy and Barrows 2006)

While there is much more that can be read into the works, due to the limitations of this thesis, I will move on to a closer study of *Caṅkam* poetry and Bharatiyar's work that have had the most impact on me as an intuitive tradition and as a reader.

Of Asian works, Haiku and the works of Matsuo Basho and Takahama Koshi have been influential. Folk poetry from across cultures, entwined with folk music have been other literary inspirations in my work. My focus remains strongly on eco-poetry

though other genres of literature too have much to offer. They are beyond the limitations of this thesis.

2. Embodied Landscape Language: Tamil Poetry and Aesthetics[1]

"In Tamil poetry across time, there is a close co-relationship between nature and human emotion. The section looks at the paradigm of nature within which construction of this poetry takes place and traces similar paradigms through several time-periods in history up to the poetry written for Tamil films in the 2000s. The authors observe that embodied landscape language emerges when a shift in consciousness happens at the intersection of nature, self and culture. The section raises questions of experientiality that are bound to culturally embodied ways of sense-making. This section also investigates the immediacy of experientiality through a relationship with nature that becomes integrated into emotion and thought, and the capacity of converting this ecological kinship into a well chiselled work of writing. In this section, we expand current frameworks to interpret the aesthetics, creative process and reading of Tamil poetry.

2.1. Introduction

Language is created through and informed by cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies of a given culture. These inform the very grammar and structure of language. Tracing back in time to a historical point in knowledge making in the Tamil universe, a cosmology that led the senses back into the world of deep experientiality

[1] This section *Embodied Landscape Language:* Tamil *Poetry and Aesthetics* has been co-authored with Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram and the paper has been accepted for publication in Nov-Dec 2020 by Sahitya Akademi's Journal – Indian Literature. We would like to acknowledge the support of Prof. Vaithialingan in interpreting the *Caṅkam* poetry and cultural ethos. The author acknowledges Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram, K.Saraswathi and V. Kalyanasundaram for their readings and support with the translation for both sections of this chapter.

seems to have existed palpably. In this worldview, subtle, intricate body sensing was a key tool for interrogation, investigation and experience.

This interrelationship between individual self and cosmos allows for an expansive interiority as well as infinity and recursiveness. As Shulman observes, "Tamil is a language engineered to express processuality in various prevalent modes and forms, in the external domain of objects no less than in the internal world of thought, feeling, and awareness" (12). Through the course of time as cosmologies shift, ontologies and epistemologies shift due to dominant knowledge paradigms, language too undergoes a shift in a certain superficial sense. However the cultural framework which is embodied in the grammar continues to provide deeper meanings, intuitions and creative impulses to those who work within the language. For instance, the Tamil word *uḷḷam* carries within it the potential of both emotion and reason, of intellect, mind and heart as well consciousness.

In this section, we extend observations by different Tamil scholars on how nature, self and culture are interlinked to create a shift (albeit ephemeral) in the framework of consciousness. We elaborate that when nature is an intrinsic part of the cultural dialogue, the written language that emerges is an intimate tool self-reflecting in/on the ecological behavior of another life form; the seasons or the immediate environment in order to echo, deepen, negotiate, communicate the intensity, depth and shades of human emotions. We perceive Tamil used in this manner to be an '*embodied landscape language'*. Some of the diverse categories in which nature is experienced, perceived and conceptualized in Tamil poetry as well as the pan-Indian framework are:

i. Physical- external, immediate, biological, including seasons, diurnal cycles etc.
ii. Elemental- based on the five elements celebrating their forces and establishing correspondences between cosmic forces and individual human
iii. Cosmological - deeply embedded in theological symbolism and iconography
iv. Paradoxical – capable of transmutation between forms, states of being and states of consciousness, emerging in both myth and mysticism

In early and middle *Caṅkam* Tamil poetry, we find a stronger focus on biological nature. However starting from late *Caṅkam* works, *Bhakti* poetry from the fifth century C.E. onwards and Bharatiyar's poems during the 19th century which herald the beginning of modern Tamil poetry, we find place for the other conceptualizations of nature. These allow for diverse ways of embodying nature in the human.

Much Tamil poetry, folds and unfolds nature into self to allow poiesis to happen in each poem. The embodiment of landscape into emotion, creates a gestalt of emotion that turns an individual personal experience, into a cosmic enchantment. Landscape colludes with the human in Tamil poetry to heighten experience. "The enunciation of the absolute kinship of Nature with Man marks the most important advance in the whole history of Indian thought" (Hiriyanna 1954, 3).

2.2. Unraveling 'Embodied'

We elucidate the use of Tamil as *embodied landscape language* in poetry through the following aspects:

- Layering inner space-time and memory onto the external landscape and its elements through acute observation of seasons, cycles of growth and decay and behavior.
- Simultaenity of time-perception to heighten aesthetic perspective
- Poetic devices to layer viscerality of emotion into the materiality of landscape
- Innerness of Tamil language that allows aesthetic expression of landscape as interiority
- Cultural conceptualization of nature into theological and philosophical symbolism to enable transformation of the self

2.3. Tamil Poetry

Ancient Tamil literary theory placed complete value on an absolute truth and the traditional rules of meaning-making. In this model, novelty and modernity in an individual poet was not critical. Neither was it important that the poet gives expression to his own feelings in poetry (Hiriyanna 1954, 42). The Tamil poetical tradition is very conscious of and celebratory of this tradition, the *marapu*. Tamil poets also consider it a big part of their tradition to inspire and create the next generation poet. Poets and scholars within the Tamil tradition to this day feel strongly about not losing the *marapu*. The continuity of tradition is established in practice, even as times and mores of both reading and writing have changed.

We begin our readings with Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry. Briefly, Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry uses a framework of five different landscapes in which universal stories of love (*akam*) and war (*puṟam*) take place. *Akam* refers to all that is experienced within two individuals who recognize it in themselves and the other through the inner eye

(*akattiṉ kaṇ*), the delicate essence of being human. *Puṟam* is the emotional experience that is not private, but accessible, emerging from the rules and meanings of the social world. The *akam* context composed of the five tiṇais (*aintiṇai*) with their inbuilt landscape, flora and fauna, time of day, phase of love, music and musical instruments as well as source of water become paradigms for love. *Puṟam* poetry is divided into seven *tiṇai(s)*.

Tiṇai is defined as *oḻukkam* literally being aligned to or abiding by context. Each *tiṇai* in turn consists of three basic elements in a set of three involuting and expanding circles each informing and enriching the other- *mutaṟporuḷ, karupporuḷ* and *uripporuḷ*. *Mutaṟporuḷ* or first elements define the time-space, *karupporuḷ* refers to the nature elements and *uripporuḷ* are the human emotions. Another key concept is *tuṟai* which is the thematic narrative of a poem.

In *akappaṭṭu*, *kuṟiñci* (mountains), *mullai* (forest/plains), *marutam* (field), *neytal* (seashore), and *pālai* (desert-like/wasteland) become the setting against which the cosmic elements, the landscape and all its inhabitants including crab and stork, rain and kurinji flowers, black stalks and desert lizards come alive as key players, tricking us with their presence, asking us to peer closely, solve riddles, know their behaviors to grasp the emotions that the humans are feeling. Zvelebil (1973) writes, "This is the tender, intimate love-poetry, anonymous, stereotyped, including some of the greatest love poems ever composed in world literature" (21). Many Tamiḻ scholars have underscored this point in their works. For instance, distinguished indologist Zvelebil explains the *Caṅkam* philosophy as,

> The reasons for this humanism are not drawn from a monistic identity with the Primeval Being, but from the very nature of man, from the fundamental identity of all men, from a rational unity found in nature and in the cosmos; above all, from a stoic-like, unimpassioned, imperturbable kind of acceptance of the facts of life (1973, 16).

Ramanujan (2014a) writes,

> …in the Tamil Poems, culture is enclosed in nature, nature is reworked in culture, so that we cannot tell the difference. We have a nature- culture continuum that cancels the terms, confuses them even if we begin with them (44).

Both Swaminatha Iyer (1937, 32-65) and Ramanujan (2014b, 210) also note that the *Caṅkam* poets were accurate in their botanical observations. Varadarajan (1969) who undertook an elaborate study of nature in *Caṅkam* literature observes,

> The ancient poets have found out that in a particular season of the year and in a particular hour of the day, a particular regions appears most beautiful and most influential, that every landscape is seen best under the peculiar illumination of the season and a period of it when its influence is powerful on human impulses and activities (7).

Selby (2000) notes that, "…the recombinant aspect of Tamil poetry has to do with the reshaping of *the human body* and its impulses, feelings, thoughts and desires" (52). More recently, Muthukumar (2011) has looked at the poetics of *Caṅkam* and late-*Caṅkam* age works through the lens of phenomenology for his thesis uncovering "…

the process of perception of landscape/ place is deeply related to emotional affect" (109) and

> In the context of place, the lived body plays a central role in the *Caṅkam* poems. The protagonists in these poems experience place in the most direct way, viz., by being in that place. Places are always sensed by the subjects in these poems and so it is that, the body as lived and remembered is crucially interstitial in status. The basic borderline it occupies is traced between mind and place: it is their middle term, their *tertium quid.* In sensing place and in remembering it, the human body experiences place while being part of that very place (Muthukumar 2011, 111).

Bhakti Poetry which evolved post the *Caṅkam* period, draws much of its structures and conventions from *akam* and *puṟam* poetry (Cutler 1987, 67-68). This allowed for the nature imagery also to be continued, albeit in a different way. Theological symbolism and cosmic correspondences emerged as a way to play with divine paradoxes using nature as metaphor, simile, implied comparison or interiority. *Uḷḷam,* the interior landscape where everything happens in the Tamiḻ imagination is unified beingness. Indicating the physical heart, the subtle place where emotion arises, the sharpness of intellect, the criticality of cognition, the transformative nature of consciousness – *uḷḷam* embodies Tamiḻ experientiality within itself. It is the intimate space between lovers, the stage for the cosmic dance, the heart of the devotee, the cosmic space. Layered and textured, the heart of Tamiḻ aesthetics lies in writing from and reading through the *uḷḷam*. The vast expanse of the human heart, the *uḷḷam*, cannot be comprehended without its cosmic counterparts.

2.4. Re-reading poetry

2.4.1. The Poet's World, Unraveling the Creative Processes

In Tamil, the word *cuvai* is the poet's original experience, the content of the experience and the constituents of the content as well as the experience of the poet's words by the audience. In *Caṅkam* poetic technique, emotions are suffused back into the earth body to be magnified, intensified, deepened, impressed, and arise back within the *embodied landscape language* in terseness and rich complexity. The poet has a critical role, with his sacred tool of poetry he acts as the observer, recording awareness and creating it. The capacity of a poet to describe a scene to perfection and place the element of nature appropriately so as be evocative was therefore seen as a seminal work. In practice through the course of time, the poet came to be celebrated and distinguished by the descriptor. For example, *Kōvēṅkai Peruṅkatavaṉar* is the poet who described a solitary *vēṅkai* tree (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) in full bloom beside a rock that a mountain stream dashes against and *Cempulapeyanīrar,* the one who wrote eloquently about the red earth mixed with the rain (Swaminatha Iyer 1937, 104-107).

We speculate that as the Caṅkam poet traversed the landscape he used a system of *kaṇṭathu, kēṭṭatu, cuvaittatu, nukarntatu, uṇarntatu: ellam uyirppittu*- the seen, heard, tasted, smelt, the felt-known: everything given life. This system yields a means of direct yet coded communication that integrates perfectly within the cultural norms. Embodied place and embodied language become indivisible in this style of poetry. The highly developed sensorial and cognitive processes that created the 'inner

landscape'[2] in response to a multi-dimensional complex biological world recreate through the interplay of attention and masking, a heightened awareness that briefly expands time into- a continuum of immediacy; memory and the thrill of longing. This process is best described through three key words in Tamil- *uṟaital, niṟaital, nilainiṟuttutal. Uṟaital* refers to any element of nature that resides within the biome, niraital refers to that element achieving a state of nativization in that environment and *nilainiṟuttutal* refers to the creative act of the poet who has the knowledge of the *uṟaital* and the *niṟaital* and juxtaposes these natural elements by hiding some of them while revealing others onto the landscape within.

Through interweaving inner and outer landscapes of cognition and emotion, the moment of re-imagined reality in the space-time between the poet and the audience comes alive. This moment of re-imagined reality is best revealed through a string of Tamil words placed in succession- *nikaḻntatu, negilvittatu, tūṇṭil, tuṇṭittal.* A moment that had transpired (*nikaḻntatu*) and involved the hero and the heroine; the flowers, the birds or the parched land or in the paddy fields or the lush mountains filled with honey- this exact evocative moment (*negilvittatu*) is what the poet wishes to share with the audience. He creates a re-enactment of this moment which can instantly be recognized by his audience. The ability of the poet to re-create/project the same evocative moment with all the hidden and unhidden players into the space-time between him and the audience is his power and charm that serves as a bait (*tūṇṭil*). In the ability of the connoisseur audience to experience immersively what the poet projected into the space-time lies their exhilaration. In this mutual sharing of the evocative moment, a reality emerges in the space-time between the poet and his

[2] A.K.Ramanujan speaks of interior / inner landscape to describe the interiority in Tamil poetry.

audience. And then this spell is broken (*tuṇṭittal)* only to shift the gaze inwards to emerge a layer of self in diverse and powerful ways.

Our reading of poetry also needs to be visual. The poet has painted a poem, it is a scene, a series of moments colluding together to create an intensified time-space. The more sophisticated and sympathetic reader, has bypassed linearity in reading to create a cascade of images, translucent and transparent, *porous* and rich, earthy sensuous and deeply evocative. Varadarajan (1969) illustrates this aspect by detailed analysis of the work of each Nature-poet: *Iḷaṅkīraṉār* –

> The poets sense of form and color is manifest in his comparison of the bark of the omai tree (*Salvadora persica* grows in riverine coastal tracts) to the skin of an alligator *(Akanaṉūṟu 3)*; her tearful eyes look like *kuvaḷai* flowers (*Nymphaea* spp.) with raindrops on them *(Akanaṉūṟu 395)*. His sense of sound is equally appreciable-The friction-roar of the bamboos is said to be heard like the hard breathing of an elephant tied to its pole *(Naṟṟiṇai 62)* (Varadarajan 1969, 39-40).

2.4.2. Nature in *Caṅkam* poetry

Among many poetic devices, we have chosen examples of poetry that use the techniques of *uḷḷuṟai uvamam* and *iṟaicci* to highlight the emotions, the psychological struggles, the spiritual spirals of the inner world through a network of mirroring images from the natural world that highlight and echo the inner self moving in its myriad emotional gamut.

In the descriptions of Chellappan (1987),

> The essence of *uḷḷuṟai* is that it is a meaning embedded in or intrinsic to the image and the meaning of the passage can be completed only by the image and its implied meaning. *Iṟaicci* (lit. flesh) has its meaning outside the image that is, it is a meaning beyond the word or beyond the setting. The setting through a distinct emotional link evokes another meaning, (which emanates from the image) and this meaning is not an intrinsic component of the situation described (67-68).

> *Ainkuruṉūṟu* 29 Ōrampōkiyar *Tiṇai: Marutam* – What the heroine's friend said to the foster mother: *māri kaṭikoḷak kāvalar kaṭuka…,*

> *When the rain stops at midnight*
> *The guards rush about to catch a thief while*
> *the crab savours the white sprouts*
> *from the newly sown paddyfields*
> *She has embraced the man from those fields*
> *Your daughter has blossomed into a lovely maiden*
> *Yet her glowing body has become sallow*
> *Who do you think might be the cause of her state?*

The heroine's family rejects the hero's proposal for marriage being unaware about the hero and heroine's love. The heroine's friend firmly defends her by indicating to the foster-mother about their love and relationship which has grown over many nights when the hero has visited bypassing the guards. In Avvai Turaicami Piḷḷai's

commentary, he indicates that the cutting of the *veṇmuḷai* (white sprout) stands in for the family's rejection of the marriage proposal not realizing that the daughter has matured and is ready for setting up her home with the man she loves (1938, 109-110). By the use of the word *pacalai*, the sallowness acquired during separation from loving caress, the poem encodes many beautiful moments of togetherness and separation, the play of light and dark in nature and the human soul in love. "*Pacalai* is such a beautifully coded word. While it refers to a yellowing in a woman's body with separation from love's intimate caress, its nature connotation refers to the earth's body intimately caressed by the gentle rays of the rising moon, where the moon is the *talaivan* and the earth is the *talaivi*. The earth acquires a golden yellow color in the sun's harsh light being separated from the moon" (Vaithyalingan Feb 19-22, 2019, Personal conversation).

However, reading it in this reductive manner results in squandering away of much of the emotional rapture that the poem can fleetingly evoke in the mind of the reader. We will take another poem which has stunning imagery and interpret the poem as is typically read by scholars of *Caṅkam* poetry, followed by an attempt to reveal an integrated framework of experiencing the poem in a more holistic paradigm.

Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉattuc Ceṅkaṇṇaṉar, Tiṇai:Kuṟiñci

What the friend said to the heroine while the hero was outside:*Vēṅkaiyum puli īṉṟaṉa…*

The vēnkai trees

have sprung forth tigers

The cascading waterfalls from the honey-laden

mountain summits sparkle like sapphires

My mother asked me to guard the ripe millet ears

from the small parrots who swoop upon them

While my father went with strong men

who hurl arrows to split the elephants visage

The female jungle fowl strolls beside her partner

with her patterned legs scratching

old fields on the mountain slopes

revealing fine gold dust

may the caring love we feel for the man

from the gold-dust fields be kindly blessed (Na<u>rr</u>iṇai 389).

Vēṅkai tree- *Pterocarpum marsupium* yields a blood red sap/gum in response to mechanical damage. In India the *vēṅkai* tree is sacred, an almost 100ft tall life-form which bleeds like the human soul reverberating with the soul of the forest. It is a tree to be celebrated, worshipped, nourished, partaken of and loved for its mystery, its healing powers.

It is easy to draw the allusions between the ripe millet (that is ready to be harvested and is instead preyed upon by parrots) and the heroine who is imprisoned in her house, gnawing feelings of despair take over her heart in her worry that she may not

be able to unite with the hero. The foster-mother who knows this sends the friend along to reassure the heroine and bring hope.

Hidden meaning can be uncovered from the allusion of *vēṅkai* tree springing forth tigers instead of delicate flowers, which is already layered but if one seeks a direct correlation it can be found in the situation of harvest time (also the time of the *vēṅkai* flowering) which should have been one to unite the lovers in marriage yet serves to separate them.

In the commentary by Nārāyaṇacami Aiyar (1915), *iṟaicci* is noted in the jungle fowl pair that scratch the old fields up in the mountain slopes to yield gold dust referring to the wealthy status of the hero's family who have not yet sent word for the heroine's hand in marriage despite all being well (517). The friend hopes that the couple will soon be blessed. Saying thus, the friend conveys the thoughts in the heroine's mind to the hero who is waiting outside.

If we allowed ourselves to reside in the peculiar simultaneity of perception that *Caṅkam* poetry urges us to do we are transported to the subjective time of imagination where a day several years goes by within a few minutes much like portrayed in dance or theatre. Vātsayāyan illuminates, "Memory is the central axis around which the poet makes loops in time. Memory is not a duration or sequence; nor is it the past per se. It is the ever present 'now' of 'Being'" (1996, 407).

The *vēṅkai* trees with their bright yellow clusters of flowers strewn against the land in moonlight is imagined as a resting tiger several times in *Caṅkam* poetry. This is therefore one powerful image correlated with time in a special way within this poem.

Cascading water plummeting dramatically has fascinated the human mind for centuries. If we focus on a single drop of water and freeze it momentarily in our mind's eye, the water could look like a sparkling gemstone in broad daylight. We have the imagery of the frivolous ripe millet heads dancing in the breeze, these need to be guarded from hungry parrots and the stark raw beautiful mountainous land where strong men hunt animals together, evoking a time in the landscape of plenty and harmony. Resident within the millet is the labor-time of sowing the grain, cultivating, the maturation and final enjoyment of the harvest time. The image of the jungle fowl and its partner hunting for worms and grain in older fields that are not currently in cultivation, layers another image into this multimodal multisensorial poem. Lived time is not linearly patterned or uniformly segmented. The poet integrates space (as landscape), movement, light and sound in one truly seamless artistic stroke. The notion of time is played with and evocatively communicated as: the time of imagination, as memory, as immediacy of longing and despair, as dream time, as hope of a future through navigating the images of time, space and visuality in nature along with aural time in the sound of the language and the silences between the words. The human capacity to perceive duration while remaining rooted in perceiving the present moment is used within the structure of the poem.

Puranānūru 65, Kaḷāttalaiyār *Tiṇai: Potuviyal, Tuṟai: Kaiyaṟu nilai*

The poet sings of helplessness as King Peruñcēralathaṉ fasts to death facing North

maṇmuḷā maṟappap paṇ yāḻ maṟappa…

Drums have no mud smeared on them

Lutes have no ragas

Large pots have overturned and have no ghee in them

His retinue no longer drinks liquor swarming with bees

Ploughmen do not make noise

and the villages with wide streets have no festivals

Just as on the great day of the full moon

when the two orbs behold one another

and one of them disappears behind the mountain in the evening,

the king of valour,

ashamed at the wound he received in his back

when a king worthy of him aimed at his breast,

is starving himself to death, sitting by his sword

Daytime when the sun shines

does not pass as days did before (Tr. Hart 1976, 332)

King Peruñcēralathaṉ followed the custom of fasting to death to save his honor when a spear aimed by King Karikālaṉ penetrated from the front to the back in the battle with the Chola King Karikālaṉ. We find two ways that evoke a response in us. In considering the device used as *uḷḷuṟai uvamam*, we take King Peruñcēralathaṉ as the sun and King Karikālaṉ as the moon. Emphasizing the last two lines where the poet says that 'the daytime when the sun shines does not pass as before', we understand the poet's sorrow in losing his beloved King. We see that the moon has risen and the sun has set implying that King Karikālaṉ won the battle.

However, if we consider the poetic device used as *iṟaicci,* we uncover the following scenario:

The poet Kaḻāttalaiyār compares King Peruñcēralathaṉ to the setting sun on a full moon night right after a spectacular sight with the moon and the sun caught in the sky at the same moment in time. In using both the correspondence of sun and moon for King Peruñcēralathaṉ, while one is ready for the bright continuing light of day, one is faced with the other orb announcing a different impending truth. In the moment where the two orbs behold one another, the possibilities converge revealing the shock and anguish of losing the poet's beloved King and patron. The sun and the moon complete the full time cycle of a day, the poet has lost his everything, where the orbs behold each other, time has coalesced into nothingness and the days do not pass by as ever before.

2.4.3. Nature in *Bhakti* Poetry 7th -8th century

"Devotion becomes an act defined by intensity of emotion rather than purity", writes Hart (1976, 351). *Bhakti* poems cannot be read line by line, they must be heard as song, as paintings, their haunting sensitivities laying our souls bare to ourselves, as we smile and hold them close to our hearts, reveling in the human spirit/spiritual, in its blessedness to open up to such vulnerabilities that can call forth all nature to collude with in secretive joy.

Nammāḻvār Tiruvāymoḻi, 2.8.7

Who can fathom the illusions

conjured by Māl(Viṣṇu)

on this earth,

the woman with long arms

locked tightly in his embrace?

He measured the world with his strides,

He became a boar

and scooped the earth from the depths of the sea,

He reclines, sits and stands

on the very earth he swallowed and spewed up once more (Tr. Cutler 1987, 144-145)

The iconography and mythology of Lord *Viṣṇu* and his relationship to earth in his varied forms is at the heart of this poem. As a baby, *Kṛṣṇa* lying down on a leaf, eats mud, swallowing the earth and shows his mother and all others the entire splendor of the earth by spitting earth out. As *Tiruvikramaṉ,* he measures the universe in three strides. As *Varāhā*, the boar, he rescues earth at the time of annihilation and separates earth from the universe. Here, earth, *Pūtēvi* is seated embraced in *Viṣṇu's* arms, then in all paradox, *Viṣṇu* also is reclining on the very earth. Nature here is many concepts: cosmic and terrestrial; personified and mythical. Nature is as mysterious and paradoxical as her relationship to *Viṣṇu* (Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa Jīyar, 2016)

2.4.4. Nature in Bhāratiyār's poetry

Bhāratiyār is said to have given away the rice grains to sparrows in a time of great poverty, writing, "Abandon everything and be free like the little sparrow". Ramanujan (2014c) points out that in Bhāratiyār, we find poetry in different styles, some written in the manner of *Bhakti* poets, some in the style of *cittar* mystic poetry, others of a philosophical nature as drawn from Auvaiyār's *Caṅkam* poetry. Bhāratiyār also writes in the style of popular folk forms like lullabies, drum songs and heartfelt love poetry. He also uses the hymnal forms of *Vedic* literature. With his diverse influences and exposure to poetic forms in Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Hindi and French, Bhārati was able to draw on many influences from the West as well, primary among them Shelley and Keats. And it is in Bhārati that we find nature observed as the subject of poetry, as he writes of storms, comets, stars and moon (2014c, 332-343).

Most beautiful of his works on nature are his works on joy, where nature and self integrate in spiritual unity, in a single feeling of *iṉpam.* This *uṇarvu*, rich feeling that one finds in Bhārati's notion of *iṉpam* permeates through his perceptions and descriptions of nature. In *iṉpam*, he transcends all his different styles of poetry in mystic simplicity.

> *Ettaṉaik kodi iṉpam vaittay…*
>
> *How vast the treasures of joy!*
> *God! God! God!*
> *You melded sentient and insentient together*
> *And at that confluence, you made a world of wonder with the five elements*

The whole world bursts forth in riches of colour, as you created much beauty.

You created a moment in consciousness - salvation,

In that space, you created the possibility to experience all this in rich emotion

And to go there, In Bhakti, you drew us a path,

Our Lord! Our Lord! Our Lord!

In this poem, all the four approaches to embodiment that we articulate earlier in the paper find place in the intent as well as description. While it is direct, the cultural references to *mukti, uṇarvu, bhakti* as well as the conception of the microcosm through the macrocosm, deepen the possible readings of this poem. Nature is physical, it is elemental, it is cosmic, theological, mystical and paradoxical. It is a backdrop and a presence, a geography and unparalleled expanse. It is entwined in self, in transformation, in perception and in salvation. There is the god to whom the poem is addressed and yet there is *uṇarvu* – rich feeling, inner consciousness that transcends the very god it is speaking to, to enable deep inner experience of transformation. There is duality and there is oneness. Nature is embodied in joy, and in the sensorial (both inner and outer) capacity to experience, interwoven with human emotion and presence.

2.4.5. Nature in Contemporary Tamil̲ film songs in the 2000s

The Tamil̲ culture continues its long tradition of using nature and the natural landscape in its daily metaphors. Breakfast starts with steamed rice cakes: the quality control question being, *iṉṉikku iṭli eppaṭi?* Followed by the perfectly right answer: *mallikaipū māri.* (How are today's *iṭli(s)*? Soft like freshly picked jasmine flowers). Anand Pandian (2011) writes about Director Bharathiraja,

> The director described a process of mixing or merging his own "feelings" with the living environment in which he was working, an affective relationship through which he came to recognize the landscape as an actor (55).

The richly detailed universes that we find in the *caṅkam* poetics have trickled down, transmuted, but distinctly visible in the manner in which contemporary Tamil continues to create evocative identities in space and time. The spirit of drawing allusions to nature to evoke a magical alignment of all the senses and grasp the reader's unflinching attention is a poetic craft that the ancient Tamil poets perfected and we find the skill delightfully practised in contemporary Tamil film aesthetics and film song lyrics.

> *There are seven of us in my family, one is our goat and another a cow*
> *As the imprisoned milk dances within the wild cactus, Opuntia ficus-indica, so do tears dance in a swell within, the heart breaks {in drought} silently*
> *Like a gecko craning its neck atop a dead tree, we have come to live upon this earth* [3]

This is a lovely example of *uvamai* where the tears that have no way of voicing themselves swell up silently within the heart are directly represented by the wild cactus (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) milk caught within the stems and pads that grow in areas of drought. Vairamuttu poses a direct correlation between the tree with no leaves to the life of the family in a fallow land who are in a position to feed the one cow and one goat among other family members. *Uḷḷuṟai uvamam* is found when we

[3] Song: *Kāṭu poṭṭa kāṭu*, Movie: Karuttamma, 1994, Lyricist: Vairamuttu

uncover that the only milk available is held in the cactus, the goat and the cow have gone dry. Their living conditions are so dire that the head of the family notes that they must be on earth for a short time as indicated in the verse by the word *ōṇāṉ* - *Calotes versicolor* which has a short life-expectancy of five years.

The beauty of the *uḷḷuṟai* lies in the immediacy of the chosen allegory, *Calotes versicolor* is typically found in a wide range of habitats. The head of the family draws on imagery from his surroundings for use as metaphors while describing his family's condition. He doesn't have the options to envision a life beyond his current limitations.

> *Piṟaiyē piṟaiyē vaḷarum piṟaiyē itu nalvaravē…*[4]
>
> *Crescent moon I behold your waxing, your earthbound time on this land is welcome*
>
> - *(to describe and predict the future of a newborn child)*

This line can be taken as an example of *iṟaicci* where the first layer of meaning is as literally translated. The moon stands in for the protagonist and the crucial word *piṟai* creates several layers of rich nested meanings. *Piṟai* is typically used as *valar-piṟai* to indicate the waxing phase or *tēy-piṟai* denoting the waning phase. The infant protagonist is growing and yet a sense of impermanence is finely woven into the verse -the moon which is in a waxing phase contains within itself the power of annihilation. The conciseness and preciseness in the choice of words further make this line

[4] Song: *Piṟaiyē piṟaiyē*, Movie: Pitāmakan, 2003, Lyricist: Vāli

particularly beautiful. *Piṟai* is used with the addition of -ye directly addressing the protagonist. The nascent protagonist 'moon' is welcomed *(nalvaravē*) definitively, the word *piṟai* prophesizing an inherent 'darkness' in the situation, further echoing the prelude to the 'no moon' phase. The word '*itu*=this, at this moment' ushers in the measure of time nested within the context of this verse. The moon disappears at dawn, its presence is for a finite time, and within that time it dispels darkness. This last layer presages the life journey of the protagonist.

3. Discussion on Section

The human experience and the cognition of the emotional experience that must be lived in the ambiguous compromise of earth time is achieved without isolating the human from the immediacy of nature nor dividing the human and the cosmic manifold. The cosmos and the poetic language are not separate, the question of 'being' is solved through deep ontological description of natural elements and processes which mirror the transience and tenacity of human existence with its myriad emotions and intellectual pursuits. There is also an unwritten expectation, a sort of mutual relationship that exists between the poet, his successors and the readers in their abilities to experience embodiment of landscape through the reading of the poetry. The poems offer a strong consonance; a rhythm between the sound of words, the structural elements of the poem and the powerful silences amidst the words inserted here now and there next, challenging the journey of the reader while creating rich textural layers for the reader's mind to recharge, lay fallow, resonate, be moved, indelibly twinged with agony and relieved.

Future directions in studying the connections between language, cognition and cultural ecology would highlight the relevance of observing nature and entwining it in everyday language as a critical step to building a relationship with nature. It would also deepen our interpretations and understanding of ecological aesthetics within the language and its cultural paradigm. [5]

[5] The section of the paper to be published in Indian Literature journal ends here.

4. Nature in Bhāratiyār's Poetry: Expanding Ecological Consciousness[6]

In Bhārati, nature is seamlessly entwined with self - in oneness, in duality, in freedom, in mysticism, in prayer and in love. Bhārati's nature is best experienced as an act of love. Bhāratiyār's notion of love lies in *nēcam(fondness), aṉpu(affection/love), kātal(love), vīram(courage), viḻippu(awareness), śakti(energy), karuṇai(compassion)*. It is rich, textured, raw, innocent, nuanced, passionate, decisive, intuitive, gentle, childlike, cherished, meditative and expansive. Courage, conviction, joy and abiding peace are a driving force for Bhārati's passion and poetry. Silence, love and inner solitude are the clue for great dynamism and action in his expansive work and short life. I propose that through his imagination, and interpretation of nature through these values, Bhāratiyār allows for expanding ecological consciousness and in re-reading his works in this light, we will find new directions for our relationship with the natural world.

1.1. Introduction

Bhāratiyār is a poet, writer, journalist, activist and social reformer who is considered one of the great contributors to Tamiḻ literature. Bhārati writes poetry in different styles – *Cittar*/ Tamiḻ mystic poetry, philosophical poetry echoing *Caṅkam* literature similar to Auvaiyār, popular folk song forms, love poetry, hymnal forms of *Vedic* literature, social reform poetry. He draws his influences from across time and also from poets such as Shelley and Keats. He is also well versed in poetry across Tamiḻ, Sanskrit, English, Hindi and French giving him an insightful, refreshing and modern take on poetry.

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[6] Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations in this section are by the author. The author acknowledges Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram, K.Saraswathi and V. Kalyanasundaram for their readings and support with the translation for both sections of this chapter.

Bhārati's connection to nature and his works that draw upon nature in his diverse styles provide us a rich framework to evolve eco-literature in India at a time of ecological crisis. Perception, observation, compassion and mysticism entwine through his work and evoke the tiny sparrows, hens and crows, cuckoos and parrots, sweet breeze and storm, twilight and deepening night, elements and the cosmos in gentleness, blessing, praise and wonder. In Bhāratiyār's poetry, one encounters nature of different kinds – There is the nature that is biological, landscape, species; there is elemental nature that capture the force of wind, fire, earth, water and sky; there is mystical nature, intrinsically bound with *Bhakti* poetry; and paradoxical nature that is playful, transmuting between forms. In his poetry, nature is gentle, subtle, beautiful as well as wild, fearsome, destructive. It is quiet, meditative, reflective and it is the source of joy and meaning. Nature freely becomes child, lover, parent, god, energy and solitude, like broad brushstrokes on vast canvases drawing us into its many dimensional mysteries. Written in simple poetic/ narrative forms drawing from the rich history of Tamil̲ and Sanskrit literature as well as other influences, Bhārati's nature (*iyaṟkai*), invites, soothes, cajoles, quietens, deepens experience, frightens, inspires awe and courage, resonates, becomes music and draws us into her fold.

> "Enjoying the beautiful sounds of the earth, "*maṇṇulakatthu nalvōcaikaḷai,*" Bhāratiyār was able to tune into the (*mahā mauṉam*) great silence of nature and convert it into frequency/ rhythm of his poetry, deeply relishing it in his soul. With these sounds of nature, he is able to hone into the original sound (*ātāra śruti*) and relish it. Evident in his words, "*taṉimai kaṇṭatuṇṭu, atil cāram irukkutammā*" *– I have seen solitude and there is essence (of life) within it*.

Deeply moved, he spent time in nature, in fields, hills, ponds, temples, the ocean at Pondicherry, drawing his inspiration from his continuous journeys uncovering the secrets of nature. In his favourite Kāli temple, he meditates in silence and reflectively says, "*All these are the expressions/forms of Śakti*" " (Tr. from Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 4, 13)

1.2. Nature in love poetry

In his *Kaṇṇammā/ Cellammā* poetry written as love poetry, he uses similies and metaphors, drawing in the beauty of nature to capture the nuances of his heroines.

Cuṭṭum viḻi cuṭar tān Kaṇṇammā
Sūriya cantiraro?

The teasing flame of your eyes, Kaṇṇammā,
is it the sun or the moon?
The deep darkness of your eyes,
the richness of tone from the darkening sky?

In *Kaṇṇammā en kātali*, categorized under *yōkam* in *Kaṇṇan pāṭṭu* and not *sruṅkāram* (Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 3, 59), the first few lines in their simple metaphors appear so straightforward, evocative of a deep maturing love between two people, intimate and expressive. It is only in slow reveling as the verses unfold, that we find these metaphors seeping beyond their original connections to deeper revelations of being, to a meditative stillness of belonging together, of subtler intimacy that draws upon the

rich dialogue between duality and oneness. This is also Bhārati's nature, interwoven, braided, imagined, experienced, cherished, transcended, embraced - his beloved.

Pāyumoḷi nī enakku

Pārkkum viḻi nānunakku

You are the bounding rays of light

I am your vision

You are the sweet nectar of life

I am your bee

I have no words

to speak of your immensity

Light and flame of great purity,

abundant nectar, the eye of my heart!

In his affectionate poem for children *ōṭi viḷaiyāṭu papa*, he writes,

Run and play dear child…

Like a tiny sparrow

fly and roam around, dear child

Look at colourful birds

and find joy in your heart, dear child

The hens are pecking and eating

beckon them and play with them- dear child

The crow is wily and will steal food

find compassion for it- dear child

1.3. Nature in *Bhakti*

In his poetry in praise of gods, similies and metaphors becomes symbols – both emotional and iconographic to draw out the gods from their temples into the everyday common consciousness. His gods and goddesses are conceived as his sons, daughters, helper, king, mother, father, friend. They are so near that one can reach out to them with ease.

Kākkai cirakinilē Nantalālā

*(*Vijaya Bhārati 2015, *Vol 2, 106)*

In the feathers of the crow, Nantalālā (Kṛṣṇa)
the rich hues of your colours arise
in every tree that one sees
your tones of green spring forth.

He describes the ideal natural settings that he would like his home to be set in

Kāṇi nilam vēṇṭum Parāśakti

He requests *Parāśakti*, the goddess to bless him a home among coconut trees and plants. He paints the picture of home near a pond, where the moonlight would gently awaken this small space, and the songs of cuckoos would sweeten the evening. He asks for gentle breeze that would bring joy to his consciousness.

Pāttu kalantiṭavē aṅkēyoru

patiṉi peṇ vēṇṭum- eṅkaḷ …

In this landscape…

Infused with music,

I wish for a wife, in our

love, may poetry

flow into this space…

In the forested spaces, Śakti

May we have your protection, with

my skill in poetry May I protect

this world

In the last verse, poetry, love for nature and love for his wife are entwined to infuse a powerful internal call for protecting nature through his own poetry. His nature poetry often resides in this blissful state of joy and peace that flows through the verse, out of which the strength of his vision arises. It would be impossible to remove Bhāratiyār's poetry from the landscapes that surround him and fire his imagination, creativity and state of restfulness. In *Kāṇi nilam vēṇṭum*, we find this home ground, a vision deeply resonant with the natural world, a poet deeply moved by the presence of life around him. In staying with this poem as a frame of reference, we find Bhārati's notion of contentment.

1.4. Nature in Joy

His spirit of contentment and joy, are repeatedly visible in his other poems that celebrate nature as well. In *Ettaṉai kōṭi iṉpam vaittay*, his sense of bliss and unbounded joy leave him in a state of meditative simplicity marveling at the gift of receiving a consciousness capable of all this rich emotion (*uṇarvu*) of experiencing nature.

Ettaṉai kōṭi iṉpam vaittay

How vast the treasures of joy!
Dear God!
You melded sentient and insentient together
At that confluence, you created a wondrous world with five elements
The whole world bursts forth in riches of colour, as you created much beauty.
You created a moment in consciousness - salvation,
In that space, you created potential to experience all this in rich emotion
And to go there, In Bhakti you drew us a path,
Our dear Lord! (A version of this translation has been submitted to Indian Literature, Due for Publication in September 2020)

In this poem, Bhārati's experience of nature is one of bliss, however the nature of this bliss is deeply embedded in cultural understanding of the states of *bhakti* and *mukti*. This theological and mystical choice of framework deepens the reading of this poem into states of oneness and duality, culminating in complete self-transformation. His appreciation of the consciousness states in which this experience becomes possible,

brings out the shades of his poetry in *vimarśa*, an act of mystical self-reflection, an ability to see oneself with transparency in a highly charged creative state.

The elegance and simplicity of his verse belies a great depth of emotional and cognitive parsing in his work. Bhāratiyār in his time with Aurobindo in Pondicherry had researched into Vedic knowledge and experience. He was also connected to *cittars*, Tamil̲ mystics who taught him much. As a poet, he brought, experientiality, emotional parsing, and infusion of mystical and philosophical meaning into his poetry. In order to understand Bhārati's richness of feeling and cognition, it maybe good to delve into his explorations of *uṇarvu*, and for that one may perhaps have to read '*iṉpam*- joy' – the first of his *Kāṭci* - (Vision/insight) poems. (Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 4, 89-99)

In the seventh verse he writes,

Uṇarvē nī vaḻka

Consciousness – May you be blessed
You are one, you are light
You are one, you are many
You are friendship, you are enemy
You are that which is, and that which is not,
That which can be known, and that which cannot be
You are goodness and evil
You are sweetness and flavour
You are good, you are joy

Uṇarvu is rich feeling, consciousness and interiority as well as awareness and intuition. And this *uṇarvu* rises from the perception of the world with a deep inner vision of equilibrium. Bharathi starts the first verse by praising nature in all its physicality, in its external presence, including the human. He praises life, and calls death as sweet. And he moves then into interiority in his second verse, calling *uṇarvu* as nectar, spiritual, as god. He goes on to see all interiority as spiritual, all nature as spiritual – forest, mountain, waterfall, river, ocean, land, water, wind, fire, space, sun, stars, in his third verse. In his fourth verse, he brings to light the oneness of all life in the *ātman*, in the self. In his fifth verse, he writes that may all life be blessed to find joy. In the sixth verse, he celebrates life in all its complexity and paradox, in its dualities and sensualities. And the seventh verse then celebrates this rich inner consciousness of feeling, *uṇarvu*. This journey of this vision/ insight is as ancient as *Vedic* poetry, timeless and transcendent; Inner and outer nature fuse in mysticism of the Tamil̲ *cittars*, in a shift in consciousness. *Uṇarvu* holds the secret to this encoding of nature in culture and culture in nature, of self in "*embodied landscape language"* in transformation and in shifts of consciousness (Kalyanasundaram and Kalyanasundaram 2020).

1.5. Nature in Vision

He also writes in a fierce continuation in the spirit of *Vedic* poetry returning to the elemental origins – wind, fire, sun, sea, energy and joy form this collection of poetry "*Kāṭci* – vision". "While Bhārati poured out new poems and songs in various older forms, in his last few years he attempted the most daring and original of his renewals-his prose poems (*Vacaṉa kavitai*) on *Vedic* themes. Originality is often a return to origins" (Ramanujan 2014c, 335).

Here are some translations from his writings on the sea

Sea

1

Sea spreads wind

In the undulations of the fast spinning earth, resides

Sea- why hasn't the water spun around, upside down

And shattered into the cosmos?

Parāśakti's decree.

The sea does not fall on our heads

She protects.

May her name resound.

Sea is a huge tank, vast pond, massive well.

Does the wall fall on our head?

Same reason, the sea too does not fall.

Parāśakti's decree.

She rooted the gravitational attraction forces on this earth.

It grounds all things.

Mountains do not float over our heads.

Sea does not fall on our heads.

Cities do not dissolve/ scatter.

The world acquires qualities of all kinds.

All of these are a blessing of the Goddess.

Let us celebrate these blessings.

2

From the hot lands to those that are cooler

Wind comes running.

As it comes running, wind brings clouds

With it.

The rains that come like this arise from the

Sea

Wind – Bring forth a lot of life-rain from the

life-sea.

We will light incense and lamps for you.

Varuṇā and Intirā - May you rejoice.

Now, Bless that good rain falls over here.

The heat of the summer has brought upon sickness in our

Children, calves and cows.

Bless us, so this may change.

The heat wave is unbearable in the mornings.

The heart is in mad flight.

Birds, in tiredness seek out cool holes

to rest in.

For many days now, Dark clouds gather in the

evening.

Gathering clouds pause the wind, not even a leaf stirs,

the sultriness is unbearable.

In short time, great winds blow away

all the rain-bearing clouds.

Like this, we have been tricked for many days.

Intirā, Varuṇā, Āryamā, Pakā, Mittirā – I sing of your compassion.

Quenching our thirst, ensuring that the world flourishes,

May there be joyous rain.

While, the focus of these poems is the sea, the poems themselves seem to only hint at the sea. The power of the sea is hinted at in two extraordinary facets that pull at our imagination. One is the imagination of what would happen if the sea were to fall on our head; repeatedly Bhārati evokes this possibility. We see *Parāśakti'*s ability to hold the sea in its place as the answer… however to the reader, Bhāratiyār's sea is a tremendous force, something that could have scattered into the cosmos, swirled and floated and consumed us. In its very presence, it still commands this energy in our perception. In reading the poem, we might miss this layer of perception completely, but like the Vedic Poetry it draws its inspiration from, Bhāratiyār's collection draws upon the primordial world with ease and simplicity, reminding us to ground ourselves, reconnect with the elemental forces of life.

In the second poem, the might of the sea is hidden in the unendurable struggle of summer. It seems so obvious, the suffering we undergo in harsh summer, the need for respite, for rain. But strangely this poem too is neither categorized in summer/ sun/ rain. Instead it is categorized in sea, once again hinting at the great interconnections across life. The sea comes alive in its absence in the poem, as the source of life.

1.6. Nature in *Śakti*

These poems cannot be read without cross-referencing his *Parāśakti* poems, particularly the first poem- *Parāśakti/ Śakti* or energy. In Bhārati's poetry *Śakti* is elemental force, but she is also compassion. The envisioning of powerful elemental force as it gentles into compassion is the essential identity of Bhārati's *Śakti*. This *Śakti* to whom he beseeches, cries, seeks comfort in, celebrates, sacrifices himself to, finds joy and bliss in, finds his great silences and solitude in- is the very essence of nature. Bhārati's *Śakti* is not to be dismissed as just the goddess or his *bhakti* as religious affinity. She is all encompassing in his work. She is the woman of his *Putumai peṇ*, his *Pāñjāli*, his *Kaṇṇammā*, his *Bhārata Tāy* (Mother India) his idea of energy, his complement, his mother, his child. She is nature and the very essence of nature. She is also his creative force and its essence. Ofcourse, if one were to read his poetry independent of each other, one may not see this feminine force interspersed and permeated through his work. But if one were to read his Hymns to Śakti, and absorb the incredible embrace of the feminine force that he evokes, it is easy to see her permeating as a presence in all his work.

Śaktiku ātma samarpaṇam (Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 2, 67)

In his poem *Śaktikku ātma samarpaṇam*, Offering one's soul to Śakti – Bhārati offers each of his senses, parts of the body, heart, intellect and consciousness in 46 verses. He offers his heart in verse 9

Heart –
Offer it as Śakti's instrument – it
will expand every moment- Heart-

Offer it as Śakti's tool – the sword

that comes to strike it will move aside.

He offers all his body parts- eyes, neck, stomach, leg, waist… Then he writes several verses offering his heart-mind/ soul, consciousness, intellect and finally his interiority, *akam*. Through each of the verses, we find the blossoming of his inner being. In verse 41, where he offers his intellect to *Śakti*, his likens the experience of the rising inner clarity to the shimmering clear waters of a sweet pond. And when it arises from this, he speaks of how it will shine in joy every moment.

'ūḻi kūttu' is another important work that captures the doomsday dance as the dance of *Kāḷi* (Saravanan 2009). Bhārati celebrates the terror of the doomsday dance in his immense trust of *Kāḷi*, cherishing the end as if it were an embrace. He calls out to her, saying she evoked and made him desire this dance that will leave one with only the stillness of *Śiva*. In this poem, death becomes central to life, destruction inevitable to be embraced as a facet of the self, and meaning of life lying in what is through it and yet beyond it.

As we begin to read into Bhārati's poetry, we find the richness of his experiences that have emerged from his inner transformation. Bhārati is as fearless a mystic as he is a national poet. His courage flowed through his interiority to seek profound spiritual experiences that altered his inner being. Much of his poetry emerges from this beingness that was forged in the flames of inner transformation. Be it *Śakti*, his chosen deity, or *Kṛṣṇa*, whom he befriended, or *Cellammā* whom he loved – he

allowed the fiery words of poetry to renew him, as would a traditional *yajña*/ sacrificial fire.

1.7. Nature in Mysticism

In his poems, *Sūrya taricaṉam* and *Sūrya stuti* categorized under his *Tattuva pāṭal* category (Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 2, 169), Bhārati paints a vivacious picture of the sun rising over the sea. To Bhārati, the experience is visceral; he is as ever stunned by the beauty and joy, that it becomes sacred to him. On the contrary, Bhārati also revels in a state of *āṉantam*, a profound joy of being, that all that he sees becomes a vision. With his capacity to be intensely moved by human social causes, political causes, and deeply spiritual moments of ecstasy, Bhārati brings sweetness in his perception to the poetics of life. The landscape becomes a surreal inscape of ecstasy. The poetics lies in his ability to transmute the inner self and allow it to flood the outside, then gently braid them into layers of imagination and intuition.

Sūrya taricaṉam

(Standing by the sea, watching the sun hidden by clouds, praying to the sun to show his face)

The sages of śruti (Vedas) and behind them
many poets of the pure language (Tamiḻ Bhakti poetry)
have sung your greatness in many ways
hearing the praises, I have come to sing yours
(Paritiyē) Sun! The origin of all life!
(Pāṉuve) Sun! What you touch turns into gold, Oh resplendent glory!

Contemplating on you, I came to worship you

glittering edge of the ray-sword, Show me your face gently.

Seeing the effulgent light that the Vedas have praised

I am moved to write hymnal poetry of the yajñas

Into that sweet sound of the endless ocean

I will weave the sounds of Tamiḻ words

Great distances, traversed in a second in the

rapid flow of your rays I sing

Oh Sun! I came to sing your praises

Beautiful edge of the ray-sword, Show me your face gently.

In yet another poem to the sun *Kaṭalin mītu katirkaḷai vīsi,* Bhārati likens his soul to the sea, as it lies under the warmth of the sun. He again expands our vision drawing us to start with the scattering rays of the sun, moving to the sea, to birds flying, to the inner soul, to the vast expanse of the earth, to once again gentling down this vast vision as he speaks of the sun and earth as parents, and brings his entire vision into the essence of all life- love.

In his preface to M.P. Periyasami Thooran's reading of *Bhāratiyum Bhaktiyum*, Ki.Va. Jagannathan writes lucidly of the relationship that connects Bhāratiyār's state of *yōkam*, *atvaitam*, nature and experience of the world (Thooran 1981). He writes in Tamiḻ, "Bhāratiyār believed that if you remove fear and falsity, true knowledge would emerge. This was his faith.

'We beat down the ghost of fear;

The snake of falsity, we ruptured and drank its life." (Thooran 1981)

He sings in victorious celebration.

He has the blessing to perceive sacredness in the vastness of life.

Kākkai kuruvi engaḷ saati

The crow and the sparrow- our kin

The infinite sea and mountain – our own

In all directions, that we cast our glance, there is just us

Abundant whirling ecstatic dance everywhere!

He portrays his *atvaita* leanings in this poem. Only if we believe that that there is something different from us, there is cause to fear. There is no space for fear in *atvaita*. This is the essence of this philosophy.

Bhārati realizes this in the *yoga* of poetry. "*The birds that fly in the sky are all me*" he sings in ecstasy.

Even in the man-eating tiger, he sees the presence of Goddess *Kāḷi*. Taking *viśvarūpam* form, his poetry, in-folds the whole universe into itself." (Thooran 1981,vii)

1.8. Nature as *Līlā* (Play)

This in-folding of the universe into his poetry is what we must unfold in our reading. In his poetry to earth, he conceives of her as a young maiden, a sensual goddess of creation, who has the power to destroy our ego and transform us. Bhārati address this earth with fondness. Originally written in Sanskrit, the verses flow in a gentle cadence. The ways, the inner and outer are entwined in his interpretation constantly remind us of the innerness of nature in the poet.

Bhūloka kumāri

hē amrita nāri

(Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 2, 111)

193. Maiden Earth

1. Maiden earth!

Damsel of Immortality!

2. Lustrously bejewelled goddess with nectarean breasts!

You demolish the fear of death by flooding us with love.

Golden creeper

who destroys our dark pride!

3. Maid! Magician of moods!

the auspicious One, O guardian Time!

With large eyes like dark-blue jewels,

You shine eternally young.

4. With lotus-garlands adorning your feet

Your words are flame-born.

Abiding world-creatrix

Of unparalleled loveliness.

Ever auspicious Queen of Love. Purify and transfigure me.

- Translation by Dr. Prema Nandakumar (Ramachandran, (Ed.) 1989, 379)

T.N.Ramachandran (1989) in his preface to *Bhārati Pāṭalkal* writes

> "Bhārati authored the New Poetry in Tamil̲, which in the words of Prof. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, was "at once radiantly autochthonous and bracingly modern." From a mere versifier, he grew, in no time, to be an authentic poet of mysticism by his willing submissions to the compelling rhythm of a larger life. He was able to push back the barricades of the self, one by one·, till at last, his life became one of intuitive love. "Love" said the poet, "is my religion," and no one practised it as the poet did. His incandescent and piercing intellect burnt all dichotomies away. Everything that he beheld was nothing but "the ardent self-expression of that Immanent Being," a *līlā*, a musical manifestation of creative Joy. *Kākkai* and *Kuruvi*, "the scuttering insects, the little soft populations of the grass," ... *Kaṭal* and *Malai* and all things animate as well as inanimate, were his comrades and his intense love asserted itself in the most suasive way in every one of his poems. To read his poem is to feel the beating of a benign heart, the upleap of a beatific joy - greater, vaster and richer than anything that one has known. By cultivating Bhārati, the aspirant will, sooner

or later, discover his fraternal link with all things; he will by and by perceive in the Many the clear and palpable presence of the One: "the changeless and absolute Life, manifesting itself in all the myriad nascent, crescent, cadent lives."" (Ramachandran 1989, Preface)

Between his *ūḻi kūttu* and *maḻai*, we come upon a great vastness of spirit and capacity to experience space-time. The rain storm for Bhārati, is an instant that opens his inner eye to the endless cosmic dance of time – *Kālattiṉ kūttu.* His poem builds in intensity and ferocity and gentles down to a vision of cosmic proportions. He takes us through this miracle and its tremendous force, all the way to its pinnacle, and when we are caught up in the trance as he is, he opens out a frame of reference to *Āticētaṉ*, the symbol of timelessness and draws us richly into the paradox that the great dance of time is about. The rich contrasts, the rhythms and beats of both dance and music that frame each stanza, allow us to tune into sound, visuality, movement and energy, each layered upon the other. Time and timlessness dance together as space breaks out of all its bounds. Bhārati's rain is not just a summer storm in the tropics, it is eternal and cosmic. On the contrary, in a single rainstorm, he unfolds geological and cosmic time. His ability to write in these dual space-time frames brings out the mystic essence of his work.

Rain

Tikkukaḷ eṭṭum citaṟi

All space shatters-Takka

tīm tarikita tīm tarikita tīm tarikiṭa tīm tarikiṭa

Mountains break apart-floods burst and leap forth

tām tarikiṭa takka tatiṅkiṭa tōm!

The cosmos tilts – like one possessed,

the wind strikes at the essence of everything.

tām tarikiṭa tām tarikiṭa tām tarikiṭa tām tarikiṭa!

Lightning spears through – The sea

strikes the sky with its daring screen of waves

The clouds break and thunder roars- In great circular sweeps,

the wind hollows out the sky

catta catacata tatta – plays the sky back and roars in madness

The ends of the universe break open – Rain!

What splendour it has burst forth with, watch my fearless brothers!

The universe trembles – as the

1000 headed cosmic snake rages

and leaps forth in endless play-

Mountains in all directions jump,

As the devas, pour out flowers

What a vision we have been blessed with -

The dance of time nourishes us!

tattarikiṭa tattarikiṭa titōm!

1.9. Nature as Freedom

From that cosmic splendor, comes the sweet gentle poem of watching the sparrow to meditate on freedom. Bhārati's love for sparrows is well known, that he used to scatter the last few grains in a time of poverty to sparrows is documented. For someone who found great joy in the ecstastic dance of time, he had a childlike warmth and wonder for the sparrow. In calling us to watch deeply at the freedom that the sparrow holds with great ease, Bhārati's joy is entwined in sorrow for both internal and external freedoms, and the simple ease of its possibility in his well chosen simile of freedom to the life of a sparrow. The mystic poet had found an inner freedom far ahead of the national poet seeking freedom for his country. The poem of the sparrow is a call for this inner freedom as much as it for the outer. It is almost a command, gentled only by the sweetness of his observations and the subject of his poem.

Viṭṭu viṭutalaiyāki niṟpai

The Sparrow

Let go, and in that freedom revel!

Like this little sparrow

Fly in endless space

Swim in the rising whirling wind

Drinking the wine of sunlight

scattered in limitless expanse

(let go, and in that freedom revel!)

Making love, in joyous conversation with your cherished one,

Building a nest far away from dangers

Protecting your children, feeding them,

Rejoicing in love

(let go, and in that freedom revel!)

From the backyards and the fields

Gather all grains and feast -Then

share with us your stories as you drift away and sleep.

Awaken before dawn, singing

(let go, and in that freedom revel!)

In hearing out Bhārati's call for us to revel in our own freedom, there is a strange counterpart of the same energy one feels in the freedom he found in watching the rain. His appreciation for the simplicity of the sparrow's life is the root for yet another bout of delightful rejoicing in life.

This essence of rejoicing and deep abiding joy in nature, floods his being in advaitic oneness. In the first two stanzas of *"The Song of Myself",* he sweeps through the entire earth finding himself in creatures grand and small, in cosmic space and the earth, in the elements and in the vastness of life.

*Vānil paṟakiṉṟa puḷḷelam nān (*Vijaya Bhārati 2015, Vol 2, 144)

240.. The Song of Myself (Nān)

I'm all the birds that fly in the sky;

I'm all the beasts that roam the earth;

I'm all the trees that grow in the wood;

I'm the wind, the rain and the sea.

I'm all the stars that shine on high;

I'm the vast expanse of widening space;

I'm all the worms that crawl on earth;

I'm all the life in the vasty deep!

Translation by Prof K.G. Seshadri (Ramachandran, (Ed.) 1989, 441)

And from that oneness, we come back to the single most important echo in Bhārati's poetry – the call to love and to love deeply as the essence of freedom. To trust and believe in the gift of life, to live a life of freedom, both inner and outer, of courage and responsibility.

2. Discussion on Section

To read Bhārati's poetry is to find the unbounded ecstasy of joy in the everyday, it is to call forth into oneself the great freedom of beingness. And then to sit back and enjoy as if we have nothing to achieve – to sit down watching from the porch, wind and rain, creepers and coconut trees, sparrows and crows. The charming simplicity hides a great tradition of innerness/ interiority – of drawing in all life, cosmic

splendour into oneself, into oneness. And herein lies Bhārati's perception and courage, his love for life, god, nature, nation, poetry, freedom, his beloved and his own family. There are many ways for us to be nature poets today, and yet we are baffled by the ecological crisis that hits us square in the face. In reading Bhārati, one comes across an almost effortless ease of unshackling ourselves from this society of consumerist excess to open hearted joy and love for life. In and through his words, I hope we can find new courage to love the earth and embrace and entwine her within ourselves in that cherished fulfilling joy of Bhārati. As a key to more meaningful eco-literacy, eco-aesthetics and ecological consciousness in our times, I hope a resurgence of reading Bhārati will provide us with new direction.

His *iṉpam* is expansive, sweetness that takes on so many meanings and forms. While

Joy 1 (Vacaṉa kavitai)

This world is sweet. The sky in here is sweet.
The wind is sweet,
Fire is sweet. Water is refreshing. Land is delightful.
The sun is good. So also the moon.
All the rays of the sky are very sweet.
The rain is pleasant. Lightning is sweet. Thunder is delight.
Sea is sweet. Mountain is Sweet. The forest is sweetness.
The rivers are joyous.
Metal, Trees, Plants, Creepers, Flowers,
Vegetables and Fruits are pleasing
Birds are delightful. Reptiles are good.
All animals are sweet. Amphibians too are good.

Humans are very sweet.

Men are good. Women are sweet. Child is bliss.

Youth is sweet. Old-age is good.

Life is good. Death is sweet.

(Note: Bhārati only uses *iṉitu* (sweetness, pleasantness) through the poem and *naṉṟu*(good/ goodness), I have translated using other synonyms of sweetness to enrich the English translation. *iṉitu* and *iṉpam* both lie in the reader's imagination and capacity for rich unfolding of joy in their inner beings.)

3. Chapter Summary

In both these sections on *Caṅkam* poetry and Bharatiyar's poetry a variety of literary devices, perceptiveness and vocabulary emerge for eco-literature and ecopoetry. An aesthetics of embodied landscape language alters how we experience, interpret and create language in tandem with the environment around us. Both the sections also show, how symbolism can extend perception of natural world in other directions, based on our own openness to concepts of spirituality, socio-politics and consciousness. There isn't just one way to interpret nature and neither is such a way a necessary hallmark for a writer. It is possible for a writer to traverse through different states of being and consciousness and develop rich, multidimensional vocabulary that becomes versatile creative work. How we experience landscape, our relationship with the natural world, our relationship with our own interiority shape the language of our imagination, creativity and expression. It is our way of reaching out to a resonant audience to share the complex mystery of living and co-evolving with other beings.

Notes:

The poetry have been chosen from different genres and time-periods of Bhārati. The author connects inner meanings across the poetry and not chronological understanding of the poet's evolution of ideas/ thoughts. The intention of this section is to draw out the richness of the poet's inner world in translating and providing a reading of his poetry, particularly with reference to nature.

Chapter 9

Movement

Sagging breasts; swollen veins; A
skeleton with a pair of sunken eyes;
Blood-red gums; teeth jutting out:
A long-ankled she-demon dwells
In a wilderness—where,
His matted hair scattered in all directions
His fiery but cooling body is dancing—
That is my Lord's home, Tiruvaalangadu.

Karaikal Ammaiyar, Tiruvaalangadu Padigam

Translation by H.S.Sivaprakash (2007, 144)

The dancer is at once the sculptor, sculpting and structuring space, in forms both graceful and powerful. She is the painter, adding tints and hues to a line drawing, bringing it to life. She is the poet, writing her poems with movements, gestures and expressions. Ultimately she is the seeker, whose dance becomes a transcendental, transforming experience - a joyous prayer with one's very being.
- Alarmel Valli

('Bharatnāṭyam - fusion of body, mind, soul,' by Seeta Ratnakar, Rotary News, June 2018)
Source: https://narthaki.com/info/quotes1.html

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16. The Body in Choreography
17. Summary

Chapter 9: Movement focuses questions on *Bharatnāṭyam*, modern, contemporary and tamil film dance and dancers in a quest for languages of expression for *porosity.*

1. Introduction

Movement training is an essential tool to develop sensitivity in interacting with the environment and oneself. While movement training can be diverse, my training in the classical dance of *Bharatanāṭyam* held an important key in opening my being to *porous* experiences.

Classical dance is deeply interconnected to cosmic principles outlined in hindu philosophy tenets that have been discussed in earlier chapters. The mind and body can be trained through focus and intense practice to develop acute awareness and resonance with the cosmos. Classical dance allows and offers a methodology for this training of mind and body. When the mind-body complex is highly trained then it is possible to achieve states of resonance with other living beings. A fount of creativity opens up in such states of resonance. Dance is therefore one of the umbrella methods for this mental and physical training from personal practice.

This chapter considers the classical training of the body and its impact on consciousness. Working through my training in *Bharatanāṭyam* for over fifteen years, I unpack the practice of movement within this tradition and how practice of traditional repertoire, new choreography and the trained body in relation to everyday life each hold a piece of our relationship with the natural world. I study the work of eminent dancers for this chapter and draw from C.Sivaramamurti's magnificent work brought

out in his book *Naṭarāja in Art, Thought and Literature* as a mystical lens to frame this chapter and understand the dance of *Śiva* as the dance of consciousness (1994).

2. The Essence of Movement

Movement is at the heart of life, the subtlest of it indicating presence of life, dynamism, direction, desire, and purpose. Be it the gentle swaying of a tender new sapling, predator in pursuit, prey in flight, quiet enjoyment of seasons by different species, rest, relaxation, even restful sleep are all about bodies and beings in movement. Between the existence, impermanence and death, the dynamic of time and space play out through movement in beings. Rushing waters, rains, the constant unfolding and infolding of the sea, the deep sigh and restfulness of the night as mountains breathe, the subtle movements of emotions, movement of the earth and the celestial bodies, a baby playfully finding its own limits, the changing rhythms of our own reflections, movement is at the heart of life, its preservation and the stillness of death. The continuously transforming nature of life, flux and fluidity and the rhythms of time and the stage of the space where we encounter life create our endless relationship with movement. The power of movement lies in the fact, that while moving, we are malleable, we are dynamic, and we are freed from the limits, from the boundaries of our own bodies and beingness. While an advanced sense of form and boundaries of body may be created specific to a particular dance or martial and theatrical arts, the very process of developing and training within the grammar of a form, breaks the body's limits to constantly find new form, new possibilities and directions for the body. Everyday movement, often unconscious- like our breathing, walking, gesturing, is all about trespassing our own limited boundaries of self to an organic fluid self in relationship, even though we are rarely aware of it.

For moments of *porosity* to occur, there has to be movement between beings- subtle, gross or transcendental, for without movement, two or more things/ beings in an environment cannot find resonance and the ability to play with the void in each other that allows for exchange. And thus movement lies at the heart of *porosity.*

3. My Training

My training in *Bharatanāṭyam,* a classical Indian dance form from Southern India started at three years of age and I continued my training till I was eighteen years old. I continued practicing and dancing for small shows and gatherings for another ten years until an accident and knee injury stopped me from performing. While I am not a professional dancer, my long years of training and practice of *Bharatanāṭyam* as a dance form have been the strongest influence on my understanding of movement. The grammar, techniques and methods of *Bharatanāṭyam* have shaped my body and influenced the relationships I have made with other bodies, beings, spaces and time in all its fluidity. I also trained in yoga from a young age and briefly trained in *Kalaripayattu* and contemporary dance. The work of dancers in early Tamil̲ films particularly the Travancore sisters -Padmini, Lalitha and Ragini, Kumari Kamala and Vijayantimala have had a lasting influence on me. My other influences drew from the work of Uday Shankar, whose work I first encountered through his film *Kalpana*.

My understanding of the tangible engagement of mind and body in *Bharatanāṭyam* comes from watching Alarmel Valli and Malavika Sarukkai as well as lectures on abhinaya by Kalanidhi Narayanan. Valli's graceful movements and strong dedication to the traditional grammar as well as the *mārgam* as a structure of performance helped

me gain insight into originality and creativity in the performance of traditional classical repertoires. Sarukkai's understanding of geometry and working from a strong core in *Bharatanāṭyam* was important in understanding the relationship between geometry and organic fluidity in movement. The work of Chandralekha answered questions about how a 2000-year old dance tradition can be abstracted and transformed to the paradigm of modern and contemporary dance and used to ask penetrating questions about gender and society. Chandralekha remained rooted in traditional thought and philosophy, while debating, revolutionizing and questioning tradition itself, her approach enabled me to evolve my movements as a practitioner of *Bharatanāṭyam*.

Regardless of several influences on my physical training and movement vocabulary, the philosophical axis of my movement is tethered to Tamil *Śaivaite* philosophy and the aesthetics that emerge in the dances of *Śiva*. *Porous* practices of movement for me emerged from my reflections and engagement with the dance of *Śiva* and the form of *Naṭarāja* from the sculptures of Chola period, particularly between the 10-12th centuries CE. Seeing the dancing *Śiva* in sculptures, reading hymns and other literature and contemplating on the philosophy provided the richest understanding of movement as an integral way of life.

Indian classical dance, literature and the arts – sculpture, architecture, music, painting as well as theatre are integrated into a complex whole (Sivaramamurthi 1994; Vatsyayan 1977). Upon close examination of the traditional concept of dance as a ritual within the temple complex, the rich and dynamic patterns of integration between the arts, literature, the *Bhakti* traditions become more evident.

I will discuss in detail about *Śiva's* dance and then briefly discuss some of the works of the dancers mentioned above. This outline will trace both philosophically and physically, the conceptual framework for movement that eventually leads to practice of *porosity* in my everyday life and my artistic creativity.

4. Sacred and the Sensuous; Sacred and the Secular

The fluid blending of the sacred and the sensuous is the most essential and difficult feature to comprehend in *Bharatanāṭyam.* This fundamental feature is a recurring theme of Tamil̲ *Bhakti* movement from its beginnings around 5-6th century CE. The interweaving of *akam* (interior- love, longing, intimacy, personal relationship) and *puṟam* (exterior – war, valor, power, duty, righteous path) into an unbroken verse with a nuanced allegorical description of nature extends into the practice and performance of *Bharatanāṭyam.* The framework that blends the sacred and the sensuous is also one of the most powerful metaphysical experiences that the body and being of a dancer can be trained to express creatively. To a dancer trained in this form, the sacred and the sensuous are like an interwoven whole. Eroticism, sensuality, desire, longing and yearning, love for the divine lover are blended with *bhakti*, dissolution, yearning for oneness, and a complete sense of surrender. Masterfully woven together through poetry, myth and literature, conceptualization of gods and goddesses and other characters and beings, the two seemingly disparate concepts become unified in the consciousness of the dancer. Mysticism is natural in the training that one goes through while learning *Bharatanāṭyam.* The body and being of the dancer trained to fuse the sacred and the sensuous begins to experience the world through this rich spiritual tradition as well. It is not merely technique and grammar that defines the form, but

this coalescing of human longing for oneness and completion that transcends the everyday with the sensual experience of the mundane existence; the transcendental abstraction of salvation and bliss with the rich splendor of the body and senses that defines the essence of the form.

The sacred and the secular are also a harmonious whole in traditional dance and not a dichotomy. Evident in temple sculptures and literature as well, dance in society moved between the sacred and the secular, between temple and court, divine and human celebrations. While a closer study is required to understand the complexities of the relationship between the sacred and the secular in dance, it is important to keep in mind that they are not be placed as opposites, but more as an integrated whole. This is once again revealed extensively in both Tamil̲ *Śaivaite* and *Vaiśṇavaite Bhakti* movements which aimed to include the human beyond the caste system, often broadening the Sanskrit theological discourse by shifting the emphasis from intellectual knowledge to an open encompassing love for the paradoxical nature of the divine (Akepiyapornchai, 2018; Cutler 1987). There were marked disagreements between *Śaivaites* and *Vaiśnavites* and also with their contemporary Jains and Buddhists. However for the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the Tamil̲ *Śaivaite Bhakti* aspects and some choreography that is *Vaiśṇavaite* in content.

The concepts that I explore are:

i. The Dancing *Śiva*
ii. The Hall of Dance
iii. The *Mārgam*
iv. *Rasa* theory

5. Dancing *Śiva*

At the heart of *Bharatanāṭyam* lies the image of the lord of dance, *Naṭarāja*. For a dancer, the image of *Naṭarāja* personifies the essence of dance and is a source of deep contemplation. The dynamic form of *Śiva* as *Naṭarāja*, perfected in the Chola bronzes of the 10-12th centuries will be my focus as they complement the Tamil̲ *Śaiva Siddhānta* philosophy and Tamil̲ *Bhakti poetry*. It is also most commonly used as the main deity while training in *Bharatanāṭyam*. However, artists have portrayed the form of dancing *Śiva* in multiple ways.



Fig 1: Ode to Karaikkal Ammaiyar, who is said to be the founder of the Bhakti movement around 5th Century C.E, and who wrote extensively on Nataraja. She is also considered to keep rhythm for Śiva's dances using the cymbals, Pastel pencils and charcoal on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.

The form of *Naṭarāja* symbolizes the five actions of *Śiva* - *pañcakṛtyas:* Creation, Destruction, Preservation, Concealment and Revival, woven into one form, acting in

perfect synchrony with each other. The drum symbolizes creation, the fire destruction, both the hands are in perfect balance, indicating the state of balance and preservation, the hands, one shows the path to being free from one's own ego and ignorance, the other offers blessing and salvation.

The symbolism of *Naṭarāja* dancing on a lotus and framed in the aureole of flames repeatedly inspires contemplation. The lotus and the aureole of flames are at once the heart of the devotee and the cosmic universal stage. It is these multiple layers of symbolism that become a meditative whole where the individual human boundaries are completely contained within the writhing form of the *Apasmāra Puruṣa / Muyalaka* lying beneath the *Naṭarāja.* Salvation lies in perceiving the oneness of the universe and dissolving in it. All the paths are dynamic and *porous* where matter and energy coalesce, as do dissolution and creation. The drum and the fire, symbolic of creation and dissolution rest in dynamic balance in the form of *Naṭarāja* and the equilibrium give way for this greater contemplation.

As a practitioner of the form, the dialog between form and formless, idea and image intrigues me. What is in reality a huge abstract incomprehensible idea and vision of the universe has been richly condensed into anthropomorphic form and yet in symbolism, it transcends the human form. At this juncture of symbolism and human form, the mind and the body are pushed to become malleable, to extend into parallel universes of the individual and the universal. Beyond the classical posture of the *Naṭarāja* lies a difficult and complex characterization of *Śiva*'s beingness. And as a dancer, the challenge is to embody this greater being in the fine grammar of dynamic *Bharatanāṭyam* form, in movement. The artistic challenge of representation,

embodiment and interpretation, alongside evoking the spirit of *Naṭarāja* and constantly invoking larger truths in performance is sublime and transcendental at one level and practical and practice based at another.

Papanasam Sivan's *Naṭṭakuṟiñci Varṇam* '*cāmi nāṉ untaṉ aṭimai*' (Lord, I am your slave) celebrates the dancing *Śiva*. As the devotee sings praises of *Śiva*, he also becomes witness to *Pārvatī* watching *Śiva* dance and losing her heart to the great dancer. Yet again, this great cosmic drama masterfully contained in symbolic mythical literature engages, taunts and transcends. The devotee desires to have one glimpse of the cosmic dance and yet his imagination takes him to unfathomable realms. In the natural kindness of the mother goddess *Pārvatī*, he sees *Śiva Naṭarāja* through her eyes. He beseeches the Lord to come early to fulfil *Pārvatī's* longing and separation. For someone initiated in the language of this mystic-mythic symbolism, here is the dance of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti,* form and formless, creation and withdrawal. The great cosmic drama unfolds gracefully in the language of *Bharatanāṭyam*. The human soul pleads for dissolution in the great lord, *Prakṛiti* yearns for creation, the *Puruṣa* is enfolded again to engage and dance.

cāmi nāṉ untaṉ aṭimai

...

Naṭarāja dēvā... caccitāṉanta

āṭum niṉ aḷakiṉil mōkam koṇṭa ivaḷai pār

Naṭṭakuṟiñci Varṇam – Composer: Papanasam Sivan

Śiva's dance is all encompassing of the very existence of life, and that, which is beyond existence itself. The conceptualizing of life through the metaphor of dance is one the most profound breakthroughs in the Indian traditional framework. The second aspect that makes the dance of *Śiva* unique is that it is also the dance of consciousness- individual as well as cosmic. This imagination conceptualizes the movement of consciousness as nuanced dance and allows for inquiry into being and consciousness through dance and body as form and tool. *Śiva* and *Śakti* are seen as a complementary whole and their dances together as duets are stories of cosmic consciousness. And it is in this cosmic frame that the traditional *Bhakti* canon as well as dance repertoires consider the following dances as the essence of *Śiva* and *Śiva - Śakti* dances.

i. The Dance of Creation
ii. The Dance of Sustenance
iii. The Dance of Illusion
iv. The Dance of Love
v. The Dance of Breath
vi. The Dance of Eternity
vii. The Dance of Death
viii. The Dance of Bliss

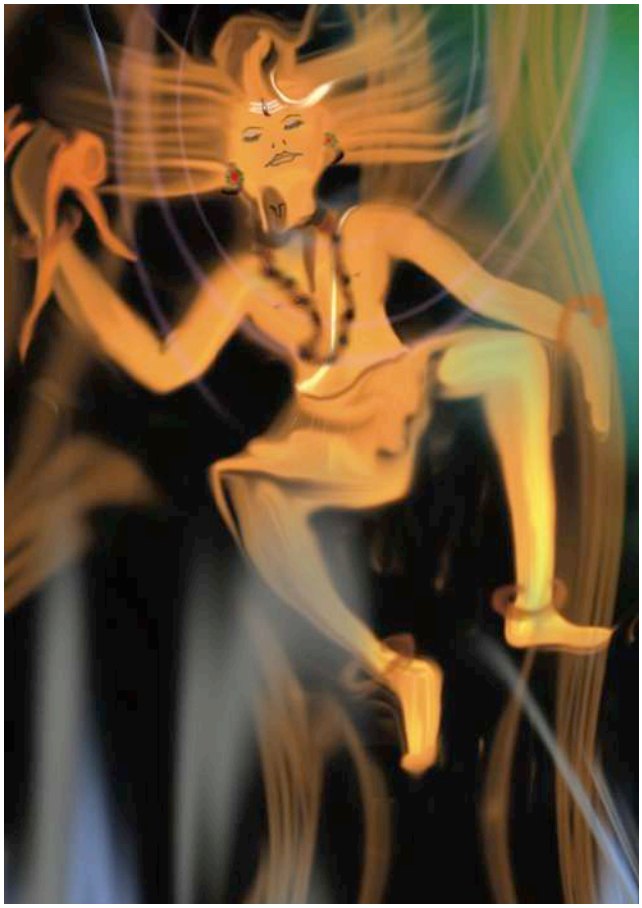


Fig 2: The cosmic dance of Śiva Nataraja - Creation, Digital Painting on Adobe Photoshop, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

The dancer finds a way
to dance
into unknown spaces.
The moment he moves
he alters time slightly and lo!
directions begin
to change
Life transforms!

Poem: 2003-2004

Most of these paintings emerged as part of my choreography work initially. It is in dancing and working with varied movements that I arrived at the postures that were then intuitively translated in my creative art.



Fig 3: Learning to Dance, Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, Dance of life and death, Dance of love and dissolution, Digital Painting on Photoshop, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

A single curve
A turning spiral
a paused circle and
a moment!
Love
and beauty!

Poem: 2003-2004

6. Personal Journey: Tracing Life through the Body

Much of my experiences of connectedness with nature arose out of my practice of dance. The more I embodied natural forms in my dance, the greater the number of doors that opened for *porosity*. Even as I take long walks now, my body begins framing the contours of all the natural beings and forms. And in tracing these contours, the body aligns itself to the life force embedded within them.

Excerpt from journal entry

> *Tree, butterfly, meandering river, amorphous mountains emerging and disappearing in light and shade, rock, pebble, withering flower, rain, heat, cuckoo, shikra, ant, frog, lizard, worm – as if scattered into a million threads, each weaving the other out of itself, my daily walk becomes a dance of invisible weaving of life forces, forms, truths of being.*
>
> *I breathe in and out and yet my body senses a greater breath and as if I have encountered the primordial Puruṣa, this being breathes in and out, the vastness of this breath pushing the frontiers of every nuanced nano, micro, space within me into a macro space. This contraction and expansion of breath in its immensity draws me in and out into porous worlds. Unimaginable expanse spreads through the consciousness. It is only in the dance of Naṭarāja, I can find my rest and peace and I invoke him with my body.*



Fig 4: Being Deer, Bharatnāṭyam stance and gesture, Seattle, November 2017. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

āṅgikaṃ bhuvanaṃ yasya

vācikaṃ sarva vāṅgmayam

āhāryaṃ candṛa tāradi

taṃ numaḥ (or Vande) sāttvikaṃ śivam

(Śiva Śloka, Saṅgīta Ratnākara VII.1) (Baumer(ed.) 2001, 117)

And as the Puruṣa finds his rest in the now expanded body, 'i' embody Naṭarāja. In this state of equilibrium with his one leg lifted, poised to move, time and space take on new meanings.

The porous self is at once cosmic and mundane,
At once breath and primordial rhythm,
At once birth and death;
Śiva dances in the graveyard
And becomes the great porous being!
Into him, through him
All life
Dances in and out…

āṅgikaṃ bhuvanaṃ… Śiva Sloka (Saṅgīta Ratnākara VII.1) (Baumer(ed.) 2001, 117)

-This *sloka* on *Śiva* as *Naṭarāja* allows the dancer to reflect on *Śiva* as the primordial being whose body is the earth and whose words are the entirety of creation, whose ornaments are celestial bodies. To this being I offer my prayers. In this reflection that arises out of embodying the form of the *Naṭarāja*, the dancer enters a dual space, where she is praying to this being, but also embodying this being. She bows to the greater truth of her body and being composed of the universe and in transferring this vast embodiment, she revels in her movements in the dance of *Naṭarāja*, which symbolizes the *pañcakṛtyas* or the five acts of creation, withdrawal, balance, grace and liberation as discussed above.

7. The Hall of Dance

The hall of dance is one the key concepts from *Śaivaite* thought and philosophy that I value as essential to understanding movement. In *Śaivaite* thought, the hall of dance where *Śiva* dances is also the hall of consciousness and simultaneously the heart of the devotee, as embodied in the form of *Naṭarāja*. This provides a unique stage for dance.

> " *Sabhā* is *Citsabhā*, the hall of sentience, *Ānandatāṇḍava* is the joyous dance of the soul within onself. *Pundarikapuram* or *Chidambaram* is the lotus of the heart of the devotee himself. Here the Lord dances." (Sivaramamurthi 1994, 22).

Dancing in the hall of consciousness is a profound concept that transforms the spatial sensibility of the dancer. Every dance on every stage is a representation of an intense and dynamic movement that is transforming the consciousness. The outer and inner meet for the dancer on her stage, the inner and the outer synchronous with each other. This layering is an interesting feature of this classical form, because now the dancer occupies two different time-space continuums simultaneously fluidly travelling between the two, altering herself through the techniques, gestures, moods and methods that the grammar of the form offers. This simultaneity of existence that is part of the training in *Bharatanāṭyam* is a key feature that allows for *porosity*. The outer and inner time-spaces have been bridged through a metaphorical and metaphysical re-imagination of how we can encounter simultaneity of time-space between the outer and inner and find a comfortable way to navigate it.



Fig 5: A moment from the scene of Krishna playing flute to other beings in the forest. The cows, deer, and other animals draw closer to him as he plays and he embraces them with his gaze. The forest becomes one unified field in the sound of Krishna's flute as all life is drawn to converge into its beauty. Krishna's symbolic stage of the forest, is also the stage of all life and his act of preservation. For the dance, Krishna's act of preservation of the world in the playing of the flute becomes her own on stage as she embodies Krishna. Seattle, 2017, Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

8. The *Mārgam*

The *mārgam* is a codified structure of performance that a *Bharatanāṭyam* artist follows to present her work. The format of the *mārgam* was codified by the four brothers of the Tanjore quartet – four brothers from Tanjavur – Ponniah, Chinniah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu in the 18th century and accepted widely by the *Bharatanāṭyam* community (Anand 2014).

"They hailed from the dance lineage of the *Bṛhadīśvara* temple of Tanjavur and were associated with the royal courts of Tanjavur, Tiruvananthapuram and Mysore." (Ramani 2016)

Historically, *Bharatanāṭyam* as a classical dance form in its current understanding was emerged in the 19th century from the long tradition of devadasis who performed as part of the ritual temple dances and the traditional practice of *Sadhir, court dances*. The socio-politics of this transformation from sadir and devadasi forms of dance to *Bharatanāṭyam* in its current form are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, different aspects of ritual beginnings and its close link to the temple culture remain relevant in the discussion of dance and consciousness within the framework of the thesis. The close link between the tradition of *Bhakti* and dance and the sacred and the sensuous remain as well as the sacred and secular are essential to comprehending this complex embodied nature of consciousness that *Bharatanāṭyam* in different styles as prevalent and practiced today has evolved in and through its grammar, techniques, training and the form and structure of the dance styles themselves.

Why is a training in *mārgam* profoundly transforming of how we experience our own consciousness and the way we relate to the world around us? In Bala Saraswathi's words, from her speech at Tamil *Icai Caṅkam* where she received the *Icai Pēraṟiñar* award,

> "I believe that the traditional order of the *Bharatanāṭyam* recital viz., *Alārippu, Jatīśvaram, Sabdam, Varṇam, Padam, Tillanā* and the *Śloka* is the correct sequence in the practice of this art, which is an artistic yoga for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal." (Balasaraswathi 2001)

She further draws an analogy between the temple and the *mārgam* recital.

> "The *Bharatanāṭyam* recital is structured like a Great Temple. We enter through the *Gopuram* (outer hall) of *Alārippu*, cross the *Artta Maṇṭapam* (half-way hall) of *Jatīśvaram*, then the *Maṇṭapa* (great hall) of *Sabdam*, and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the *Varṇam*. This is the place, the space

that gives the dancer expansive scope to revel in the rhythm, moods and music of the dance. The *Varṇam* is the perpetuity which gives ever-expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfillment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art.

The *Padam* follows. In dancing to the *Padam* one experiences the containment, cool and quiet of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and the rhythmic virtuosities of the *Varṇam* yield to the soul-stirring music and *abhinaya* of the *Padam.* Dancing to the *Padam* is akin to the juncture when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of God. Then, the *Tillanā* breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the God he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse." (Balasaraswathi 2001)

Mārgam is a journey that fuses the inner and the outer and draws us deeper into ourselves. Starting from the *Puṣpānjali* and *Alārippu*, travelling through *Jatīśvaram* and *Sabdam*, discovering great depth and beauty in *Varṇams* and *Padams*, and exalting in the *Thillanā* while finally resting everything through the *Maṅkaḷam* takes the artist through an intense journey of consciousness framed in the training of her body. *Mārgam* harmoniously blend the outer and inner worlds for the artist, the form and the formless, abstract rhythms and intense emotional expressiveness, body and a freedom from its limitations, bound grammar, and self expression.

Chandra Anand (2015), dancer and scholar elaborates how each piece of the *mārgam* reflects different philosophical and spiritual views from within the Hindu philosophical systems. Through her research, she concludes that the spiritual traditions, inquiry into living and striving for moksha that are essential to Indian traditional thought are exemplified in the format of the *mārgam* as well.

> "The Tanjore Quartet *mārgam* imparts this knowledge through its structure or lineup of items. The adoption of the *prthgartha* style of *nritya* helps move from one ideology to another. It makes an effort to understand life and reality, which is the function of *nāṭya*, by analyzing human emotions in its innumerable tones through abhinaya. It has made a judicious use of rhythm, movement and feelings and thoughts for the expression of the inner self or the embodied being. It puts forward at the outset the truth of the human life (*Alārippu*), then the zenith that a human being has the possibilities to reach (*Varṇam*) and then the realities of life (*Padams* and *Jāvaḷīs*) and ends expressing the hope to attain or regain the epitome of life (*Śloka*). It explains Hindu philosophy through *Bhakti mārg* as the unifying base through which the common man can contemplate on God or 'Self' - the Supreme Truth, goodness and beauty of which perfect happiness essentially consists - easily.
>
> Tanjore Quartet *mārgam* educates and elevates society by giving the spectator a foretaste of *mokṣa*, the ultimate spiritual experience through *rasa* - experience. Even mediate knowledge of the reality of 'self' brings bliss. This elevating experience perhaps can be credited for the increase in viewership for *Bharatanāṭyam;* for encouraging the spectators to view the art for the charm

> and magic that envelops them after a presentation; and stimulating them to take keen interest in the presentation (Anand 2015).

The dancer takes years to build her repertoire and select specific items that will be part of her *mārgam* presentations. These decisions are conscious as well as intuitive choices that the artist makes in collaboration with her troupe to present a journey of consciousness and to evoke the *rasas* that are pertaining to that state. For the aesthete in the audience, residing in the journey through a *mārgam* presentation takes them through many layers of consciousness in pursuit of the blissful experience that rasa can evoke through and at the end of it. The *mārgam* therefore also is a journey of consciousness, danced in the *citsabhā,* hall of consciousness towards the deities, emotions and experiences that one chooses to reside in, reflect upon and engage with. Training in rhythm, *abhinaya* and long reflective and meditative practices that allow the intuitions of the body-mind-intellect- consciousness complex to emerge together remain at the heart of the *sādhanā*, or artistic practice and process of *Bharatanāṭyam*. What is essential to understand through the structure of *mārgam* is the studio tradition of embodied training with consciousness as its focus and how a complex system of practice and performance have been evolved within the tradition.

Personal notes on *mārgam*: My early training and practice was within this system, alongside the upbringing that was resonant with temple cultures, and *Bhakti* tradition, it became a part of the intuitive practices of training and transforming consciousness in embodied ways for me. The *mārgam* therefore in itself is a tool for training consciousness, recording, observing, reflecting on and transforming it through embodied movement practice. The intelligence of the body informs the choreography,

presentation and conversations with life that emerge through this classical form and becomes integral in the inquiries into consciousness.

9. *Rasa* theory: Emotions in Movement

The *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer trains both in movement and footwork and complex emotional states of being, defined within the framework of the *rasa* theory. When emotions become comprehensible and visible as aesthetic expression and experience, it becomes possible to touch what is otherwise tacit and intangible. What the arts, particularly dance and theatre offer is the study, perception and interpretation of emotional states of being, shifts in consciousness induced by emotions and inquiring into the nuance of human experience as well as experience of other beings. In performing arts, the body is deeply integrated with emotional expression, as gestures and physical movements are used to express subtle realms of being.

Abhinavagupta's reading of rasa as a conceptual and experiential category throws light on the process of how the evocative experience of being, *rasa,* occurs. (Mason and Patwardhan 2017, 155)

> "In the course of our ordinary life, we acquire a certain proficiency (*pāṭava*) through long practice (*abhyāsa*) in inferring people's mental moods (*cittavṛtti*), i.e. their basic emotions (*sthyāyyātma*) from observing certain signs (*liṅga*) consisting in causes, effects and accompanying elements (*sahacāra*). In watching a drama (or reading a poem – *adhunā*), a garden, or a glance, i.e., ordinary causes (effects, etc.) lose their ordinary characters of cause etc. to take on the essential nature of the function of awakening a permanent emotion (*vibhāvana*), the function of leading the spectator to a

recognition of this permanent emotion (*anubhāvanā*) and of adding colour (to the emotions in question – *samuparañjakatva*). And so they require the non-ordinary names of *vibhāvas* etc. Now it is through these things called *vibhāvas* etc. precisely in order to proclaim the fact that they are depended upon the *saṃskāras* (latent impressions) of their nature as a cause etc. and whose essential characteristics will be given in the *bhāvādhyāya* (seventh chapter), when they, by assuming a leading or subordinate role, attain a unity, a joining, a fusion (*yoga*) in the mind of the spectator, that an emotional situation (*artha*) whose essence consists exclusively in aesthetic pleasure (*carvyamāṇataikasāra*) is brought to the state of aesthetic relish (*carvaṇā*) which is a form of consciousness (*saṃvedana*) free from worldly obstacles (i.e. worldly preoccupations). It is not something that is objectively existent (*siddhasvabhāva*) (for) it exists only for the duration of the aesthetic relish (*tātkālika eva*) and does not persist any time after the aesthetic emotion. It is completely different from the permanent emotion. It is *rasa*." (Mason and Patwardhan 2017, 155)

Kalānidhi Nārayanan is considered one of the foremost proponents of teaching *abhinaya* – emotional expression in dance. Her work on teaching rasas, and interpretation of each rasas by elaborately discussing specific characters from different songs have been recorded by *Kalākriya* and offer a closer look at how nuanced explorations of emotional states of being experienced by characters can be studied, interpreted and expressed in *Bharatanāṭyam* as a series of conversations of Kalānidhi Nārayanan with her students. The setting, mood, age of the character, situational context, intensity of emotion, the layers of emotion and how one emotion

can be hidden behind another, the relevance of social modes of a particular time in interpreting emotions are each unraveled for a character. The complex building up of emotions through repetitive lines of a song, and how a dancer can show nuances of an emotion, and its varying shades are described by her in discussion with her students. The rapid transformation of one emotion into another, and multiple emotional states that can be evoked in a character through the experiences and incidents narrated in a single song for example from *śṛṅgāra* to *bībhatsa, raudra* and *hāsya* are also discussed.

As Abhinavagupta clarifies in *Locana*, the apprehension of *rasa* is not inference or recollection of another person's mental mood or emotional state (Mason and Patwardhan 2017, 156). It is however, the resonance that emerges out of sensitivity in the heart of the aesthete who has evolved his abilities to be sympathetic, this state of *rasa* experience therefore transcends the cognitive modes (Mason and Patwardhan 2017, 156). Aesthetic experience differs from experiences of everyday life or inferences of other people's emotional states as we may do in everyday life. Instead there emerges a state of being, *rasa,* from a combination of *vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas*, while the *sthāyibhāvas* themselves become/ evoke *rasas*, the aesthetic experiential states arising from one's own latent impressions as they resonate with the states of being, *vibhāvas* and *anubhāvas* of the characters in a performance (Mason and Patwardhan 2017, 156-157; Savelyeva, 2011).

Often *rasa* theory is explored in its role in the aesthete's experience of the arts. However, the artist's own *rasa* experiences and how they lead to her creative process

are refrained from discussion in Indian aesthetic theories. While the artist goes through rigorous intellectual and cognitive training, the sensitivity and opening of the heart are also essential aspects of an artist's training and the heart of the *Guru- Śiṣya paramparā*. It is when the artist's heart opens unconditionally in response to her environment and rasa, aesthetic relish fills her being that the artistic process becomes transcendental. This relationship between the intellectual, cognitive practices and the transcendental sensitivity that reaches beyond cognition into subtler realms of consciousness lie at the heart of artistic practice and the ability for emotional expression.





Fig 6 and 7: Dancer Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram echoes the lines of the tree at the Lepakshi temple, drawing her inspiration from the breath and form of the tree to embody it in her stance, 2019.

Photograph: Srivi Kalyan

Emotions present some of the finest challenges of human existence, as they often defy logic. They also hide, play, disguise, and morph as people struggle with everyday life, trying to make sense of their own experiences and emotions. They are constantly full of surprises, conflicting and confusing that it is impossible to track the possibilities that may exist at a given point of time, context, situation or experience. This adventure that emotions lead us on, make them the most vibrant, and exquisite to study in order to comprehend and wonder about human life and capacity for experience. They also give us the tools needed to comprehend the lives of other beings and the environment around us. In the transcendental aesthetic states of experience, it becomes possible to resonate with the lives and experiences of other beings and the natural world at large.

Dance training offers insight and practice for the intellectual, cognitive exploration of emotions, meditative and contemplative practices that lead to sensitivity and opening of the heart in conjunction with the cognitive practices, resonant states of being in which the body and mind- a whole being is harmonized and tuned to vibrate together.

In the words of acclaimed dancer Malavika Sarukkai,

> "The inner heartbeat of dance has a way of unlocking the secret door to oneself. At its deeper levels I believe dance harmonizes the mind and body giving it a sense of tranquility, a different sense of being. Staying with this meditative thought, over the years of *sādhanā* I understood the difference between brightness and lustre, clever repetition and manodharma, polished veneer and authentic recreation."(Sarukkai 2016)

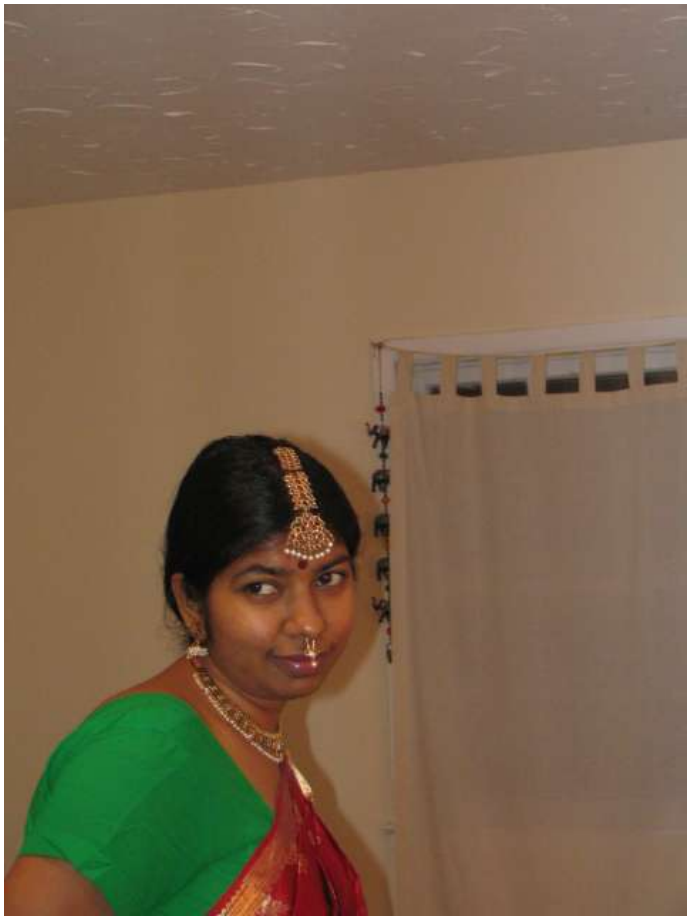




Fig 8 and 9: Krishna charms and entices the Gopis as they scold him for stealing butter, and plays the flute to mesmerize them, 2006. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

Thus emotional training through dance practice, particularly *Bharatanāṭyam* opens up the subtle world of emotions to great depth and becomes crucial in developing sensitivity in the body-mind-heart-consciousness complex to evolve a state of being that is deeply resonant with the world around it. The elephant's sorrow, the deer's lament, the tiger's alert and fierce pursuit of prey, the langur's mischeivous pranks, the cow's deft movements and concern for the calf, the door opens to the world of other life forms. Gentle monsoon winds, full moon shimmering light, creepers swaying, trees whispering secrets, floating clouds, majestic mountains, sprightly young blossoms, everything comes alive in the body of the dancer. *Rasa*, imagination, and define the conversations of the heart (*hṛdayasaṃvāda)* as we resonate with life around us.



Fig 10: Cows frolicking in the field, 2006. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram



Fig 11: Peacocks dancing in the rain, 2006. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

This aesthetic relish is different and in some ways distant from the emotions of everyday life, but for the sensitised aesthete and artists, it is also a way of perception and a way of life.



Fig 12: Enjoying a moment of relaxed and thoughtful wonderment, 2006. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

10. Alarmel Valli: *Bhakti* and *Śṛṅgāra*

Alarmel Valli's production "Is there some way I can reach you", was first staged in September 2013 (Srikanth 2013; Arora 2014). I watched it both in 2013 and 2014. Her performance was based on five of Annamacharya's *kṛtis*, chosen and supported with the translations of his poems in the book 'God on the Hill' by Narayana Rao and David Shulman. These were all from the *Vaiśṇavite Bhakti* corpus.Valli's performance and the poetry translations in 'God on the Hill' along with my long immersion in *Bhakti* poetry and Padam genre of *Bharatanāṭyam* led me to work on my poetry collection '*Śṛṅgāra - Love'* that delves into *porosity* through the frame of the sacred and the sensuous between 2015-17.

In Valli's work nature is infused, interwoven in every line, movement and expression. In her documentary *Lāsya Kāvya*, she mentions the long hours spent in her garden watching the natural world, cobras and drawing in these movements into herself (Meshram 2012). Her ability to draw the movements of all natural beings, celestial bodies and landscapes in gestures and physical movements through the grammar of *Bharatanāṭyam* is most rewarding to observe.

One of the other things that is so powerful for me to observe in Valli's performance is the the way *bhakti* and *śṛṅgāra* are layered in her work- the sacred and the sensuous, the woman and the *bhaktā*, the lover and the devotee. It is a response to the sacred, the deep connecting thread to something much bigger than us. And in that the intertwining of *śṛṅgāra* and *bhakti* are like a gentle swing in the playground, capturing the myriad responses we have to this great vastness of life, at once hidden in the seashell and the rumbling thunderstorm. And we succumb to this vastness,

bound by the natural erotic play that draws us and yet celebrate it with the surrender that only *bhakti* can bring.

Personal explorations in bhakti and *śṛṅgāra in an illustrated series capturing the playful dances between Śiva and Śakti.*



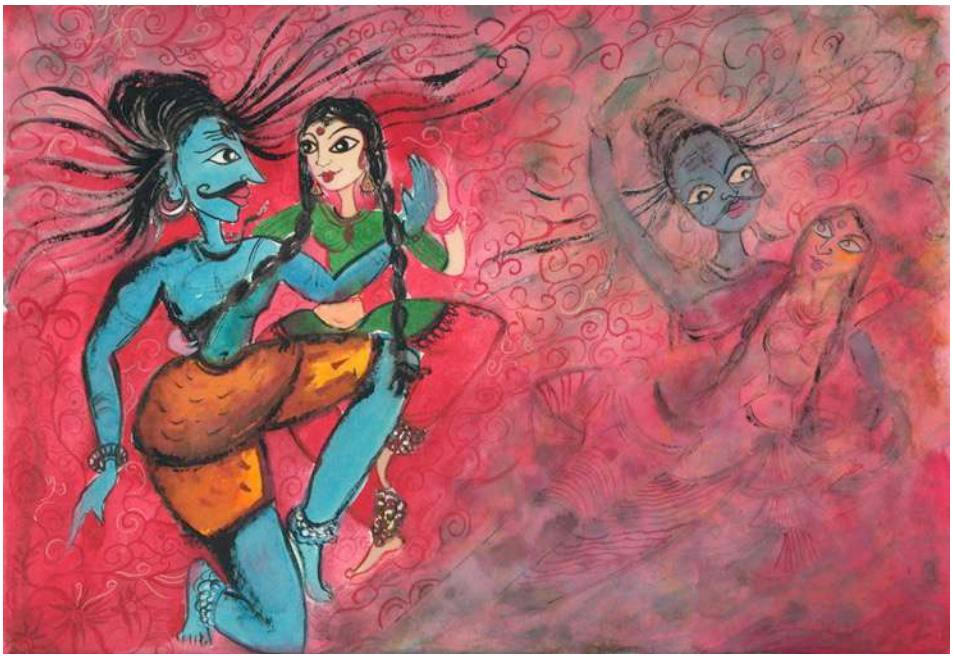
Fig 13, 14 and 15: Śiva, the great dancer disguises himself playfully to dance with Śakti also known by the name Korravai in the south when she is younger. Śiva and Śakti are also considered to be Puruṣa and Prakṛti, the essence of life and its counterpart in the ceaseless play of form. This collection of paintings, written as an illustrated story in 2007, plays on the symbolism and metaphysical truths using dance to highlight complex metaphors. In his form as Natarāja, Śiva holds fire in one of his hands, indicating destruction. This series, plays with many of these symbols bringing them to vivid life.

Illustration above are for the lines - "As she watched him (Śiva), he became many different creatures… And before she saw what was happening, he transformed into a tree on one side and a bright glowing fire on the other. He twisted his branches around her hands and pulled her closer. She smiled and began to dance with him. They danced together as the days passed and the seasons changed, laughing and challenging each other."

Watercolours, Photocolours, Pen and Ink on watercolour paper, 2007.







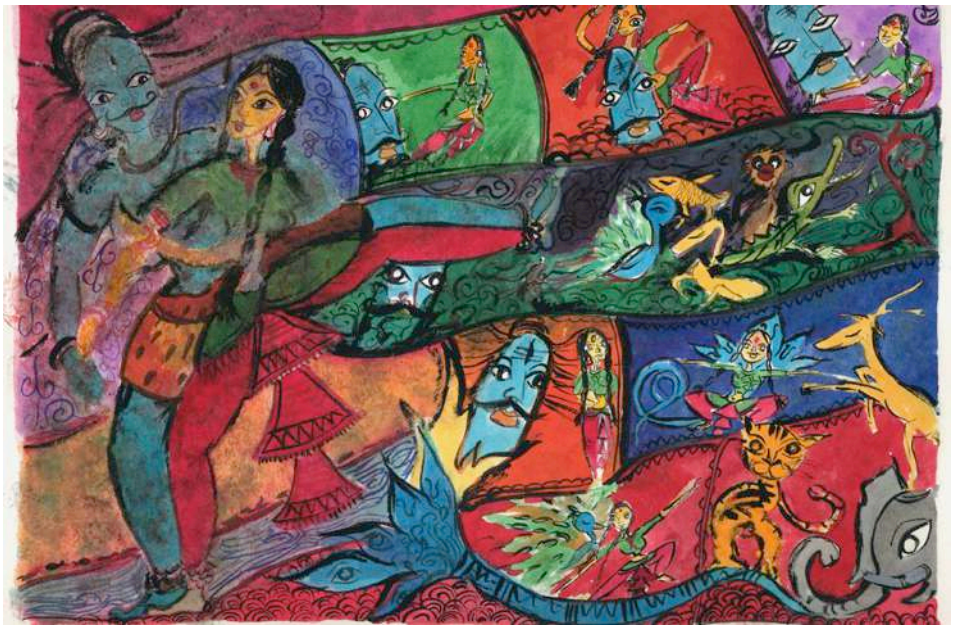


Fig 16 and 17: Śiva reveals himself in his human form and they reminisce heir dances in all the other forms of life.

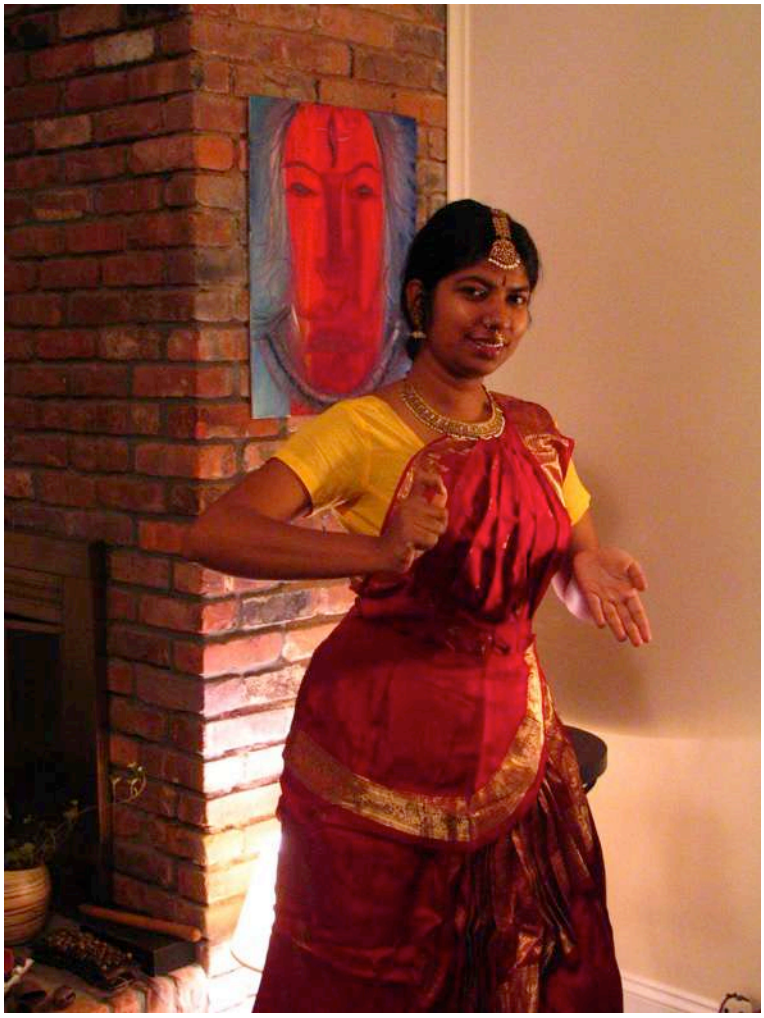


Fig 18: Korravai and the blue stone evolved from my contemplations on Śiva and Śakti both as a dancer and as a visual artist. The blue stone in the story, a salagrama stone/ rounded rock, is the Śivalinga or aniconic form of Śiva as worshipped across India. In the photo above, one of my paintings of the Śivalinga and my posture as Śakti have been photographed together, 2006. The story emerged with my own choreographic ideas for the Śiva-Śakti tandava. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

As I watched Alarmel Valli perform, I wondered in what better space can this immense experience be drawn but in the inner sanctums of gods and goddesses; in what better way but in dance of these primordial beings and their vibrant love. Because only then the ephemeral gems of sparkling dawn on water, can be conjured into the diamonds on the goddess's anklets, and the rhythm of the entire creation can be captured in the nritta of her delicate feet! To me these moments are what I experienced in Valli's portayal of *Alamelu Maṅkā* to the *padam, 'Alarulu Kuriyaga'*.

And the sense of confident belonging in *'yėlinavāḍu tānu yem' anagala nenu',* I wonder if there can be any other way that one can depict this intimate relationship that each individual shares with the unnameable vastness that pervades and yet permeates us. The teasing play of love to which the universe responds, can only be as delicate and yet as deeply moving as the relationship between *Veṅkateśvara* and *Alamelu Maṅkā.*

And *' kopamu dīrina mīda gūḍe gāni*' reaches out at so many levels, and I marvel at this ceaseless flow of dialogue between *Alamelu Maṅkā* and *Veṅkateśvara*. As I watch Valli dance, I am suddenly transported from form into formless, where the characterizations cease to be and a leap in consciousness takes place.

'*Yedu Upāyamu*' and '*Śrīman Nārayaṇa*', leave us floundering in the bliss of this vastness. I wonder how I can make peace with it, with the way it permeates me and yet doesn't let me caress it. And then as if by its own compassionate will, I am given the gift of *śṛṅgāra* and the vision of *Alamelu Maṅkā,* so I may without fear, conflict, sorrow or grief, simply reach out in playful joyousness, liberated in love, and strengthened in companionship. Can this incredible joy be contained in anything but *śṛṅgāra*, I wonder as you watch you, mesmerized.

To me, Valli's choreography and performance completely and unerringly discard the unnecessary line that is drawn between the sacred and the sensuous, between the lord and the devotee, between lovers, between human soul and the divine sea. And in that, her dance becomes at once contemporary, bold, feminist and yet remains subtle, quiet

and charming. It is at once metaphysical that I can compare only to the spread wings and smooth flight of the crane and yet it is poetry, firmly rooted in the ground, simmering with the scent of the earth.

11. Sarukkai's Deerness

Sarukkai speaks of representing *deerness* in one of her choreographies, where she worked with the *Mṛiga Sapnovbhava Parva*, a sub section of the *Vana Parva* in *Mahābhārata,* where *Yudhiṣṭhira* dreams of deer lamenting, asking him to stop the hunting and allow them to revive their numbers (Venkataraman 2017; Sarukkai 2016).

> To Leela Venkataraman's question –
>
> "Speaking at the Natya Kala Conference, I heard you talk of a character like a Deer, and you referred to entering the consciousness of the deer. Is it like Manipuri dancers performing a work on an elephant *Moirangsha* danced in such a way that one got the feel of an elephant herd moving on stage - not human dancers."
>
> Malavika Sarukkai responds saying,
>
> "Exactly. This is a very difficult process when self is displaced. That shift when you do the character of *Hanuman* for instance when you unconsciously put your hand to adjust the tail. So also while enacting a deer's role, I speak of 'deerness', 'treeness' etc. You as a person have been taken over by the other you represent. That abstraction cannot be described; it has to be sought through sheer effort by the performer." (Venkataraman 2017)

12. My Experiences of Other Beings through *Bharatanāṭyam* Training:

As Sarukkai evocatively describes above, this transformation into another being, sharing its consciousness, or rather have an experience where the other being seems to take over one's own self is a profound possibility in dance training, practice and performance. In *Bharatanāṭyam* training, gestural as well as physical movement training, one trains to express the body, physicality, movements, emotions and experiences of other beings over long periods of practice. This enables an empathetic and compassionate ability to encounter other life forms and learn from them, engage with them, and be perceptive of them.

To me, even as a child, the ability to experience the presence and consciousness of another being in my body was natural. Dance allowed for the embracing of these experiences, and eventually refinement and expression alongside the acknowledgment that such experiences were deeply transformative and allowed for momentary, and sometimes longer resonances with other life forms. These resonances were like non-verbal conversations, where one implicitly understood another in innerness. While many such memories flood through me, one of the most memorable remains meeting a baby octopus in an aquarium in Pondicherry. In an initial playful attempt, I kept my finger and was enveloped suddenly into its world as it raced towards me. We played for a bit after my initial shock, however the octopus had somehow become a part of my being, its intelligence, alert consciousness, and vitality transferred to me in those moments of resonance. And that body of the octopus now also became mine, in that shared moment… emerging a shared body consciousness that eventually trickled into my movement practices. Dogs, deer, elephants, cows, cats, birds, trees, rivers, seas and mountains – I felt them all in my own body, my body giving way to theirs over

the years. An extraordinary alertness and awareness of the environment and other beings, arose out of this. To me, it is difficult to say whether movement training made it possible to experience other beings in my body or if experiencing them, allowed me to re-engage with movement in new ways. At some point, it became mutual, and central to the *porous* relationships I shared with the world around me.



Fig 19: Echoing the Earth, Alapadma gesture. In response to the organic flow of the natural world, Seattle, 2017. Photograph: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.

13. Dancers in Early Tamil Cinema

Dancers in early Tamil cinema left an indelible impact on my creative consciousness as a dancer. The work of Kumari Kamala, Padmini, and Vyjayantimala remain the most prominent of the influences even as many other performers, group dances and duets of Padmini with her sisters Lalitha and Ragini have also been important to my imagination.

Trained classically, these dancers took to the film screen, reimagining, and innovating within the world of cinema. While they often stayed with the choreography as it was designed for them by mainstream *Naṭṭuvaṉārs*, they brought new dynamics to the classical form as it was presented on screen. Woven into mythological, political, romantic and historical narratives, their performances were nuanced and a critical part of the storyline.

Kamala's role in the recasting of *Bharatanāṭyam* as a nationist and religious art form in the twentieth century runs deep" (Krishnan 2019, 146) Kamala introduced a new aesthetic to *Bharatanāṭyam* with her athletic flexibility (with the consideration of a body trained for *Bharatanāṭyam*) and speed. Harikrishnan writes that, "It was her work, not that of Rukmini Arundale and Madras' intellectual elites that persistently straddled the stage and cinema and brought *Bharatanāṭyam* to South India's middle class in the 1940s." (Krishnan 2019, 139).

Padmini deepened the evocative and narrative aspects of classical dance on screen, bringing new dimensions to the form with her versatility and confident performances.

Nuanced and mature, her style drew out deep emotions of the characters she played, enriching each performance, narrative and character depth.

Vijayantimala's performances with their stylish flourish and aesthetics were vivacious and vibrant on screen. Confident and advanced in her skill as a dancer, the characters that she portrayed became unforgettable presences.

Both Padmini and Vijayantimala brought the strength of the classical form to screen adapting it with ingenuity to the new medium reaching out to audiences with their sensuality, dynamism, emotiveness, and métier.

The power of the dancer to express, shape a character, a narrative and impact audiences through their emotive brilliance was huge as these dancer-actresses were able to reach out to a larger number of people through television and film screens. Accessibility to high quality dance, creative expression and choreography by *Naṭṭuvaṉārs* who were acclaimed through cinema and later television was crucial to the impact dance could have on consciousness.

As dance was adapted to this new media and screen, exposure to the form became easier for audiences and inspired many to learn and influenced their styles of performance as well. Dance on screen was often fluid, organic, and vibrant and interwoven with rich narratives. This approach to dance provided different dimensions from traditional classical performances on stage or in temples.

Personal reflection: As a young dancer, I learnt much from dance on screen as from my dance training. We also sometimes performed the classical dances that had been depicted on screen by these actresses. One of the songs, '*pār kaṭal alai mēlē'*, from the film Raja Desingu (1960), which depicts the ten avatars of *Viṣṇu* was part of my repertoire, both as a solo and group dancer. Through this song, one performs the multiple roles of *Viṣṇu* taking the form of different beings, and also the various *rakshasas* and demons who *Viṣṇu* fights against. In a short span of about 8-10 minutes, the song demands immense transformations in the dancer. Fish, turtle, boar, lion, horse, mountains, seas, snake, man, woman, and a wide range of secondary characters are depicted through the song.

Originally performed by Padmini in the film as a solo piece, this dance item is extremely challenging and depends on the dancer's skill to transform into multiple roles, emotions, beings, and show great transitions of consciousness and spirit in a very short span of time. Training to perform this dance both in a group and as a solo artist, I learnt a lot about transitioning and transforming the body in rapid moments of time.

The huge shifts in consciousness that need to be portrayed between being for example, *Hiraṇyakaśipu,* the demon and lord *Jagannāth* in his avatar as the half-beast and half-man *Narasiṃha* requires one to show the evil and arrogant demon in combat with a ferocious man-lion, the subduing of the demon by *Narasiṃha*. The scene is also one of the goriest scenes of mythological literature as *Narasiṃha* lays *Hiraṇyakaśipu* on his lap and tears out his intestines and wears them around his neck.

Violent and gory, filled with controlled rage, moving between characters as a solo dancer, or personifying any one of the characters is a tremendous responsibility.

From this violent scene, the next one transforms to the dwarf who measures the cosmos, the earth and the ego of the king with his three steps. Internal transitions of expressions, physicality, gestures and emotional dynamics, understanding of rhythm and the physical and mental training that it takes to perform this piece with maturity was one of the early gifts that I received as a 10-11year old. Dance thus became the heart of understanding consciousness with deftness in a harmonious way where body, breath, mind, intellect, consciousness functioned as a unified whole.

14. Chandralekha's Inquiries through the Body

Dancer and Choreographer Chandralekha Prabhudas Patel's work drew its richness from the vocabularies of *Bharatanāṭyam*, yoga and kalaripayattu, fusing them into a new whole. While emerging at a time in the global dialog of modern dance, Chandralekha's work is also seen now as the beginning of contemporary dance in India (Bharucha 1997; Naskar 2016).

Chandralekha broke out of the traditional format and structures of presentation of *Bharatanāṭyam* to pose new inquiries in dance through the body. While the rich imagery of her form continued to be inspired by the iconography, symbolism and *yantras* as well as the philosophical traditions and thought systems of Hinduism, her work was strongly feminist, socio-political and inspired by the indignation she felt at the social conditions that we face and encounter in our everyday life. The two most important aspects of her work that are relevant for study here are

i. The centrality of the body in resistance and inquiry

ii. The resistance, and selective rejection of 'taboos, codes, rhetoric, and cliches' of culture even as one draws from it[1]

In the documentary, '*Śarīra* - Chandralekha's Explorations in Dance,'[2] Chandralekha explores her questions on the body, on performance, on the process of dancers coming together and her constant inquiry into "where does the body begin and where does the body end? (Lall 2003)"

Through three major works produced by Chandralekha – *Rāga, Śrī* and *Śarīra,* the documentary explores Chandralekha's quest for a deeper engagement, understanding and inquiries into life through the body itself. The visuality of her choreographic as well as creative process centre the world in the body, acknowledging its sensuality, sexuality and spirituality as a singular whole. Chandralekha moves seamlessly across the iconographic, symbolic, abstraction and formlessness. She moves from narratives to open-ended inquiries that emerge in and through the body emphasizing its intelligence and centrality in our existence and expression. Working with geometry, symmetry, organic flow, rhythm and energy, Chandralekha innovates the experiences that emerge from and through the body by staying closely with it and embracing the body as both dancer and choreographer intimately celebrating its presence.

Chandralekha's work in its modern and contemporary dance frameworks opens up the form of *Bharatanāṭyam* even as it fuses it yoga and the martial art form of *Kalari*, freeing it from traditional narratives, and emerges the body as a space of inquiry,

[1] Rustom Bharucha, p32
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyXh_5dT0zw

contemplation, dialog and indignation and in some ways rebellion that is profoundly contemplative and deeply socio-political.

I first encountered her work in my late teens and early twenties around 1999. *The Other Festival* that was started in Chennai by Anita Ratnam and Ranvir Shah opened the doors to contemporary dance for me and raised important questions about how I perceive, engage with, create and choreograph. It also allowed me to form new relationships with space-time as the grammar of forms that I was introduced to became varied and open. Chandralekha's work, which drew richly from the tradition even as it broke the grammar of *Bharatanāṭyam*, became another language of bodily engagement with the world for me. This language that arose from her work, allowed for more abstract contemplations using the body as a tool and brought new energy to my engagement with movement as well as life as a whole. While her work does not directly engage with the natural world, her contexts are drawn from the sensual physicality of the body and its relationship to everything. The profound understanding of breath, and how the individual breath merges with the cosmic breath redefining what the boundaries of the body are remain central to her choreography and inquiries into the body.









Fig 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25: Dance explorations from 2001, inspired by Chandralekha's work. Photographs: Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram.





How does one body interact with another, how does it come together with another, how does it embrace and perform a sensual dance of intimate and mutual engagement as a complex entity – these refreshing ways to understand and be alert to the encounters of our body, brought new vitality to my understanding of dance. I became comfortable with abstract, conceptual questioning through the body. The primacy of the body, and the extreme alertness to one own's presence became a vital part of how I began to engage with my body in relationship with everything around me.

Chandralekha's questions, conflicts with tradition, the socio-politics of her work enabled by a strong inquiry to find herself as a woman willing to resist and confront the world around her in all its inequality and injustice enabled a space for body in movement persist with the most important questions of what does it mean to be human? And what does it mean to live? Dance, life, and resistance are inseparable in Chandralekha's work.

To me, this framework that emerges from her work, allows for creative questioning and inquiry about our relationship with the environment through the intense presence of the body and its ability to move. While the relationship between the inner and outer remains central in Chandralekha's work as in classical tradition, her context and concepts are drawn from her response to the outer, while fiercely internalizing these questions through the body and expressing them through the inner paradigm. The outer becomes intensely spiritual in Chandralekha's work and gets fused in the body in sensual, erotic and feminist inquiries that do not separate art and life.

15. Uday Shankar's *Kalpana*

I first saw a screening of *Kalpana*, dancer-choreographer Uday Shankar's autobiographical film that was originally made in 1948 as a nineteen year old, when Amala Shankar came to present it in *The Other Festival* in Chennai.

Kalpana, the film is a revelation of imagination, intuition, choreography, forms, narratives, possibilities and an encounter with dance, movement, theatre and the body with refreshing dynamism. *Kalpana* became a vital experience for me in re-interpreting dance and the aesthetic possibilities of dance. Uday Shankar's style that

was in alignment with Tagore and Nehru's conceptualizations of pan Indian aesthetic possibilities, emerged in a time of colonial and nationalistic dialogue, and was not well –understood or received in its own time (Coorlawala 2003).

Dance critic Coorlawala speaks of *Kalpana* as a sliding between worlds at various levels. Even while the time period in which he operated in was intensely nationalistic, Coorlawala points out that his work evidences "sophisticated intracultural and intercultural consciousness: (Coorlawala 2003). She elaborates,

> "Living in two worlds, shapes a kind of dual sensibility and choreographic imagination. One sees one's self as other, as not-other, and sometimes an alien from another galaxy. Confusing, exhilarating, restrictive or creatively generative – after a while this back-and-forth state becomes comfortable." (Coorlawala 2003).

Shankar's work drew rich inspiration from traditional visual art and plastic arts – from the murals of Ajanta and miniature paintings. Supported by Alice Boner, the complexity of costumes, sets as well as choreography itself drew from the visual arts as well. Progressive and ahead of its times, Shankar's vibrant imagination and vivacious, bold, conceptual and sensual choreography brought many worlds together culturally, metaphorically, visually and in the language of movements.

The imaginative and fluid possibilities and strong visuality of his choreography and performances presage Bollywood dance scene, and impacted Tamil film choreography as well to some extent as the Travancore sisters Lalitha and Padmini also trained with Uday Shankar and are part of the film. In *Kalpana*, Uday Shankar

uses dance and the medium of film to engage in debate, discourse and conversation about identity, meaning and the journeys of the body in movement.

In his attempt to create a style of movement that is pan-Indian, the dance form has a new grammar and visuality, organic fluid movement that is reminiscent of the Ajanta paintings, while being boldly conceptual as well as comfortably mythological, lyrical, narrative as well as abstract and rhythmic at times. There is a certain flamboyance and poetic liberation in Shankar's school of dance that appealed to me in my quest for movement. The sheer scale of bold imagination, magnificence and plurality that the film captures and is also evidenced in the Uday Shankar's language and vocabulary of dance shows a reveling in and through dance as a medium of conversation, communication and a way of relating with the world.

The film demands an equally involved and intense engagement of the viewer in order to capture the abstract, conceptual, symbolic and metaphorical elements of the larger narrative that is woven together through richly textured smaller narratives. The poetic riddles and possibilities of viewing, perceptiveness required to engage challenged me as a viewer attempting to grasp the many interwoven meanings that pulsated from the film. His choreography allows for transitions of consciousness in elusive, abstract, ways as well as concrete obvious ones. The bodies transition from spiritual to actively socio-political, to dreamy fantasy, commenting on social issues, experiencing life, debating, expanding, limiting and breaking free from cultural boundaries, physical and conceptual selves, cross-cultural possibilities, all the while, seeking out new consciousness through movement.



Fig 26: Sketch of a young Odissi dancer, Brush pen and multicolour pencil on watercolour paper, Calcutta, 2012.

In Uday Shankar's work, I encountered the possibilities of a body that was free from the limits of formal grammar. The vibrancy of the folk and the structure of the classical have merged to create a new aesthetic that is fluid, open to interpretations, and dynamic in its possibilities for imagination and choreography. As a young dancer, I found this approach to movement liberating, playful, witty, and creative. As a tool for movement practice, Uday Shankar's approach to dance allowed me to find new possibilities of body and beingness as well as context and narrative. Consciousness is molten and open to being shaped into varied forms in Shankar's work making it rich, textured, dynamic, playful and even satirical, opening a space for endless generative possibilities of form.

16. The Body in Choreography

Choreography in relationship with space and time is a practice that allows the dancer to find ways to relate with the world around her using her body. Solo, duets and group choreography present different possibilities and challenges to the body and how bodies come together in time and space. In a solo performance, one body becomes many. In duets, two bodies come together in infinite ways merging sometimes, distinct sometimes, always in rhythm, creating rich patterns on the stage. In group choreography, many bodies become one, they become new shapes, transcending their limitations and boundaries of being single bodies.

Whether the choreographies tend towards narrative or abstract styles, geometric or organic forms, bodies are broken apart, become malleable, restructured, reconfigured, extended and transformed into newer possibilities. And this kind of revolutionizing of the body that dance and movement practices bring is essential tools in the study, emergence and engagement with a *porous* consciousness. The body can be imagined anew because movement makes it possible. The limits of the body can be broken because it can be choreographed to new limits, and new freedoms.

While the thesis does not focus on music as I have not trained in it, dance with its inherent symbiotic relationship with music makes it inevitable to engage with music as an artistic form as well. Music gives time and space newer dimensions than the limits we impose upon time-and space in our experience of it in everyday reality. The energy and vibrations of both space and time transform in response to music. Music enables the body to find these seemingly imaginative yet real space-time possibilities

in which the body can move, endure, resist, engage, embrace, interpret and find new relationship with the world.

Engaging in dance choreography as well as solo, duet and group performances as a young dancer enabled me to find my body in relationship to other bodies, conceptual frameworks and slowly this training and practice found its way back into the natural world, where it began intuitively. And I dance with life everyday, drawn by the way creepers seek out the sun, flowers bloom, rivers flow, waves ebb and flow, twilight transforms into night, birds play hide and seek … it is always a dance with another being, sometimes a duet, sometimes a group performance, sometimes in solo stillness, always in relationship.

At another level, as Malavika Sarukkai insightfully speaks of the relationship between dance and silence in her conversation with Shekar Gupta in NDTV's *Walk the Talk with Malavika Sarukkai* (Aired February 2006)

> "It is really a kind of alignment with this silence around you. Because I think, in India, one is always working with opposites, so you might think dance is sound and melody and music but I think what the dancer is inside deeply aware is a kind of silence…"

And it is in this immersion into, resonance with and living embraced in silence that listening, *porosity* and a fluid oneness become possible.

17. Summary

The practice of dance as ritual art or for entertainment has varied possibilities for us to comprehend according to individual dancers and different time-periods. What is essential within the frame of this thesis is to understand that *Bharatanāṭyam* as a form, as we experience it today and in its long evolution through history has offered both possibilities and fused possibilities of sacred, sensuous and secular in multiple ways and these potentials that the form holds are important to acknowledge.



Fig 27: Photographing a tree. The posture of taking a photograph was an intuitive response to the land and the tree and showcases how my training in Bharatnāṭyam influenced my other artistic processes, 2002. Photograph: Ambica Banu.

New practice that can emerge within the frame of ecological consciousness, will rest in a nuanced understanding of the possibilities of the dance form and how it can be adapted to understanding, inquiring into, experiencing and sharing ecological consciousness and *porous* states of being.

Chapter 10

A *Porous* Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice

Re-engaging with Classical Indian Philosophy and Aesthetics as a Living Tradition[1]

Bīja is the origin of rasa which always abides in the poet. From this source all bhāvas have their emergence. Bharata writes:

Yathā bījād bhaved vrikṣo vrikṣāt puṣpam palam yathā /
Thathā mūlam rasāh sarve tebhyo bhāvā vyavasthitāh//
Natya Sastra VI. 38

As from the seed the tree is born and for the tree, flowers and fruits are born, in the same way all sorts of bhāvas have their firm root in rasa (aesthetic pleasure).
(Translation P.L. Sharma)

Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, Bīja, Kalatattvakosha, Vol 1, 175

[58] A slightly edited version of this chapter has been published in Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. 'A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice: Re-engaging with classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a living tradition', *Journal for Artistic Research*, 20 https://doi.org/10.22501/jar.614184 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/614184/614185/10/43 [accessed 23/07/2020].

Sections

1. Introduction
2. Locating the Indian artist, Locating my practice
3. Evolving my Position
4. Principles of Research
5. Principles of Experience
6. Principles of Engagement
7. Principles of Practice
8. Aesthetic Devices
9. Form and Principles of Form
10. Artistic Directions
11. Discussion

Chapter 10: A Porous Consciousness in and as Artistic Practice will focus on Re-engaging with Classical Indian Philosophy and Aesthetics as a Living Tradition to study personal practice.

1. Introduction

The artist trains to be able to move seamlessly through the physical, emotional, psychical and the metaphysical layers of self and the world in intersubjective spaces. In building this sheerness of skins across different dimensions, realities and ways of being, playing with consciousness become the real craft of the artist. In order to understand how ecological consciousness can be unraveled through artistic processes, this paper inquires into personal practice. The individual human being is conceptualized in relation to his ecological environment and it is his ability to be aware of this intricate relationship through his consciousness and self-reflection which allows him to transcend his individual form, as well as the multiplicity of forms to arrive at the formless and that which is beyond-form. (Vatsyayan 1997, 11). Artistic Creativity is critically and painstakingly intertwined with ecological creativity in Indian aesthetics. The underlying principles of form, grammar and structure are carefully considered applications and expansions of ecological principles. But what lies at the heart of the consciousness that can enact, embody and expand this creativity principle. I argue that the consciousness principle is *Porosity*, an ability to transcend self to enter a state of being where life can move through as a seamless exchange of energy in consecrated time and space. This chapter draws insights from practice based research and unravels the practitioner's point of view into subjective, qualitative research using text, image and movement. The

philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings are drawn from Hindu Indian aesthetics, philosophy and ancient notions of ecology.

2. Locating the Indian Artist, Locating my Practice

Indian contemporary art is complex as the aesthetic, theological / philosophical, intellectual frameworks and frameworks of practice that guide the artistic practices are diverse and draw from different worldviews. Constructing the identity of the Indian artist therefore requires careful positioning of the artist within traditional, colonial, post-colonial as well as global post modern and contemporary frameworks. Theoretical readings of the works of the art as well as artist profiles need to be reviewed under the diversity of frameworks they draw from.

Indian aesthetics has a rich tradition that dates back to 5th Century BC. The *Nāṭya Śāstra* (200 BCE - 200 CE) and different *alamkāra-śāstras* codify, critique, question, and a continuing tradition of the aesthetic frameworks are part of the living tradition of the arts today. India as a country has absorbed many cultures over the centuries and rich traditions of art and craft have evolved over time, both within India an have gone beyond her borders to other lands as well. Indian tradition has always held art and craft within a singular frame, a whole in itself. A single word *Kalā* encompasses both. The colonial period, however brought about a transformation in what was perceived as art and craft, destroying the integrity of how art was traditionally conceived in India and is evidenced in art from 3rd Century BCE of the Maurya Dynasty to the 18th Century CE, Mughal Dynasty (Balaram, 1998). The art and craft movement that started in Europe in the 1800's impacted the notion of arts in India, through the art schools that were set up by the British. These schools did not evolve

their curricula sensitive to the context and conditions of India leaving a gap in how the forms of art were conceptualised as well as the identity of the artist. The nationalist and revivalist movements that followed with the Bengal School with eminent Indian artists emerging on the scene like Abanindranath Tagore, setting up of Visva Bharati university, Santiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore raised critical voices to usher in Indian art with its own distinct identity into the colonial era. Ananda Coomaraswamy, a pioneering historian of Indian philosophy and art brought perspective to how the west could engage with Indian and much eastern art. The Indian intellectuals over time have continued to find ways to articulate the nuances, inspirations, and differences that constitute the identity of the Indian artist. However, there is no singular frame for creating an identity for the Indian artist. The traditional Indian artist was rooted in the notion of arts as sacred and deeply connected to theological, mystical traditions. Creative processes, practices and forms also emerged from symbolism that arose within these dimensions. However the contemporary Indian artist is not necessarily immersed in this framework and is free to borrow from it or completely negate it. However, there may be deeper intuitions that inspire and direct the artist from within that are still bound to older cultural traditions.

Indian art and artists and the varied creative processes of practice that encompasses artistic work today could be categorised in the following frames

1. The traditional Indian artist, working within the larger frame of theological and mystical worldviews
2. The traditional Indian craftsmen, who continues to work within his/her paradigm, or has adapted his art for a changing paradigm, while holding his worldviews.

3. The contemporary Indian artist who is self-taught or has emerged from some of the leading art and design institutes across India and abroad. These could be further understood in categorising their work within
    a. Artists who create art for the sake of art
    b. Artists who focus on socio-political or ecological frames
    c. Artists who build from cultural-theological frames
    d. Artists whose work intersects socio-political, ecological and cultural-theological frameworks
4. Artists of the Indian diaspora whose experiences are reflective of lived experiences in cultures they have adopted, adapted to, and continuously create new exchanges and contributions in a cross-cultural frame.

My work is framed within the contemporary Indian frame, where it intersects with both socio-political, ecological and cultural-theological frameworks. The research methods, principles of practice and questions of form arise within this frame of practice. My training in the arts is rooted in several traditions. In my creative practice, the elements of art - line, space and form are understood and drawn from Indian aesthetic traditions. As a trained *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer, with over fifteen years of training in this traditional art form, my roots of embodied practice also draw from cultural-mythological-mystical traditions of gesture as well as space, line and form in performative practice. However my forms of expression also draw from Western Greek and Roman art, Renaissance, Romanticism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Modernism, Post Modernism and Conceptual Art. However, the core principles of my practice, particularly the practice of mind and consciousness draw from Eastern traditions of contemplative and reflective art practices and

meditation, mystic traditions of poetry and philosophy, and Indian aesthetic philosophy. This provides for a rich transdisciplinary exchange of knowledge frameworks as well as questions of form. Locating these questions of form further within socio-political, ecological frameworks that are contemporary and relevant in Indian contexts as well as within larger global ecological movements add another texture and layer to considerations of practice. The following framework of research and positioning of the Indian artist therefore derives from one segment of artists and does not necessarily encompass Indian artists/ art as a whole.

Notes: This chapter draws from both Tamil and Sanskrit texts and philosophical works.

'Hinduism' is a broad umbrella term for the diverse cultural notions and nuances that I draw from. It is essential to be sensitive to the fact that 'Hinduism' as a religious construct is colonial and recent and does not do justice to the diversity held within the subcontinent (Horn 2006).

3. Evolving my Position

Drawing from these juxtapositions of practice, aesthetics and philosophy, I evolve a position that allows me to blend and interplay consciousness and creativity as an intrinsic aspect of ecological consciousness.

In this chapter, I elaborate the principles of engagement in my creative practice and principles of practice that help understand the links between how the philosophy of art and its interconnectedness with ecological consciousness in Indian thought traditions translates into aesthetics and creative practice. The correspondence and correlation

between the inner and outer forms the core of developing these principles. While my work is informed and influenced by both Eastern and Western traditions, my sensibilities and creative core emerge from the Indian cultural roots. The central principle of consciousness that my work is based on is *Porosity*. Through *porosity*, I seek to understand how our perceptions and relationships with nature can change. I see *porous* principle of consciousness as the instances in which we are free of the limitations of the human form and are able to experience and embrace other beings and life forms within us, in a seemingly permeable relationship. In these instances, our very definition of human self is challenged and perception of reality is altered.

My work, both research and artistic practice revisits the traditional notions of dissolving the self, through the frame of ecological consciousness and artistic practice, to emerge its meanings in simple mundane everyday living in relationship with all life. It draws from personal practice and also traditional wisdom, the permeation of which is across everyday language and culture, reminding us that the greater transitions of consciousness as one conceives of them are often simple practice and daily ritual.

The *porous self* is an inquiry into symbol as discussed earlier and it is in this light that the following Principles of Engagement are discussed. Principles of Engagement are central to the exploration of *porosity* as a practice. Each principle allows me to deepen my engagement with nature and self in a multitude of ways. Principles of engagement have arisen from synthesizing years of work and reflections on my experiences in nature. They have been constructed as ways to build methods and methodologies to

decode *porosity* as a principle and practice of consciousness. Each of the sections below unfolds a critical aspect of the research process of an artistic inquiry.

4. Principles of Research

Evolving research methods for practice that can bring together *porous* states of consciousness, informed understanding of one's own cultural roots, diverse moments of felt experience, and inquiries into form, concept, techniques of final outcomes and representations require one to consider artistic research methods that are more open.These methods need to create space for

Subjectivity - Allowing for autobiographical research, annotated studies of one's own work, making connections to one's flow of thought and consciousness in relation to one's cultural worldviews, observing leaps of imagination within the worlds of myth, and notions of consciousness that emerge from cultural or philosophical thought that the artist is grounded in.

Experientiality - Suspend notions of reality that we believe in as absolute to allow for alternative notions where we can find appropriate language to describe felt experiences. Instead of engaging with logical reasoning and argument in judgement of a notion of reality, to use the same to investigate and find articulation for that which seems paradoxical, absurd or illogical. The felt-experience / lived experience is what makes it real. The investigation needs to proceed into the nature of the experience rather than proving the validity of the experience.

Intuition - Intuition is to be carefully studied, looking for insights to what led to the moment of intuition or insight. Intuition happens at an incredible pace of time, where innumerable connections are fired to create a great moment of clarity. While it maybe impossible to trace all the connections, acknowledging intuition as a valid aspect of research will allow to find the conducive environment in which a particular intuition can not only rise, but allow the artist to practice/ use that intuition with confidence in her work. Understanding what helps the artist accept her own intuitions, look for validation for some of them, acknowledge but critique them, draw her creative force from them become essential to researching practice.

Alogic/ Ineffable - What would academic research look like if logic and rational argument were not to be its only driving force? What would the study of alogic and illogic look like if they were acceptable within the framework of research? This is an important question in artistic research and has multiple possible answers. Matilal offers a framework for how Indian mystics expressed the 'ineffable' (Matilal 1990, 142-155). The first method is the use of metaphor and poetic language. The second method is to use paradoxical statements. The third methods is to use negation. To those inclined to mysticism, these methods provide a framework of research, articulation and expression.

Form - Form reveals intuitions, non-linear connections, cultural perceptions that are otherwise inaccessible in formal academic writing. Form may include linguistic expressions of poetry as well. Researching form and the principles and aesthetic philosophy that drive its origin is essential to unfold research. While the final outcome of form may appear to be drawn from a particular school of art, it is essential

to also determine the philosophical beliefs and values of the artist to truly comprehend the visuality and its inner meanings.

Research itself moves into the realms of subjective, intuitive and imaginative as well as those of seeing and perception. In keeping with the nature of inquiry into *porosity,* the research approach looks at non-conclusive, uncertain possibilities of states of being, making and approaches to creating form. The quality of research then becomes an act of unfolding, unravelling and transitioning placed in diverse temporality and spatiality that allow for non-sequential, continuous, rhythmic and recursive ways of experiencing. Integral to eastern notions of intuition are self-assessing strategies, rigor and methods for judgment or assessment (Burtt 1953). This sensibility of artistic research allows for inviting the unknown, the tacit-invisible. In painting, my nascent, shy inquiry acquires form. Through the process of form, thoughts settle, inquiries take shape, intuitively understanding simmers in. Solutions and resolutions emerge in ephemerality and transience, acquiring new form, thought shape. As one inquiry rests, another emerges in that stillness. Sometimes there are long periods of stillness, rest and then a rich movement tremors in…

Recording these nuanced journeys and explorations are essential as contributions of research to studying practice. While one maybe able to study another artist for these same questions and methods, in studying the self as subject, one encounters hidden pathways, invisible journeys, and unexpected encounters with one's own past, present and future giving a remarkable window of time to study. This kind of research leaves one to inquire into what is most vulnerable within oneself. And it also allows one to reveal principles and methods of practice, engagement and research that could be

unique to a particular individual while allowing to emerge a framework to study the same in others. In artistic research, where the artist studies one's own work, she creates the possibility for this kind of unique understanding of the work of artists, approaching nuanced moments of experience and their translation into form/ artistic work across several years of being and becoming as her core inquiry. These particular principles of research allow for investigating the mystical, metaphysical aspects of a *porous* experience through the conditions under which such an experience can exist.

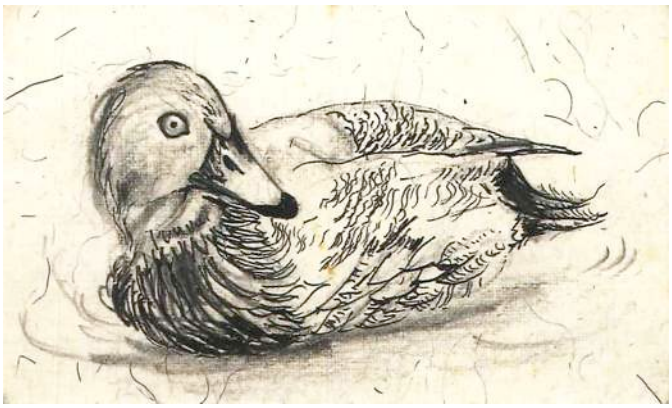


Fig 1: A quick study of the common pochard, for its lazy intensity, 3.5 in X 2 in, 2017.

5. Principles of Experience

Porosity is a state of being, as much as it is a principle of consciousness. Evoking this state of consciousness, and remaining in this state of being for long periods of time takes practice. The practice is in some ways like an act of meditation. Through awareness, observation and contemplation, some of the experiential principles that the *uḷḷam* goes through that have emerged so far are: Melting, Dissolving, Amalgamation, Coalescing, Alchemy, Cracking, Disintegrating, Surrender, Balance, Embody, Transform, Transcend, Transmute, Permeate, Transfer, Sublimate, Play, Reflection, Contemplation, Simultaneity, Becoming, Being and Non-Being.

A moment of watching another being/ landscape can be transformative if one allows for the transmutation of energy and matter. While standing and watching a tailorbird, there is an instance when the tiny weightlessness of the bird begins to melt into me. For a few seconds, the bird permeates its being through me and then there is a transfer of being-ness from one to the other. At the end of this experience, I begin to feel the sense of weightlessness. Out of this experience comes an ability to understand body, mind and intellect differently. My being now is intrinsically intertwined to that of the tailorbird, and he dictates my sense of body, mind, intellect to rediscover myself. Transfer, melting, Becoming, being, coalescing, reflection are all experiential principles that I encounter through this happening.



Fig 2: Sisters and Geese, Pencil drawing, 8.27 in X 11.69 in, 2017.

Do I know you Goose?

Have we met before?

Will you play with me?

I can waddle like you too

And flap my wings to fly!

Inspired by my early years, when my sister pointed out many birds to me and my sense of wonder instilled in early years, I chose to interpret a scene from the life of her daughters capturing the same transfer of passion and magic for life and connection with all beings. This illustration captures a playful moment for the younger child, as well as one that is mystical for the older one, visualising moments of Surrender, Balance and Embodiment for the younger child, Contemplation, Becoming, Permeation and transcendence for the older one.

6. Principles of Engagement

Using Art Practice as Research Methodology

Principles of engagement are essentially a collection of interrelated ideas that form the essence/ guiding code of practice of being developed particularly to study the *porous self.* These provide direction to conducive emotional, mental and intellectual

states when experiencing *porosity*. They also allow one to create an inner space for a *porous* state of consciousness to exist and find firm ground to unravel and unfold. Since much of the experience of the *porous self* emerges in the tacit, invisible, mystical aspects of beingness, it becomes essential to construct principles of engagement that allow one to engage with these experiences, translate them and then further study the processes and outcomes. In particular, when personal art practice is studied as research, principles of engagement essentially make visible tacit beliefs and methods that the artist takes for granted in evolving a body of work.

Photographer Ashvin Mehta's collection " Gifts of Solitude" (1990) provide a glimpse into principles of artistic engagment when they are rooted in cultural nuances and traditional intuitions. Mehta writes, "I was all alone on the beach looking for pictures, when suddenly it happened. As dimensions of time and space vanished, I slowly dissolved in the fathomless blue. Something confined within the narrow shell of my mind and body was hurled into a whirlpool of ecstasy. When I returned to the reality of the sea, and sand, and driftwood logs, it took some time to find my bearings. The invisible bonds of affinity with everything around me made my entry stable and my movements effortless... (Solitude is devotion to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, so that one sees him everywhere). A totally new meaning of solitude dawned on me when I came across the above sentence from the *Srimad Bhāgwat* (7.7.55). Solitude is not isolation, shutting up oneself the outside world of contemplation or work, or out of malaise and depression. It is a state of mystic communion with the source of all energy and all its material manifestations.The photographs in this book are the gifts of such solitude, mostly created in the scintillating moments of my entering the worlds of rocks and trees and water" (Mehta 1990, 5). Judith Mara Gutman in her introduction to this

book captures the nuances of Hindu religious thought in his work (1990, 6-11). Mehta's work is rooted in Indian philosophy and he sees himself becoming part of the great order which is invisible. He tries to portray the five basic elements of fire, space, earth, water and wind -'not as elements but as the gods who form the limbs of the Formless' (1990, 8). Gutman muses how Mehta uses Photography, a form that has 'gained credibility and power through reality' to uncover another underlying reality 'emerging from a religious understanding of life' (1990, 8-9). She points out how Mehta's notion of self is 'fused to indivisible' and how his notion of order, located in stillness amidst disorder and discordant voices is made of non-linear relationships and frameworks that are religious and cultural, associated with Indian cosmology (1990, 10-11). Expanding on ideas that look at the relationship between the inner and the outer, of self and the world in the cultural framework, and studying one's own practice over a period of time, the following principles of engagement have been emerged.

- Be open to non-linear relationships
- Acknowledge intuitive and tacit knowledge
- Investigate paradox
- Study emotions with care and diligence
- Annotate form through cultural nuances
- Study cultural notions of space and time to investigate consciousness
- Slowly journal moments of transition in consciousness
- Reinterpret relationships between idea and image
- Build a layered understanding of creative process in crafting consciousness
- Make art

Principle of Engagement 1 - Be open to Non-linear relationships

This non-linear approach that draws as much from cultural intuition as from the artistic form used for engagement is critical to my own approach of making as well as practice-based and theoretical research. An unconscious impulse that allows me to create, on careful investigation finds its roots in cultural paradigms. This flow of creation, intuition, reflection and research creates specifics principles of engagement and research with life outside, creative work, artistic form and technique, and creative expression. As I sketch, my thoughts often flow across terse philosophical aphorisms, metaphors that hold a complex network of cultural beliefs and ideas. Sometimes, I sketch with none of these thoughts flowing consciously, but emerging in the text that I write alongside, giving me pause to reflect and connect idea and image. Many times these intuitions remain silent, with no possible connections to trace their origins.

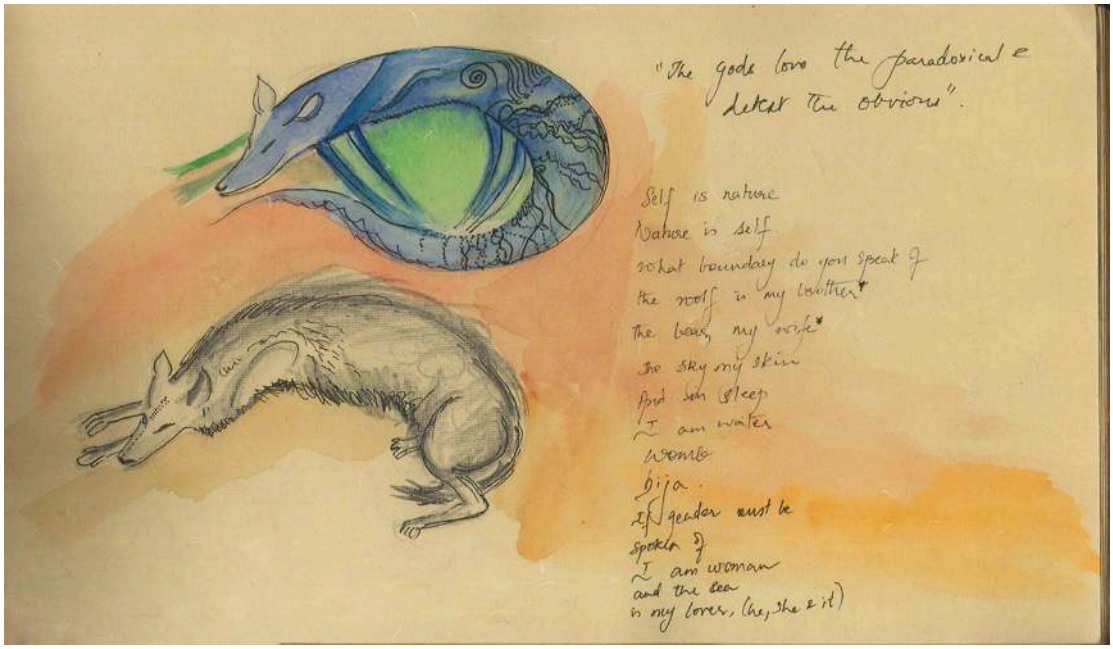


Fig 3: Dreaming Wolf. Mixed media on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

The Indian Wolf is an enigmatic creature. I was sketching to capture its forms, when my own sense of oneness with the being flowed through, allowing me to expand my wolf sketches, to sketches of interiority framed by wolf boundaries. Indian farmers in North Karnataka think of the wolf as their

brother. Bīja, the Sanskrit word for seed, is seen as a metaphor for the origin of things. Working on a sketch like this one opens up doorways to interiority. The sketch happens without thought and when I begin to annotate and observe the outcome closely, it becomes possible to see the non-linear connections that have emerged to create new meaning. These connections draw from ancient memories of self, connection with the natural world, cultural perspectives and symbolism. In studying several such sketches over a period of time, I am able to unravel the methods, principles of engagement that can provide an unhindered space for the creative state and consciousness of being porous.

Principle of Engagement 2 - Acknowledge intuitive and tacit knowledge

Artistic Practices at large, drawing, writing, and performance in particular reference to my work, unpack layers otherwise inaccessible. Likewise the languages of myth, mysticism and poetry allow for greater fluidity of meaning and transient states.

Principle of Engagement 3 - Investigate Paradox

Paradox, incompleteness, inconclusiveness, experimentation, speculation are critical to artistic research (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005, 13-15; Koskinen 2009, 16; Maffioletti, Hjelde and Bradfield 2009, 54). Artistic research allows for questions that are in the realm of paradoxical/ those that cannot be proven, that are different from those of scientific disciplines (Koskinen 2009, 16). Within the inquiry into a *porous self*, paradox touches upon our perception of reality. In *porous* states of being, when we encounter moments of dissolution of our identites and boundaries as we know it, in and through our felt experience, what we believe we know about the world is challenged. We counter logic with illogic or alogic in these mystical experiences. Finding ways to articulate by investigating this nuanced reality of our felt and lived experience allows for investigating paradox.

Principle of Engagement 4 - Study emotions with care and diligence

Throughout his/her practice the artist cultivates the ability to move through emotions, sensitivities, intelligences and experiences allowing one to seep through the other, transforming and transitioning them to find new expression and meaning. The Indian theory of *rasa* as practiced largely in the performing arts, allows for nuanced study of emotions, their representations, subtleties and eventually the mood that they evoke in the audience. This provides a framework for the study of emotional states.

Principle of Engagement 5 - Annotate form through cultural nuances

The study of form cannot happen by excluding form as a research method. Form in relation to space, time and energy can be studied carefully in expression that brings forth insight. Annotating form explorations could be a way of researching. Annotations of processes can become layered in the layout as an invitation for the audience to engage with form and process to acquire a deeper appreciation for its grammar and construction. In making cultural memories, philosophies and intuitions visible through reflection, reading and conscious making, it would be possible to map some of the tacit knowledge back to one's roots.

Principle of Engagement 6 - Study cultural notions of space and time to investigate consciousness

How can artistic practice become a research methodology to investigate consciousness? Between word and image, artistic practice moves between being and non-being, being and becoming, form and formless. It is in spatiality and temporality that consciousness acts. Whether it is word or image, it is only by a creating a platform for the exchange of energy, the study of consciousness in its multiple states

can be delineated. Hence the very delineation of space and time in form becomes a method to inquire. Notions of reality can be different across different worldviews. In mapping some of the cultural notions of space-time, notions of reality can become clearer and therefore the relationships that are possible within a certain world view can be articulated.

Principle of Engagement 7 - Slow journal moments of transition in consciousness

In my work, word and image are closely linked providing me with channels of practice-based inquiry into events, moments of transitions in consciousness, and self-reflection. Both are drawn from my training and practice as a dancer. Movement in space and time therefore play a critical role in my visualizations of both words and images. A word rises in pursuit of an image and vice versa. The strong link between the two, work as leaps of intuition, each feeding into the other. Inquiries into *porosity,* which have been a life long thread in my work, emerge in the illusive spaces of a *porous self*, where no clear definitions exist and tacit meanings, and seemingly mystical experiences are required to be visualized, articulated or explained. A flash of intuition is often a network of millions of connections and very difficult to trace. In slow journaling, it becomes possible to make some of these connections visible and also to reflect on imperceptible changes in one's being.

Principle of Engagement 8 - Reinterpret relationships between idea and image

In reinterpreting how an artist's construction of an idea is perceived through the lens of 'Being' and 'Becoming', it becomes possible to engage with the world around us as something that is pulsating, changing and alive. Without using the differentiation of living and non-living or matter and consciousness, everything around us is seen as

imbued with consciousness. This changes the very perception of what we observe of reality and things around us. The work of the artist, is then about drawing out the essence of this being and becoming-ness of any idea/ subject through image, capturing their consciousness, relationship with its own materiality, and its capacity to change. Each of these within the larger framework of Indian thought is tuned to the Universal being/ essence of life itself. The correspondences between the subject and the universal essence of life become essential to the perception of the artist and thereby the way she goes about creating form/ image.

Principle of Engagement 9 - Build a layered understanding of creative process in crafting consciousness

The conception of form is critical to artistic work. The relationship between idea and the artistic form that it will take is at the heart of the aesthetic-philosophical inquiry of any creative process. The relationship between form and meaning follows in tandem with this. Closely entwined to the relationship of Idea, Form and Meaning is Consciousness. There are several layers in which consciousness must be acknowledged in creative process as discussed in Chapter 6 and reiterated here:

- The consciousness required to create a work of art and the training of the artist,
- The consciousness of the subject of study
- The consciousness that emerges in intersubjectivity
- The consciousness that emerges from study, practice, cultural lineage and the constraints of a given form/ style of art
- The consciousness expressed in the form/ image

- The consciousness that is not independent of corporality and sensuality, but embodied
- The consciousness that is actively socio-political

Principles of engagement thus emerge for each strand of consciousness to build a complex layered practice that can delve into the experience, beingness and consciousness state of *porosity.*

Principle of Engagement 10 - Make Art

While artistic research values careful observation and study of one's own work, it is equally important to disconnect from these observant states to just creating for the sake of creating and free of the research mode of making. While one may continue to make tacit observations in this state of making, the need to remain in an intuitive state of flow, without a strong intellectual observation is critical to being creative and allowing the paradoxical unknown to come forth into being and becoming.

7. Principles of Practice

What is practice as defined here?

There are two layers of practice that are unfolded and inquired into this paper.

1. The creative practices of Visual Art , Writing.

2. Crafting consciousness through and as artistic practice

Hence a curated set of principles have been created in order to engage with *porosity* as a practice of crafting consciousness, and to make tangible and visible practices of visual art and writing. *Sādhanā,* the Sanskrit word for practice, is understood as a

spiritual and meditative practice, where the artist seeks to immerse herself in a state of transcendence or oneness with the universal consciousness through her creative practice. The curated set unravels the terse meaning of the word *Sādhanā* to elicit each aspect of this word that goes into building a comprehensive practice.

Why does one need principles of practice?

There is both complexity and paradox in every creative act. When we are driven by intuitive flashes and insights that emerge in seemingly unconnected moments, it helps to understand one's own creative processes and from within these, look for a certain pattern or order that can inform and help one create a space in the conciousness for creative moments. *Porosity* is a specific state of consciousness and often elusive to reach into and experience. The principles of engagement help one to keep this state open, and the principles of practice help in building a practice that allows the elusive experiences to be acknowledged, articulated and crafted into visual/ written form.

How do they work?

Principles of Practice as evolved here are a curated set that emerges from the cultural philosophical framework outlined in the introduction. Non-Linear in their relationship with each other, however the seven principles outline below act as intricate web of ideas that work as a set and not independently. While it may appear that individual works/ sketches could be through one or other principle of practice, a body of work that evolves under the framework of *porosity* would use the entire set in its evolution.

What are they?

My practice emerges through seven key principles: Artistic reflection, ritual practice, philosophical inquiry, metaphysical embodiment, physical transience, mythological storytelling and aesthetic play. Through movement, text and image, through gardening, walking, pausing and listening, I build everyday practices that become my grounds for artistic inquiry and research. 'Movement is a continuous problem to deal with in painting. A painting is a static image, but the construction of a painting is performative,' says artist Catrin Webster, who goes on to write how performance painting turns into a meditative process when capturing her journeys through the Welsh landscape (Merriman and Webster 2009, 528-529).

> "We experience life through our senses, this I'd call real experience, first hand engagement with the world around us in the moment. I see my arts practice as increasing opportunity for such engagement, art as a doorway between our inner and outer worlds." - (Richard Keating 2019)

Our acts of perception emerge from simple embodied everyday actions like walking, driving, looking through a window, digging, planting, composting. In Richard Keating's work, he uses 'art-walking' practice as a way of place-making and developing landscape aesthetics (Keating 2014). Actions and art-making are entwined in my practice, as actions themselves become line, space and form, and performative art (Ilango & Kalyan, 2015). As Webster draws out the richness of her art practice pointing out how travel journeys, repeating a certain journey or circuit, becomes itself a form of a drawn line (Webster 2014). My work draws on the interconnectedness between everyday actions and engagement, and the principles of practice to emerge an art of transforming consciousness.

Artistic reflection – Reflection that happens through practice of art; Reflections happen both through the creation of form and the diverse artistic processes that is involved in the act of making. Sometimes form itself is the reflection, be it text or image or movement. This nature of reflection allows for intrinsic action in artistic practice and sometimes extends to everday action as well. A thoughtful awareness of practice leads to artistic reflection. Drawing from meditative practices of the arts, *Yoga* and *Vedānta*, reflection here, is the process of consciousness reflecting on itself. This lens of reflection is critical for a practice of *porosity* as it is built on the notion of reality where inner and outer correspond with each other. For example this paradoxical process is evoked through the iconography and symbolism of *Śiva* as the Lord of Dance, *Naṭarāja. Naṭarāja* dances in the heart of the devotee, indicated by a lotus at the base, however he also dances within the expanse of the cosmos as indicated by the aureole of flames that surround him. For the devotee, *cit,* consciousness is his interiority as well as the hall of consciousness, where *Naṭarāja* dances- the *citambalam.* This ability for the cosmic, macro, universal consciousness to reside within the inner, micro, individual consciousness, and one to be conscious of the other, is considered as one of the best iconographic symbols of reflection and enlightenment within the tradition.

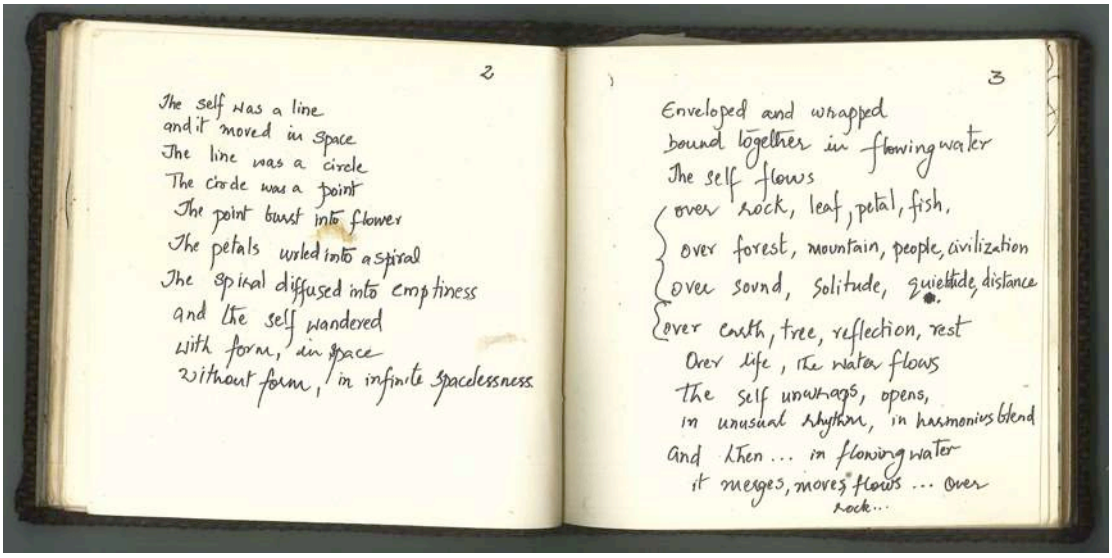


Fig 4: Pages from journal, Reflective poem on Self drawing out the relationship between the inner and outer worlds. The reflection draws upon the cultural perspective of the macro and micro entwined and reflective of each other. This kind of reflection allows for a flow of consciousness that moves seamlessly across all beings and derives from a cosmology as well as highly developed symbolism in the Indian tradition. 5 in X 5 in Journal size, 2008.

Ritual practice – *Yajña* and *sādhanā* are two words that denote intensive and meditative practice in the Indian arts. *Yajña* also indicates transformation that an individual experiences through a creative process as observed by Kak (Kak 2006). Practice when taken into account in this light becomes an act of self-transformation and deep change within oneself. From walking quietly in natural spaces and listening to other beings to the act of painting, writing poetry, gardening, composting, each action becomes then a ritual practice of being, an aesthetic state of *rasa* in which correspondences are established between the microcosm and macrocosm. *Rasa* here is a state of being, the soul of relationship between inner and outer. Time and space when consecrated for *yajña* and *sādhanā*, become sacred time and space where exchange and continuum between self and cosmos become possible through symbols, myths, narratives, traditional knowledge systems and notions of being (Vatsyayan 1997, 21-50).

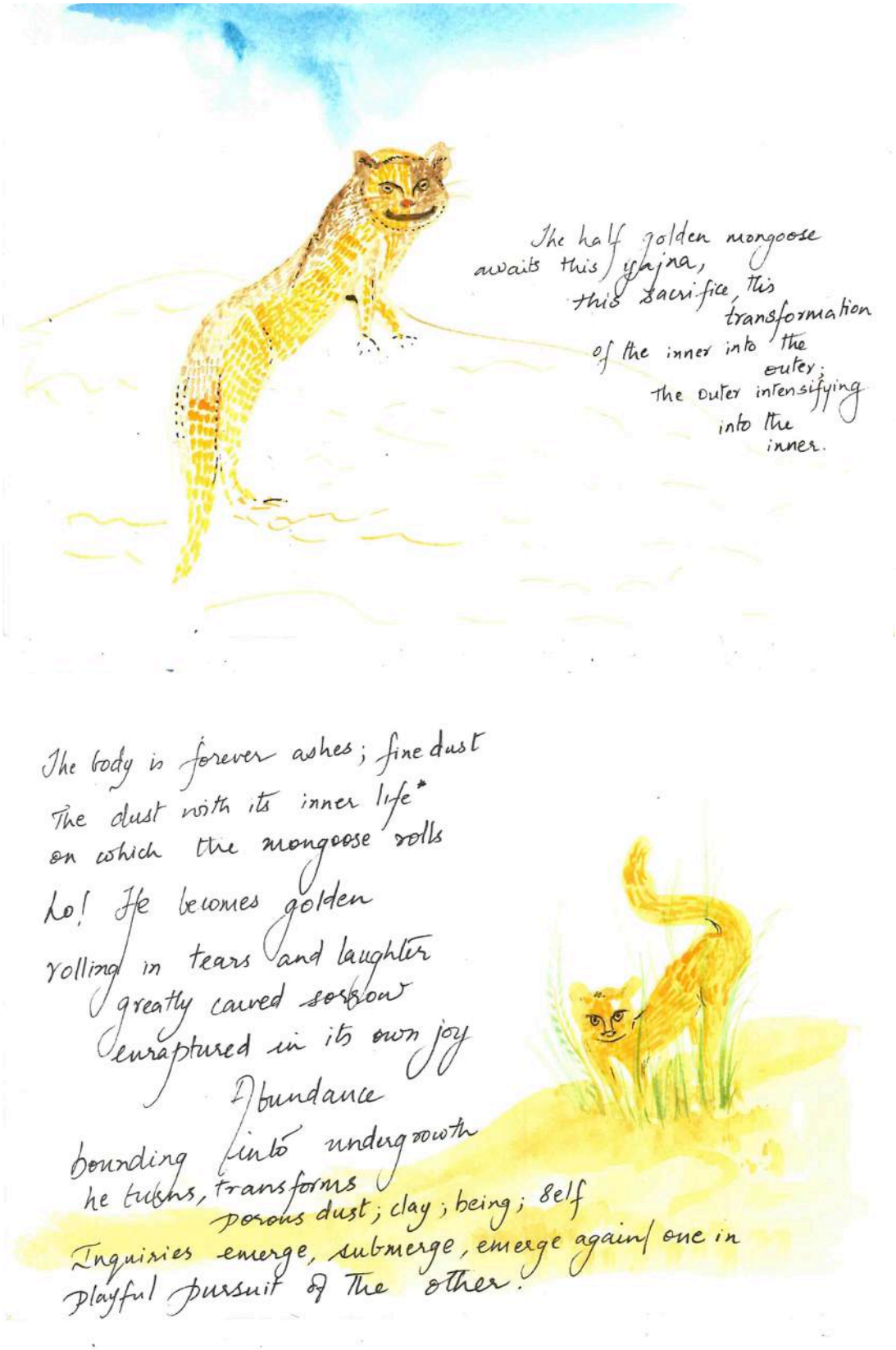


Fig 5 & 6: Transformations of the Golden Mongoose, watercolours on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2016.

The inquiry of the artist is an unique process of research. The concerns here are many. But at the heart of this inquiry lies paradox, magic, alchemy. The story of the half golden mongoose in the Mahābhārata talks about the essence of yajña. A fundamental transformation, requires simplicity of giving, of willing sacrifice rather than opulent show. The mongoose who was a cursed young man, had transformed into half-golden when he rolled over the food that an old man and his family had sacrificed to a guest, even as they had been hungry for a week. This, the mongoose finds to be the greatest of yajña. He comes to Yudishtira's grand yajña and in vain attempts to transform the other half of his body into gold. Boldly he claims that Yudhiṣṭhira's yajña is false and does not stand up to the greatness of the poor man's yajña. As Indian stories go, rich in metaphor and perplexing, the mongoose remains a stark and important imagery in my mind. And so I choose the half golden mongoose as the guiding light, the judge of this yajña. He becomes the quiet inner voice as well, allowing me to characterize him, invite him to join in this journey and seek the essence of transformation through him. He is a symbol of transformation, of sacrifice, of yajña. His straightforwardness, embodied experience and bold pronouncement of what he considers a yajña, a good voice to trust.

Philosophical inquiry – Much of my artistic quest stems from philosophical enquiries into the nature of existence, self and being, meaning-making and Indian speculative-thought traditions. A philosophical approach to both art-making and ecological consciousness reframes my thinking within the realm of eco-ethics. This in turn impacts my play with form, technique, media and material. Critical to Indian notions of philosophy is practice- *Yoga*, where mind and body, inner and outer align together. In Donna Farhi's insightful words, the practice of *yoga*, a self-reflective journey,

> ‘has not made our world smaller and more encapsulated but rather has dismantled our perception of separation. This new awareness allows us to see that no matter how different we may appear on the surface, we all share the same life. And it allows us to see that no matter how convinced we are of our own ideas, there is always another facet to consider. Such an undefended self can arise only out of the inner tempering process of daily practice. Such is the paradoxical virtue of practice. Through steeling and strengthening ourselves in the kiln of daily practice, we unleash our capacity to be vulnerable, tender, and open.’ (Farhi 2008, 10)

Artistic practice is in itself yoga. Finding and relinking the profound and the mundane in everyday action is critical in my work. This is also crafting of consciousness that arises from cultural notions of *neṟi/ muṟai,* more than tradition or a way of life, it is a way of being, where the philosophical, sacred and the mundane everyday flow in a singular frame of responsible living.

The following poem (written in 2017) ‘Vāc’ interprets the Hindu notion of ‘Word’ as imbued with magic, mysticism and profound mystery. Visualized in Indian sculpture and painting in the form of a lion or a mixed creature called Yali or Sardula, the power of word and meaning in the Goddess Vāc. Drawing from the philosophy of Vāc, the poem distils the essence of the relationships between word, meaning and extends them to questions of cognitive justice, culture and identity.

Vāc

Come reclaim me,

roaming wild spirit of lioness

of word and inner meaning

suffused, diffused

into this raw land

that unfolds

cradling you and me

like newborns;

like warriors

Give me back my

native tongue

the living flame of

my connections with my

land

and

sky

Come claim me

Vāc, seething goddess

of word and meaning

ravage my senses

so I may come alive again,

let me ride on your

back

Mother, and mysterious

thread of consciousness

Let us roam across wilderness

of plundered land and abundant forest

Teach me again,

teach all that I have forgotten of my

people's voices

Come reclaim me,

roaming wild spirit of lion

of word and inner meaning

suffused, diffused

into this inner

hall of consciousness.



Fig 7: Yāḷi Pillar inspired by 7th century Pallava Sculptures, Mahabalipuram; Illustration created for Young Adult fiction – 'Parthiban's Dream', 2005, Katha Publishers, New Delhi, Indian Ink with dry brush technique in cartridge paper, 5 in X 8 in, 2005.



Fig 8: Yāḷi and child playing with words, Illustration for self authored story 'A pearl! A costly pearl! Did you find any?' selected for Katha Chitrakala Award 2005, 11.7 in X 16.5 in, 2005.

Metaphysical embodiment – Transcendence is nothing but deep self-knowing. 'Art leads to transcendent knowledge, which, in the spirit of Vedanta, is nothing other than self-knowledge' writes Harsha Dehejia. (Dehejia 2000, 2). *Porosity* can be practiced only when our perception opens up to consider possibilities that are beyond the physical. And moving beyond the gross physical into the subtle space of mind, intellect and breath to inquire into beingness is critical to reflect on *porosity.* Beingness further expands when the idea of self is broken from within its limits as of a physical body to encompass a more universal self. This act of breaking the self, allowing other beings to seep through and experience the energy and spirit of other beings in oneself is a practice of metaphysical embodiment. Abram in his poetic lush approach, writes of this intimacy with life in many different ways. To quote him,

> 'To step into the shadow of this mountain is to step directly under the mountain's influence, letting it untangle your senses as the rhythm of your breath adjusts to its breathing, to the style of its weather. To step into its shadow is to become apart, if only for this moment, of the mountain's life. Just as shadows are not flat shapes projected upon the ground (but rather dense and voluminous spaces), neither are they measurable quantities, mere consequences of sunlight and its interruptions. Shadows are qualitative attributes of the bodies that secrete them. … To find oneself in the shadow of a mountain is to abruptly find oneself exposed to the private life of the mountain, to feel its huge and manifold influence on the local world that lies beneath it, to enter the gravitational power of its intelligence, a sagacity no longer dissolved in the dazzling radiance of the sun.' (Abram 2011, 13-25)



Fig 9: Sahṛdayās - The Great Wilderness. Acrylic on Canvas, 3ft X 3.5ft, 2009.

Touching the great wilderness

Men,women, eagle, fish,

Leaves in conversations,

Curved forms, bent tree

Children in embrace

Leaping, laughing

In heart woven heart

sahṛdayās

Emerge

Rest

Submerge

Fly

Breathing in and

Breathing out,

The great

Wilderness.

Physical Transience - Allowing one's physical being to change, morph and transmute in response to the natural environment is part of my practice. Whether it is using the gestures of dance or walking among trees, listening quietly and deeply to the surrounding environment and responding to its rhythms with my body allows me to engage with the space and beings in it differently from when I move in the same spaces without awareness. This ability to allow the body to fluidly respond to the rhythms of the outer world, therefore drawing it into the inner is one of my central approaches to physical transience. Being aware of the ephemerality of these experiences is critical to understanding and deepening practices of *porosity*. "*Yoga* attempts to create a state in which we are always present—really present—in every action, in every moment" (Desikachar, 1995, 6). This intensive awareness of mind and body, and an integrated self lies at the heart of physical transience.



Fig 10: Grey Heron in Flight. Acrylic on Canvas, 2016, 1.5ft X 2ft

There is this wingspan of the grey heron as she takes off from a branch close by. Grey. Orange. Black. White. Graceful flight. Camouflaged landing up in the trees. For a moment our forms are impermeable and then the boundary slips. She is heron and I human. She is wing and feather and lightness and I am hand and torso and much more solid... and yet when the boundary slips, it is only awareness that changes and imperceptibly form becomes a shapeshifting play. That wingspan is now mine as also the lift of her head. I walk. She flies. But her wingspan has changed my awareness...and therefore imperceptibly it has altered my form...

Mythological storytelling - Space and time can easily be altered in mythology. Mythology affords characterizations and ploys that are often unavailable in everyday language. In Mythology it is possible to build multiple layers, symbolism, circular, non-linear and recursive narratives. Also, existing Hindu mythology is rich in content and purpose and in subverting, inverting, interpreting and reengaging with myths as deeper truths, new understandings begin to emerge about diverse experiences.





Fig 11 & 12: Kor̲r̲avai and the peacock; Kor̲r̲avai and the Golden Deer. Illustrations for a self-authored story 'Kor̲r̲avai and the blue stone", that investigate the relationship between Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, Nature and Matter in the form of dance. The myths and movements are informed by own practice of Bharatanātyam as a classical dance form. Watercolour and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 16 in, 2007.

Aesthetic Play – *Porosity,* with relevance to my work is one of the central principles of aesthetic play. Aesthetic play is both ornamentation and grammar. Play for me is envisioned as *līlā*, a wondrous space of *māyā* as well.

'In India, poetics, the *alamkāra-śāstra,* is one of the central sciences, a natural extension of the great paradigmatic discipline of grammar…' (Shulman 2012, 53). Never bound by a singular style or form and continuing to be *porous*, my work spreads across art and design, writing and movement improvisations. From children's picture books, to books of poetry, paintings, workshop designs, curriculum, I choose expression of the central principle in diverse contexts and media. Children's Illustration allows me to play with forms, characters, storylines, while paintings allow me to explore abstract forms. Poetry allows me to work with different poetic devices as ornamentation, metaphor and analogical reasoning being key among many others. Movement allows embodied experimentation of emotion, experience and actions that are *porous* in nature.

Notes for Painting (Figure 10): 9th April 2016, Bandipur, The ficus

Somewhere along the curve, further away from the roads, a ficus stands in the fields adjoining the forest. In a self-contained circle she rules the landscape with simple elegant ease. I am mesmerized when I watch her and wonder what made her fashion herself like that. The hanging roots are in varying lengths, but they appear like rain, like waterfall, The rhythmic song that seems to be the form of this tree is reminiscent of water. I am drawn to it like I am drawn to the raincatcher. It rises in perfect cylindrical geometry and yet breaks that in the organic flow of its branches and roots, of its million leaves dancing in the wind. This tree is song, but of such extraordinary stillness that she appears to anchor all the land around her as well as the sky. And just as she anchors them all, she finds a way to draw me in too. Even as I have always wondered about the architecture of trees, this time when I look at this particular ficus tree, I get the feeling, perhaps an insight that these fine beings



Fig 13: Nekiḻci: Moments of transformation, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 4ft X6ft, 2016.

are extraordinarily conscious of their own form and craft themselves diligently. In trees, I begin to sense a nature of consciousness that as humans we have no clue about and no tools to measure. But I would hedge my bet on the trees and bet that it wasn't just land, sun, water and other resources that shaped her form, but a conscious process by which the tree crafted herself in that space.

Notes for Painting (Figure 10): 30th January 2016, Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh

The pochard sleeps content in still water

The water sleeps content in the stillness of the reflection.

The common pochard sleeps on a still lake and I feel rested.

The black headed ibis fly. The marsh shifts, air lightens. Another imperceptible shift; Space and time alter instantaneously. Why be stuck in human space-time when ibis can cleverly alter it.

The old heron rests in the forest... I watch him through the lacework of leaves and branches. He is old and I age with him in simple resonance. I walk away, but the ageing stays... as restful stillness.

8. Aesthetic Devices

Aesthetic Devices are techniques and methods that I develop to recreate my experiences in form. While there can be many kinds of aesthetic devices, these are the few that currently inform my practice. Form can be the gross form that I develop for a painting or poem, a movement piece, or it can be the subtle form of consciousness. Both the gross forms and the subtle forms have materiality and physicality. The devices help to play with this materiality to shift states of being and also to make visible these shifts. Forms may transmute from one into the other, media might change and inks and acrylics may play together to create diverse weight shifts, a word may transition into another, a construction of paragraph or verse meter may alter. All of these devices support the nature of being that emerges through *porosity*:

Continuous Narration,

Recursion,

Seamlessness,

Shape shifting temporal

and spatial play,

Fluidity,

Permeability,

Malleability,

Transitions and Transience,

Repetition,

Interweaving,

Transparency,

Simultaneity,

Rhythm,

Myth and Symbolism,

Simultaneity.



Fig 14: "This Becomes That." A journal sketch in planning for a series. The sketch uses folk style form and imagery to capture seamless flow of life and death, through a continuous narration sequence, that looks at the paradox of one form transmuting into another. Pen and ink on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

This becomes that,

frog becomes snake,

slushy leaves

are now great rainforest,

the mighty streams, we.

9. Form and Principles of Form

Movement, Text and Image are the three primary forms of practice that I choose for my exploration. To me they emerge as one transdisciplinary practice, each influencing the other in terms of evolution of technique, understanding diverse experiences as well as creative expression. This kind of practice, that emerges as a melded whole from many different forms to have an underlying set of common principles is a key framework of my practice. This integrated practice is in line with Kapila Vatsyayan's framework of Indian art, philosophy and aesthetics. While there are several individual pieces of work that are part of an inquiry into *porosity,* which are in one kind of form or another, the whole meaning of the inquiry emerges in the consolidated practice of movement, text and image.

Movement brings the body into being; Text and Image allow for mental, intellectual play. It is when all three come together that intense transitions and experiences become possible. Image and text are like two different languages, the nature of visualizations in both is different and so are the outcomes of these two forms. In their very nature, they allow for diverse kind of experientialities. The idea of these explorations is not so much an attempt to build expertise in any one form. The purpose of inquiring through these forms is to better understand *porosity* as a principle and engage with *porosity* in the visible worlds that form permits. The diversity of form allows for deeper inquiries. In crafting form, artists craft consciousness and perception. Study of form cannot happen by excluding form as a research method. Form in relation to space, time and energy can be studied carefully in its expression/ expressivity in the work of the artist to draw out insights.

Each of the images as well as the poem below look at creating a series of diverse inquiries into one form of practice or the other. They then also exemplify a particular kind of form as an output/ outcome - a posture, an illustrated work, a still from an animation and an installation. The priniciples of form under investigation include but are not limited to:

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practice - Conceptual and philosophical frameworks are shared across forms of practice as well as outputs allowing for exchange and fluid evolution and expression of experiences as well as ideas.

Embodied Practice - Consciously bringing body-mind-action into alignment to create a highly alert and meditative state of consciousness.

Materiality - Studying materiality of media used to be able to make the media supple to suggestions of *porosity* and varied principles/ aspects of *porosity*, staying in alignment with notions of being and becoming, inner and outer correspondences.

Metaphor and paradox - Playing with language as well as visuality to craft and express the tacit-invisible. Form as a means to expressing essence of being and transformation.

Time-Space-Energy - Allowing for leaps and jumps in consciousness to accomodate a *porous* state of being. Finding appropriate techniques and methods to depict these in practice.

Axis - Situating the work and oneself around an axis, so that there is clarity in expressing a moment of transition, a state of being, a particular principle at work, a change or transformation perceived within oneself. Using any one aspect of material, concept/ word or body to create the axis around which a more complex form evolves.

Translation - Cultivating the interconnected and complex relationships between media and material, form and expression, experience and conceptualization, intuition and execution, crafting and spontaneity.

Here again, these principles of form are to be seen as a set that allow for a depth practice into *porosity.* It is a non-linear set, but the set emerges from the notion of *Bhāva* (being and becoming) as discussed earlier as well as the notion of *Sādhāna* (meditative practice), allowing for a complexity in the understanding of form and how the artist approaches working with form.

-

Poem

The axis in the poem is drawn in the link between the individual self and the spirit of the landscape and space of Bandipur. In the metaphor as well as the physical presence of the Banyan, *(Ficus benghalensis)*, a large evergreen tree, the axis is centred both visually and as an anchor on which the poem as well as experience rests. Hours of slipping in and out of different beings and bodies in the forest form continuous narratives that slip in and out creating a highly dynamic, permeable space.

Bandipur (Forest reserve in South India)

The banyans in monsoon mist

Ah, stillness takes root

far inside the earth,

permeating through my senses...

As longing reaches out and touches

open grasslands hidden in the forest,

The tiger prowls by somewhere near.

The banyan breathed me in early yesterday morning

and I found myself in bamboo growth, leaf, shiver

Only to become camouflage

Of stripes

And tiny wings in momentary rest

Oh but, she hurled me out of bamboo

Root and all

And I was left

Soul in tango

With the tiniest black

Frog

Soon lost

breathing as mushroom, monitor

and water holes...

shy gaur

Swinging their heads in graceful rhythm

Babblers, warblers and the golden oriole...

Oh she took me far into the earth,

All the way to the night sky...

The banyan

Roots and all, she took me in

And with a careless flick

Sitting in the bus back home,

I was uprooted...



Fig 15: A recent image of self, holding a Bharatnāṭyam posture that indicates harmony with nature and allows the dancer to connect her axis with the axis of the landscape. This embodied practice of drawing correspondences between inner and outer is the essential premise/ condition under which porosity becomes a lived reality for me, Seattle, 2017.



Fig 16: A shot from scenes of a 3DS max animation sequence titled "The Living Brain" that explores the relationship between self, compassion and experience through a surreal space narrative. Animation uses paintings in mixed media to create textures and backgrounds. New and mixed media techniques allow for one to inquire into more mythical/ alternative space-time options, particularly the way time and space move in our consciousness and imagination. Storytelling and animation allow for the construction of narratives of the inner reality. Form here inquires into these fluid space-time concepts allowing different inner realities to become visible, 2002.

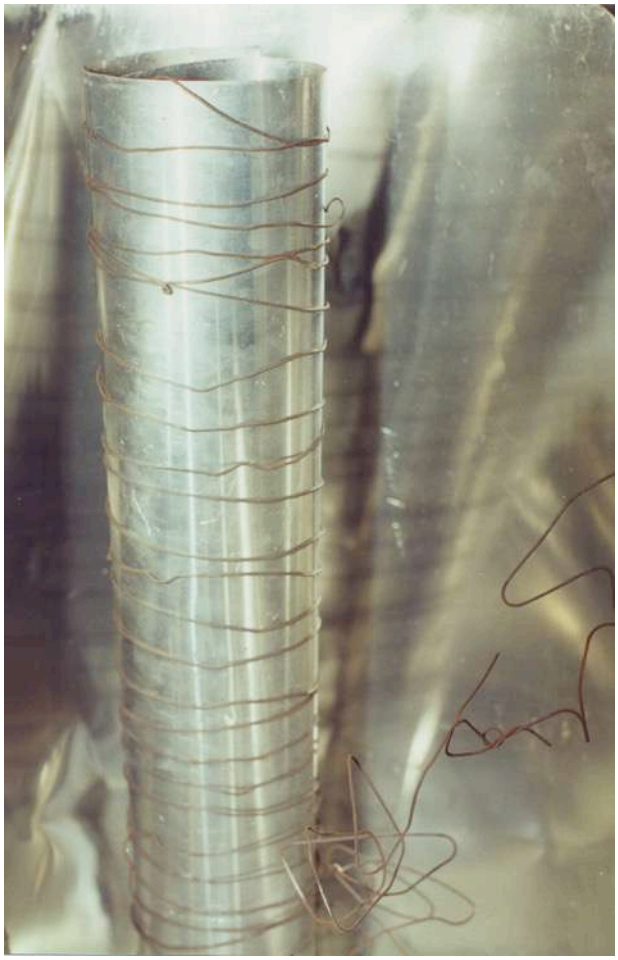


Figure 17: 'Temple' is an installation that looks at exploring the inner and the outer in a constant series of reflective exchanges through mixed media. Materiality is essential study when working with form. In this work, illusion as an aspect of the materiality of aluminium is used to capture a complex mystical experientiality and how discovering the correspondences between

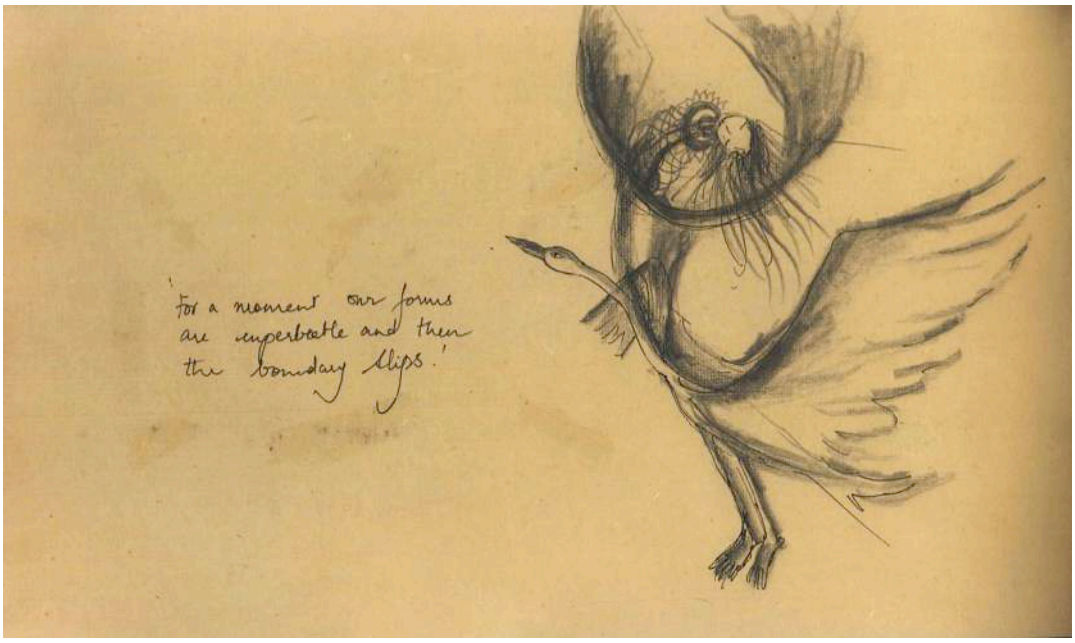


Fig 18: Sketch to show how the physical materiality of one form may dissolve into another in an ecstatic moment of porosity. Trying to find words and form to experience. Pencil, pen and ink on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in.

10. Artistic Directions

Artistic directions can take many different approaches. Each approach contains within it a certain world view and tendency. As an artist, designer and illustrator my work has been spread across a varied range of directions to suit different kinds of contexts. Over time, I have valued this diversity of directions and approaches, as it opens different cognitive centres within me. In my quest to explore *porosity,* I find it meaningful to bring together a diversity of directions in order to inquire into the multidimensional nature of *porosity.* Some of the directions that I am pursuing include:

Aesthetic,

Romantic,

Scientific,

Interpretative,

Illustrative,

Activist,

Symbolic,

Metaphysical,

Educational.

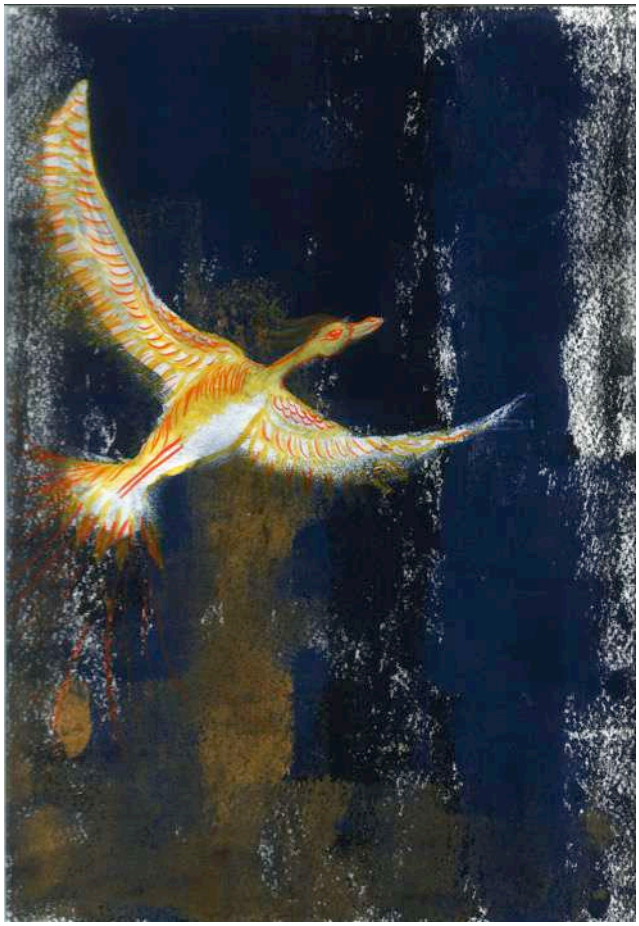


Fig 19: From a series of paintings of the mythical Haṃsa, A swan/ goose that represents consciousness and breath. Acryclic on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.



Fig 20: Naturalistic painting of the blue-eyed bush frog, Raorchestes luteolus, neelanethrus, a species that I encountered in the Western Ghats as part of my ecological inquiries. Water colours and ink on water colour paper, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

X

Significance

To sense the meaning of our existence can we shed all human perception to enter vicariously our own planet of all pervading life and the cosmic universe in which it is embedded? Fluidly, devoid of our silos and borders of self, community, beliefs and values, can we enter mountain and sea, sun and star, flight of the firefly and silently shifting sands? Letting go of all that we hold as ours, our knowledge, our traditions, our cultures, our discoveries, our intelligences, can we enter a zone of sentience and observe, participate and evolve within life anew?



Fig 21: The tree maidens – Śālabhañjikās are a recurrent motif in Indian art through time, as symbols of abundance. I interpret them for their gentle intimacy they appear to share with life, providing us with sinuos flow of lines from one living being to another. 5 in X 5 in journal size, 2008.

Then slowly, with the gentle wisdom of a dewdrop residing on grass, can we recover all that we know and have learnt as humans through this consciousness that allows us to be reflective inhabitants of a shared universe. What would it mean to turn inward to resolve one's relationship with the earth and the universe through unraveling our shared bond of creativity? (Uhl, 2013). Does our cultural upbringing allow us to enter or close our doorways to all life; Can we be free of it or is it inherent, subconsconsious and intuitive? There is much to ponder when one unravels states of being *porous* through artistic practice.

11. Discussion

Corner emphasizes the need for training of the aesthete by discussing the notion of aesthetic "difficulty" and varied ways in which aesthetes encounter and engage with these moments of experiencing works of art. As he insightfully argues, "Certain kinds of artistic work require a greater degree of prior orientation and contextualisation in order to be appreciated than others, a fact sometimes neglected by those who believe that, for instance, the qualities of a particular piece of music, writing or painting will 'connect' immediately with anyone regardless of their aesthetic biography to date. This is very rarely true" (Corner, 2016, 3). In order to expand artistic research and inquiry, it is essential to describe and expand notions of "aesthetic difficulty" for the observer as well. In particular, cultural notions of creativity open the space for different ways of experiencing the world, diverse notions of being and corresponding aesthetics.

Symbolism, Iconography, myth, metaphor, Indian aesthetics and philosophy draw upon an intrinsic ecological consciousness, where nature is not necessarily the

observed botanical reality, but the interconnected flow of life. The creative process therefore stems from a notion of perception, where the artist experiences herself in all life, in oneness. Form too therefore does not seek botanical realities, but a symbolic truth of being. Are these ways of thinking, being and making true to everyone who may stem from this culture? – Obviously not! However, tracing this thread of consciousness through practice, allows for a nuanced study of a lineage that goes back over seven thousand years of human history. And these intangible, yet powerful links to ancient creative processes remain contemporary, relevant and essential to developing an intrinsic notion of ecological justice for all beings.

Philosophy of art, aesthetics and consciousness are integral to an artist's creativity and her ability to evolve aesthetic principles. However this process is not linear and hierarchical. Rather, often aesthetic principles translate into art and consciousness as well. This recursive loop of art, consciousness and aesthetics forms the crux of the artist's meditations on form, in text, image or movement. For the artist, it is the creative process, the vision and the embodiment of the vision that is performance rather than a final work of art, be it visual or a singular performance on stage. *Porosity* as a principle of consciousness as well as one of artistic practice is then informed by principles of engagement that further help in delineating aesthetic principles and grammar of form.

As consciousness expands, philosophy too opens up into creative paradoxes allowing the artist to revel in the creativity of the universe. In this unique relationship, in the light of traditional Indian world views, art becomes celebration and reflective meditation as well as self-knowledge or transcendence. Form transforms

consciousness as consciousness transmutes forms, each constantly influencing the other in a recursive infinite loop. Both form and consciousness play with each other to touch the *porous* states, and then move beyond it into the formless, beyond form. This is philosophy, yet strangely it is also art.

Part 4

Application, Analysis And Discussions

Chapter 11

Picture of Practice - Bird and Line

- Tracing Indian Aesthetics to Find an Ecosophy of Personal Art Practice

"Two birds perfectly winged, sysygies[1] companions,

Embrace the same tree.

Of them one eats of the nourishing sweet Pippala fruit[2],

While the other eats not, but over-sees"

- Ṛg Veda 20, Hymn 164, Maṇḍala 1

Translation by Balaji (2013)[3]

Note: A slightly abridged version of this chapter has been accepted for publication in

Kalyanasundaram, Srisrividhiya. 2020. "Bird and Line: Tracing Indian aesthetics to find an 'Ecosophy' of personal art practice". The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy (Accepted for December 2020), Canada.

[1] *sysygies* refers to a pair of opposites, yoked/ paired in conjunction or opposition, a pair of connected or corresponding things

[2] Fig tree, Ficus religiosa

[3] Vikraman Balaji's translation visualizes the two birds in a dynamic and equal relationship. He also differentiates between the Vedic and *Upaniṣadic* interpretations of the two birds. In the Vedic version chosen here, he interprets both birds in an equal partnership without any conflict between each other. In the *Upaniṣadic* version, however the participating bird is lost and is trying to find its way back to the ultimate reality.

Sections

1. Abstract
2. Artistic Inquiry
3. Developing an artistic inquiry and research practice using key principles in traditional Indian Aesthetics
    3.1. Principle 1: Arts as Spiritual Exercise
    3.2. Principle 2: Arts as Interrelated
    3.3. Principle 3: Arts and Aesthetic Emotion
4. Birds as a Point of Artistic Investigation
5. The Body in Training
6. Line as a Tool, Method and Philosophy
7. Process/Journey
8. Unfolding and Infolding
9. Aesthetic Method Towards Ecological Consciousness
    9.1. Contemplation
    9.2. Transience
    9.3. Creativity
    9.4. Experience
    9.5. Transcendence
10. Conclusion

1. Abstract

'Bird and Line' is an artistic inquiry into the relationship between a deep state of artistic consciousness and the act of drawing a line to arrive at the form of a bird. This inquiry further proposes that by using line as a mode of research, the artist begins to perceive the consciousness of a bird and the relationship it shares with its form.

For me, the embodied and *porous* experiences of watching and knowing birds through the practice of working with 'line' as an artistic element allows for an intimacy of experiencing, and an unfolding of intersubjectivity. Artistic inquiry also acts as an investigation into self-awareness and self-realization in this space of making eco-art. These acts of being lead me into reflections on how perception and creativity are melded together during creative moments, to allow for a *porous* consciousness to emerge and perform the act of drawing a bird. As an artist working with text, movement and image, I embed questions on the ethics of creativity into how we evolve our lines of art, as well as encounter other beings. By unraveling the relationship between the inner and the outer through Indian aesthetic philosophy, I evolve methods for eco-art practice using line as an element. I emphasize the importance of artistic research with a framework of Indian aesthetics as a way of deepening our perception and relationships with the natural world.

This chapter is written to make artistic processes visible through a reflective auto-ethnographic approach. I write in a non-linear reflective narrative to comprehend cultural ontologies that drive my practice, unfolding internal thought processes, directions of research and moments of mystical experience.

2. Artistic Inquiry

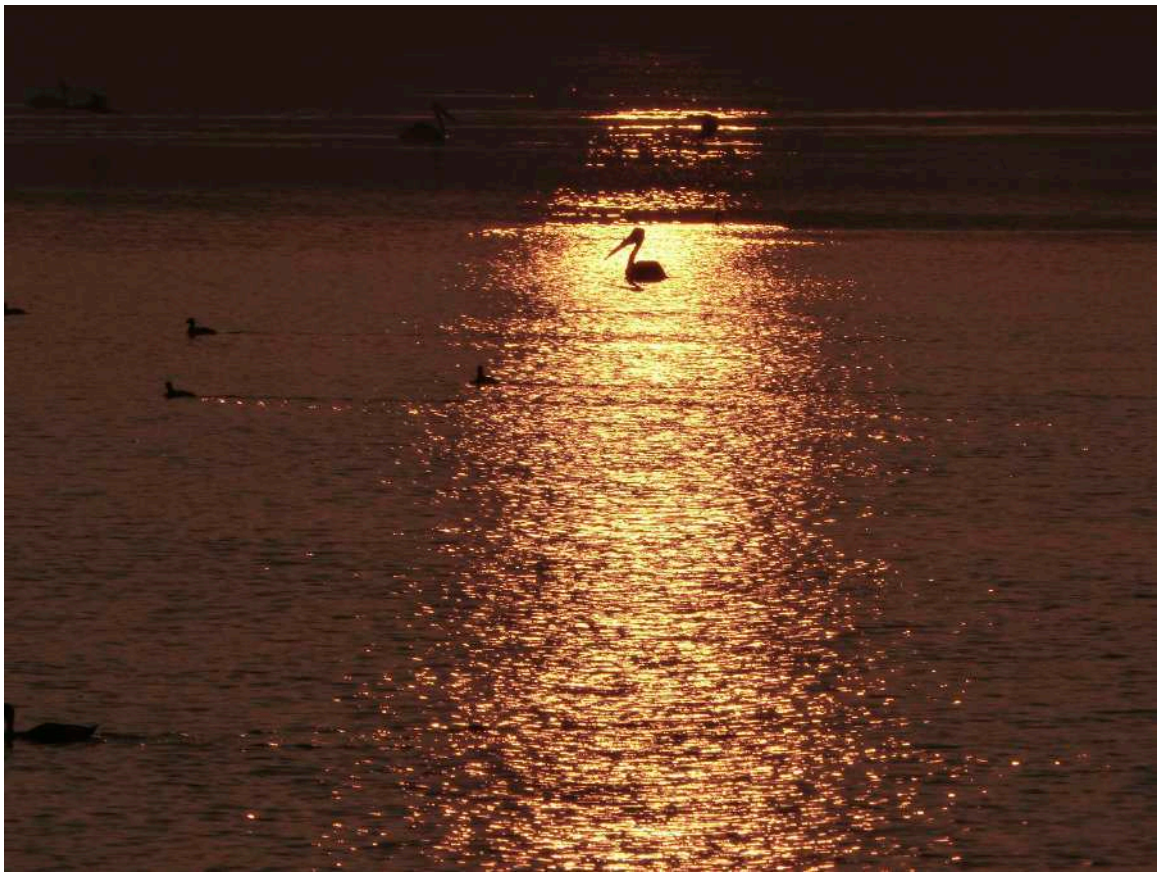


Fig 1: Pelican gliding in Jakkur lake at dawn, March 2017.

I have been sketching birds for a while now wondering to myself why I seem to be captivated with them. The regal pelicans at Jakkur lake, Bengaluru, India have stilled my mind in the last few months. For a few years now, I have been fascinated with cranes, herons, pelicans, black-headed ibis, cormorants and the flamingoes. Shelducks, pochards, painted storks, darters, egrets, pintails – The list is rather endless. There is something transformative about watching lakes, ponds, birds in their contained movements bursting into sudden flight. I am enthralled as I am curious about their beings. There are many ways in which one can choose to be curious. I for one am curious about the relationship between form and consciousness. I wonder as I

watch the wingspans of painted storks and herons, why it is that they choose to embody these forms. Elegance, sensuousness, gracious beauty, lightness of being and clearly unique temperaments to match their glorious forms, I am forever caught in the elusive line that traces their forms. From beak to wingtip, from webbed feet to ruffled feather, sinuous, light strong dynamic line! – still, preening, resting, perching, curious, taking-off, flying, swooping, turning, gliding, turning, landing.

And out of these countless encounters with birds, I quest for my line. It is an impulse to trace their bodies, somehow draw the incredible essence of their form into the very nature of my line; clearly a tall order that I have set for myself. It is much like learning to play a thousand disjointed notes. I draw again and again, broken lines, interwoven with their own idiosyncrasies – bird line, beak line, wing line, webbed feet line, ruffled feather line, tail feather line, rest line, flight line… wind line…

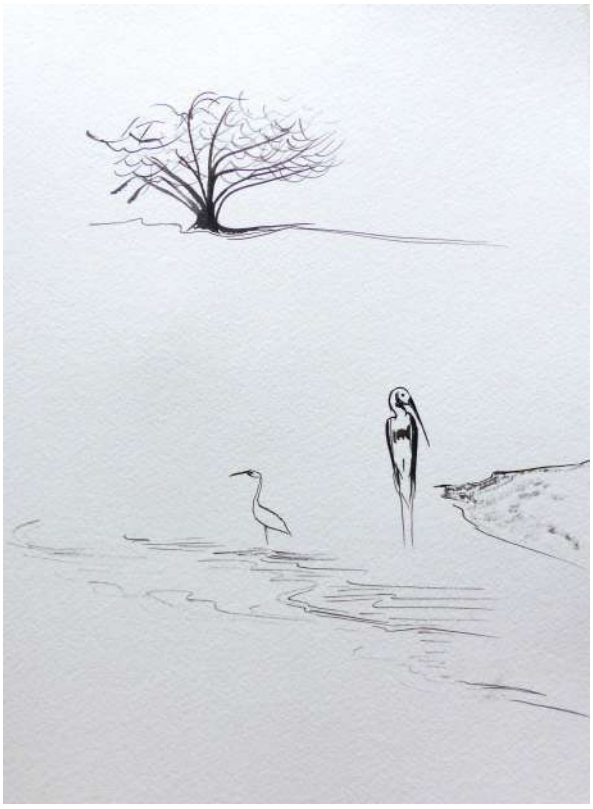


Fig 2: Time to ponder - Painted Stork, egret and birds resting on a tree at Pulicat, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

My inquiry into birds occurs through artistic research. Artistic research for me emerges from my training in Indian philosophical, aesthetic and artistic traditions. My sense of being largely draws upon Hindu worldviews.[4] Due to colonialism, as well as rapid growth, globalization and homogenization that followed, much of these traditions as well as practices are lost in common knowledge.

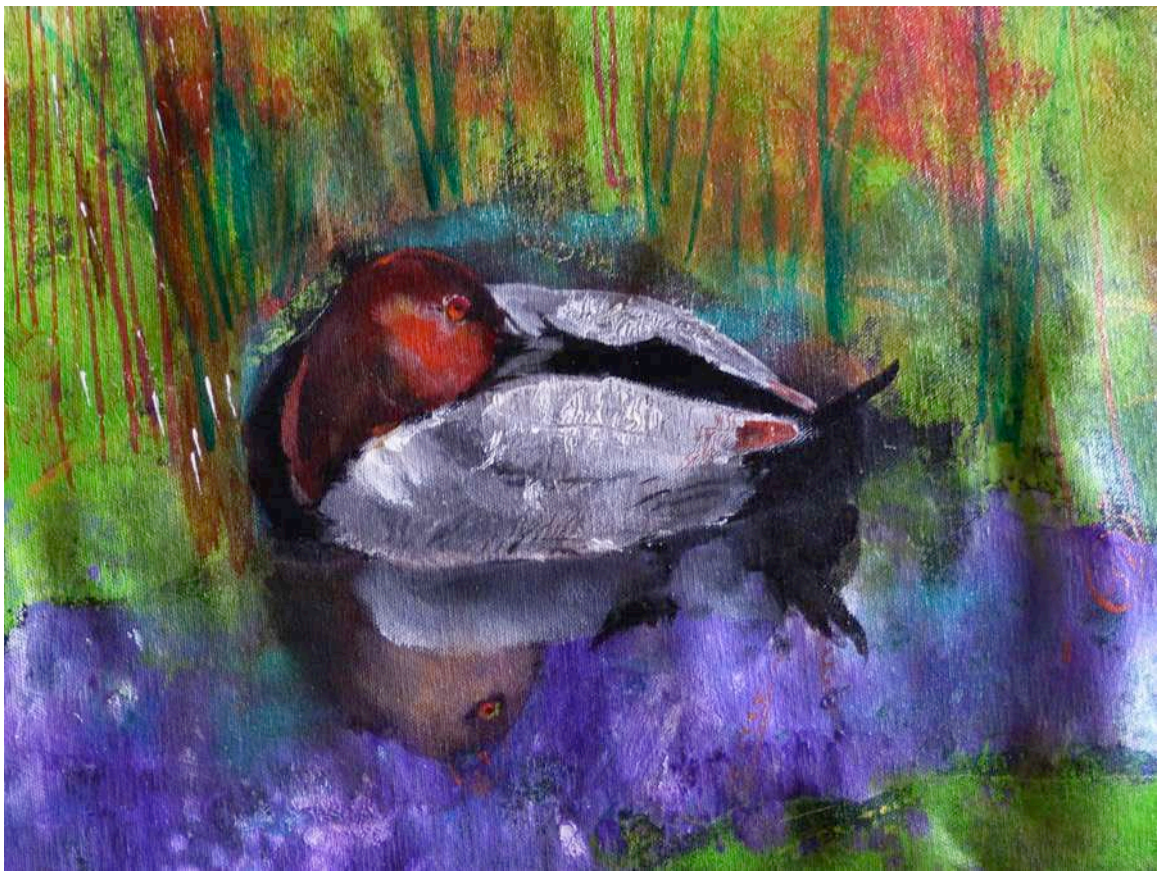


Fig 3: Close up of common pochard from a larger painting - Nekil̲cci: Moments of transformation, Acrylic and ink on canvas, Full canvas size- 4ft X 6ft, 2016.

Formal education systems largely developed on the lines of Western education models, and art colleges, which train students for contemporary art, also further the dissociation with traditional epistemologies, often erasing cultural notions of creativity, imagination and even intuition. Artists in India, who have for long debated on what constitutes the modern or contemporary for Indians, have evolved various

[4] Van Horn's (2006) reading that, "Hinduism is only a useful conceptual umbrella that indicates diversity more than unity, fluidity rather than stasis, and multiple practices rather than singular orthodoxies" (p. 7) is a critical note to helps us to understand that there is a great plurality of thought, and even ontologies within the frame of Indian thought, philosophy, and art or aesthetics spanning various time periods.

directions of inquiry that try to blend the Western and Eastern, traditional and contemporary. Alongside contemporary artists, craftsmen and traditional artists who follow ancient methods have also survived. There has been much reconstruction of lost or transitioning traditions and methods of practice as well in the eras that have followed India's independence.

In this essay, I begin by describing my artistic inquiry. I delineate this further by positioning it within the cultural framework of Indian aesthetics. I follow this with an outline of my fascination of birds and the particularities of my investigation into birds. I then delve into investigating how theoretical understanding of the body in Indian tradition and in classical dance training informs the sensorial experiences that I describe. This section engages with how to train the body for artistic practice. In unraveling the body, I emerge notions of *porosity* that occur at points of unfolding and infolding of consciousness and elaborate this process through notions of being as well as the epistemologies that govern perception of self and reality in Indian frameworks. From these, I evolve a method of eco-art practice articulated in the final section.

Line as an element of art, unraveled through Indian categories of practice, is the pivot that guides the article. Using 'line' as my method and tool of inquiry, I deepen my observation of birds at two levels: one external, which teaches me to observe biological characteristics and behavior patterns of different species; the other is internal, observing a bird in interiority, the inner space of the heart, where one transcends external differences to find unity of being. This exercise of drawing at two levels is driven by a simple purpose- to find *ṛta,* the cosmic order. Cultivating a deep

inner perception that is resonant with the natural order of the world (*ṛta)* is at the heart of training in the arts in the Indian tradition. The conceptualization of this natural order extends into the Indian notion of truth (*satyam*) drawn from these cosmic ecological limits. From *ṛta* and *satyam* come the notion of the way of life and right actions (*dharma*) (Khanna 2004, 2). Training to trace the line of interiority, of the essence of life through artistic practice, is the vital skill that drives Indian artists, who are drawn by the traditional ontologies where oneness of all life is at the heart of perception.

3. Developing an Artistic Inquiry and Research Practice using Key Principles in Traditional Indian Aesthetics

Three key principles of Indian aesthetics, help me construct my artistic research into birds and line:

3.1. Principle 1: Arts as Spiritual Exercise

The first principle considers the arts as a spiritual exercise that leads to inner transformation and help in the realization of the universal principle that underlies the matrix of life (Vatsyayan 1977, 5; Kak 2015). The inner and outer, the physical and the psychical are correlated to imbue suggestiveness of this universal being through rhythm in Indian arts. The rhythms are lines in motion. This principle translates in two ways within this inquiry

- Bird watching becomes an exercise that seeks out patterns of connections between the inner self and the outer encounters with birds.

- Birds become a conduit to observe the underlying matrix of life becoming an embodied experience that allows for drawing in the being of the bird into oneself.
- Translating birds into artistic forms becomes an engagement with symbolism, metaphorical and metaphysical inquiries, fusing psychical, metaphysical and physical layers of my experiences with birds.
- Rhythms and lines become the tools of translation and inform the approach to working with form, colour, texture, patterns and composition.

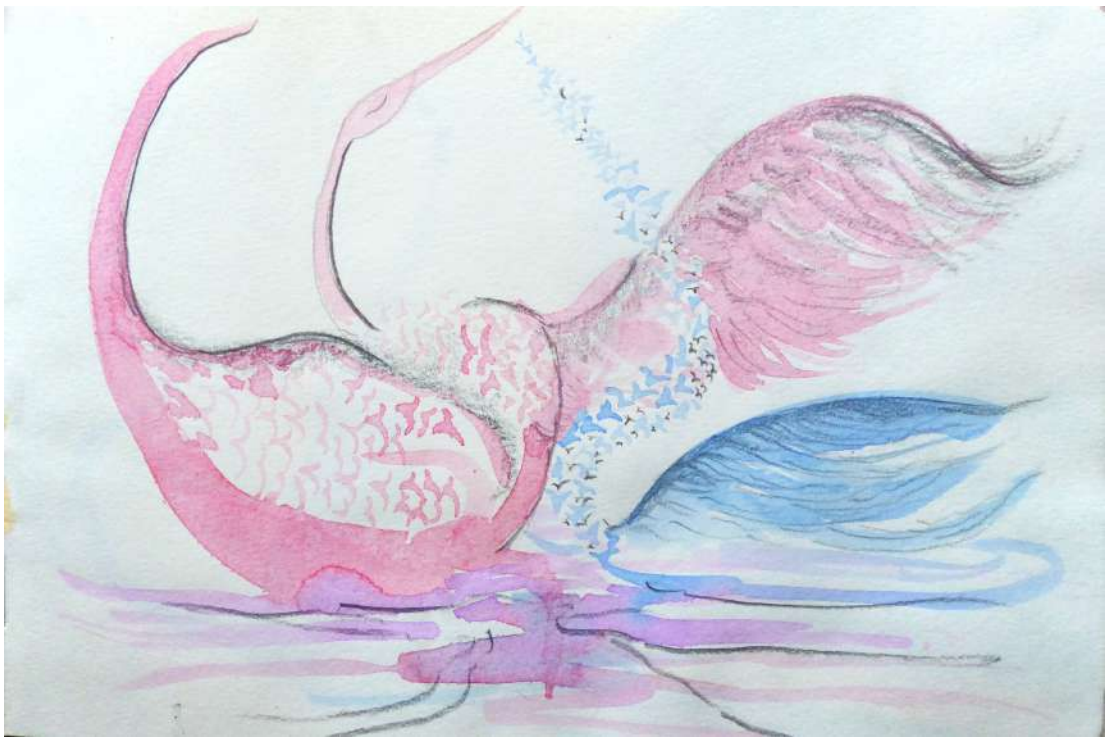


Fig 4: The mythical hamsa – the breath of love, Created in response to the sound of piano and violin and one of the Four romantic pieces by Antonin Dvorak, played by Dan Sedgwick (Sonata, Work in progress 2016-17) and Marjorie Gere. Watercolours in journal sketchbook, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.



Fig 5: When sea meets sky - Black headed ibis in flight at Pulicat, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.



Fig 6: Gait of the Lesser florican, Watercolour and pen and ink on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2017.



Fig 7: Repose of the egret, Pastel pencils in pocket journal, 6 in X 4 in, 2019.

3.2. Principle 2: Arts as Interrelated

The second principle to consider is that Indian arts are interrelated through underlying philosophical principles. (Vatsyayan 1977, 8). This interrelated and integrated approach has led to a diverse set of artistic forms across architecture, sculpture, painting, dance and theatre that are unified in principle. In practice, I work with lyrical prose and poetry, dance, painting, illustration and installation art. These works are often constructed in parallel with each other, the principles, techniques and aesthetics of one art form informing the other. This approach allows me to engage with birds capturing different facets of my encounters with them. A grey heron in painting, in lyrical prose and in movement, each tease out a transformation in the inner consciousness through the possibilities of the media. The two-dimensional canvas of a painting expands and flows into the three dimensional space of dance seamless breaking one boundary and entering another. Poetry and lyrical prose open consciousness to a layered time-space where the psychical and physical meet to create new meaning through a reflective and conscious engagement. Taken together, the principle of interrelatedness of the arts, allows for deeper meaning making and creative expression, where one can tease out an encounter with birds as not only an empirical encounter but an embodied, psychical and metaphysical one, allowing for the rich interrelationships between beings to unfold in artistic form.

3.3. Principle 3: Arts and Aesthetic Emotion

The third principle is the approach to aesthetic emotion in classical Indian aesthetics. Keeping in mind the first principle, the artist prepares herself for a state of balance and rest (*hṛdayaviśrānti*) before beginning any artistic work. This is fundamental to building practice in the arts from a traditional perspective. The intention of this

approach to practice is for the artist to transcend subjective emotion in order to translate and depict universality of emotion (Vatsyayan 1977, 6 - 21). This translates into an in-depth training in study of emotions in traditional art, particularly dance and theatre forms.

The *rasa* theory which is fundamental to Indian aesthetics explores primary emotional states, secondary and transitory states, contexts, and involuntary physical expressions that accompany emotions in great depth. The artist trains to interpret nuances of emotion in varied contexts as she builds her repertoire. Aesthetic emotion is considered intrinsically different from emotion in real life and aesthetic experience distinct from experience in the empirical world (Vatsyayan 1977, 7). Aesthetic emotion offers one a requisite state of disconnectedness to ponder and reflect upon the meaning of an experience. It is in the light of such aesthetic emotion, that bird watching transforms from an empirical encounter into an aesthetic one. In an aesthetic encounter, multiple realities of the inner and the outer experience fuse to emerge in mythical, mystical, or metaphysical frames that integrate the biological and empirical experiences with the subjective and intuitive ones. Aesthetic emotion is considered as a way to find one's resonance with the universal matrix, and the ultimate experience of such an aesthetic emotion is seen as bliss. The artist's training in the study and interpretation of emotions, allows her to work from an emotional state of rest and balance tuning into stillness and silence that are in resonance with the underlying matrix of life.



Fig 8: Valmiki's inspiration to write the Ramayana is said to have emerged at the point of deep sorrow he felt when one of the Krauncha birds who mate for life is killed by a hunter. The deep overwhelming sorrow that he felt at the death of one bird, leaving the other to loneliness was a moment that melted his heart and became the origin of the Adi Kavya, the epic poem of Ramayana. Soft pastels on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.

In working with birds, I research into the challenges faced by birds in the industrial world, the impact of pollution on their lives, their behaviours, flight patterns and other details. I also work my way through varied emotions like grief, anger, sorrow on one end, and beauty, joy and wonder on the other. The emotions collide with each other for long periods of time, amidst which I find moments of quiet contemplation and stillness. The initial states of emotional balance that I achieve are unstable and transitory. Over years of observation, sketching and contemplation, I achieve more stable periods of emotional balance that mature into aesthetic emotion.

These three key principles thus become the core of building my artistic processes and practice. They also help me integrate diverse styles of artistic practice through a cultural aesthetic paradigm bringing together wildlife and naturalistic art with symbolic work. These three key principles integrate the mind-body complex and tune them to resonate with the invisible rhythm of an underlying universal matrix. They quieten the mind, provide tools for continuous engagement and expression and language to interpret our encounters with ourselves and the world at large. An embodied ecosophical language of creative expression and perception is embedded in these principles.

4. Birds as a Point of Artistic Investigation

My artistic investigation of birds has three aspects of form and representation that entwine to build a framework for artistic research: birds as biological beings, birds as

symbolism, and birds as mythical[5] creatures. As a methodological framework for artistic practice, I work with moments of mystical and metaphysical experiences. I cultivate bird watching, and build strong naturalistic encounters with birds, ecological understanding of their behaviours and informed perception, followed by a philosophical and aesthetic understanding and interpretation that brings together my mystical experiences with the presence of the bird and its possible translation in the arts. I draw, paint, write poetry and sometimes work out specific movement exercises in order to translate these experiences with birds. At this point, specific technical and skill based inquiries rise. For instance, I ask –

- What kind of visual forms can translate multiple relationships with nature?
- Can realistic and symbolic forms be combined to show transitions in consciousness?
- How to work with English language poetry if the content and experiences emerge distinctly from the ontology of my native language Tamil?

These and other questions enable me to delve deeper into technical aspects of my practice. In order to understand what triggers my creative work and what the root of my intuitions are, I further research into traditional Indian aesthetic and philosophical traditions. Due to a long period of colonization and subsequent loss in traditional knowledge systems, there is a loss in comprehending and tracing many intuitions. This research enables me to find my cultural roots and helps in articulating and authenticating experiences based on the epistemology and ontology of the traditional knowledge systems that I have encountered through lived experience.

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[5] Myth, as interpreted here, indicates a language that is spoken silently allowing for the expression of the inexpressible. (Snodgrass 1992, 6).

Birds fascinate me for the simple reason that they can fly. My observations and encounters with birds allow me to experience lightness of being, and an inner soaring of emotions. In particular, three ideas of symbolism that emerge in the Indian mystical and philosophical traditions have been a critical link to my observation and investigation of birds. The gander (*haṃsa*) is considered a symbol of in-breath and out-breath. It represents the cycles of manifestation, dissolution and balance. It is a symbol of self-realisation that enables the insight that the cosmos and the individual are one:

> "The ingoing breath *(apāna)* makes the sound *haṃ*, the outgoing breath *(prāṇa)* makes the sound *sa,* and the *yogin* who listens to the Gander murmuring its own name in the inflow and the outflow of his breathing realizes the Bird's indwelling presence, since *haṃ-sa-haṃ-sa…* is also *sa-'haṃ-sa-'haṃ…,* 'This is I.' Having become one with the Sunbird of his Breath, the *yogin* is called a *parama-haṃsa*, 'a great Gander'" (Snodgrass 1992, 301; author's capitalization).

This symbolism is extended further and the *haṃsa* is considered to be none other than Lord *Viṣṇu* (one of the most important gods of the Hindu Pantheon), representing manifestation and dissolution of the cosmos (Snodgrass 1992, 301).

In Indian thought- myth, ritual and philosophy are deeply entwined. The artistic expression of truths that are mystical, metaphysical or beyond the rational is constructed in the language of the myths. Birds in their representation in myths draw upon the biological aspects of the bird, while infusing them with metaphysical truths.

As an artist, working with birds, I explore these three aspects - birds as biological beings, birds as symbolism, and birds as mythical creatures in the quest for a new framework of artistic research. Using line as a tool and method helps to discover an artistic process that leads to visual/ textual/ performance outcomes that are representative of the biological, mystical and metaphysical layers of reality. Line as a tool, is symbolic of breath as well as thread that connects all life (explored in more detail below). Working with line to encounter birds allows for artistic research that looks to express the ineffable about our connection with life, and helps to break our boundaries of perception and form to find resonance with life.



Fig 9. The Greater Coucal pausing to look around. Photocolours and Indian ink on watercolourpaper, 17 in X 10 in approx., 2014. A black and white version of this painting has been published in (Ilango and Kalyan, 2015).

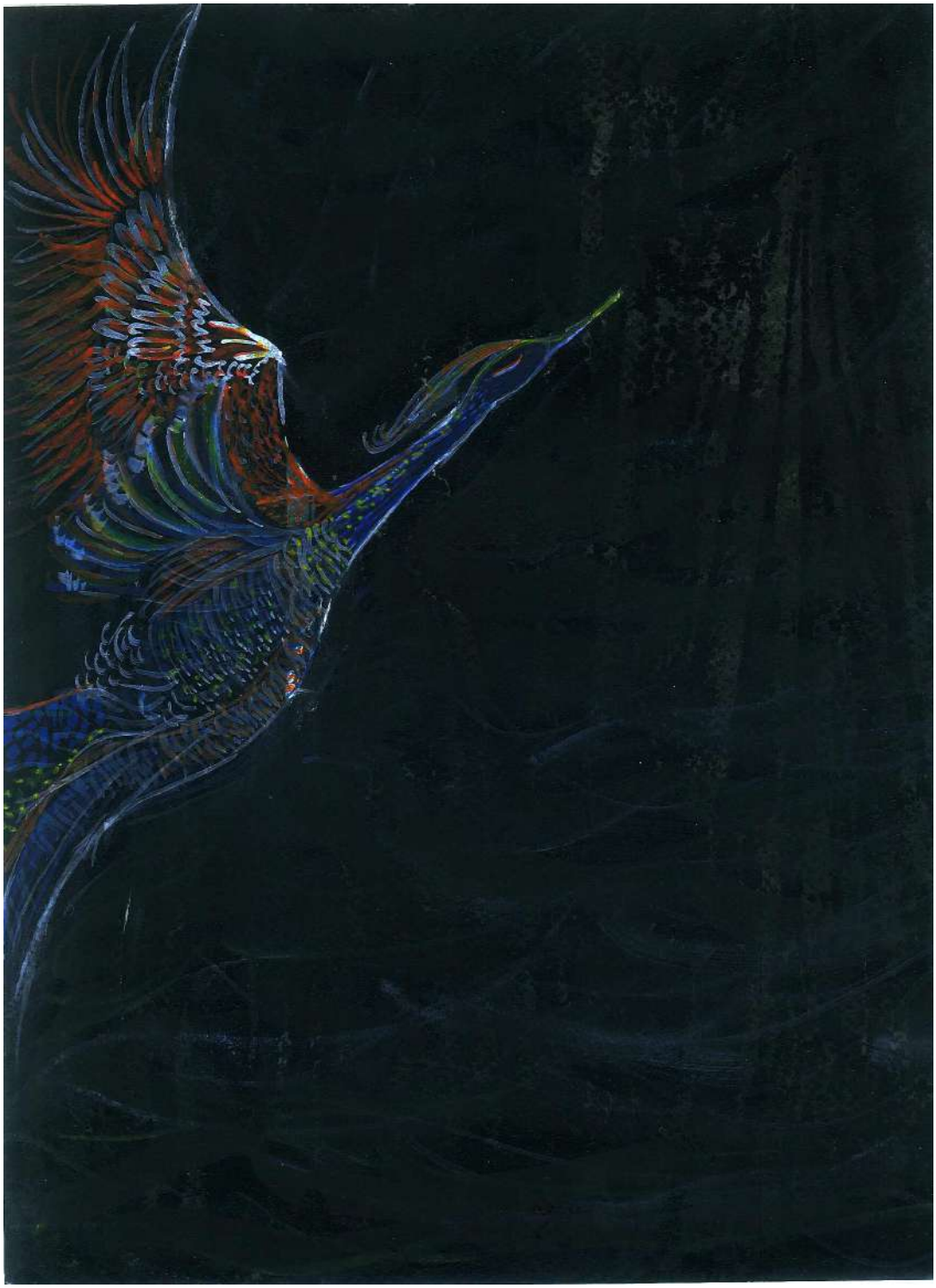


Fig 10. Soaring in inner sky - The mythical hamsa in flight. Stylized. Acryclic, watercolour and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.



Fig 11: Woven into music – Saraswathi and her swan, Soft pastels on handmade paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.

I observe birds and bird behavior extensively in their natural environments: alone, in flight, feeding their young, preening, dead, subject to environmental changes and constraints. As I observe birds, I abstract the movements of the birds in two ways, one, through the act of drawing and another through moving my body using dance.

For instance, during my act of drawing my observation of different species of birds involves looking for details of form, behavior, and expression in each bird. A tailor bird, a green bee eater, owl, kite, a crow, a heron, a peacock and an ostrich are each varied in their forms, expressions, sizes, colours, weights and flight. Each form has a particular place in the food chain, and each has a presence that is different from the other. The kite's silent swirling of the skies and sharp shriek with its stark strength, are very different from the lightness of flight of the tailorbird, whose weight does not even bend a leaf that it alights on. In being and becoming one with the bird, I draw upon my perception and draw in the presence allowing the bird to fill my body and consciousness.

During dance tracing through my body, the fluidity of the lines transform my breath and the tangible form of my body, which I consciously practice back into my drawing on paper.

5. The Body in Training

I trained for several years in the classical dance tradition of *Bharatanāṭyam* alongside learning textual verses. One of the verses that captures the flow of line between body and mind, exterior and interior, gross and subtle, is from *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*

(Nandikeśvara, Coomaraswamy, and Gōpālakrisna 1977, 17), one of the critical texts for Indian dance practices:

> *Yato hasta stato dṛṣṭir yato dṛṣṭi stato manaḥ/*
>
> *yato mana stato bhāvo yato bhāva stato rasaḥ// (*Rajendran, 2007, xvi)

A literal translation of this reads as

> *Where the hands are, there go the eyes*
>
> *where the eyes are, there goes the mind*
>
> *where the mind goes, there arises feeling*
>
> *and where there is feeling, the essence is evoked.*[6]

This is succinctly a method for body-mind-consciousness alignment. This training is essentially the drawing of the tacit line that invites the exterior into the interior and vice versa. Training in *Bharatanāṭyam* or any of the other Indian dance forms would involve continuous practice to achieve a perfection of this line that moves seamlessly from gross to subtle states in the bodymind continuum[7].

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[6] I have translated this verse based on my training as a dancer and following Coomaraswamy's translation of the verse in: (Coomaraswamy, Ananda (1917) 1977, 17:The Mirror of Gesture)

[7] Indian thought (*Advaita Vedānta* and its roots in Upaniṣads) identifies the body in its gross *(sthūla),* subtle *(sūkṣma)* and causal *(kāraṇa)* states (Bäumer 2001, 114-115). The gross body, made of the five gross elements, fire, earth, space, water and wind, is subject to change and seen only as a temporary residence for a life. The subtle body is made of matter comprised of all five subtle elements, and constitutes the five sense organs, the five organs of action, five life forces and the four internal organs – mind-heart *(manas),* discerning intellect *(buddhi),* consciousness and memory *(cit)* and ego/self *(ahaṃkāra)* (Sivananda, 2012, 165-170). The causal body is the subtlest of the bodies and the potential of being before it takes form in subtle or gross states. This conceptualization of the body deepens experience in several layers. The training required for the body, be it through yoga as a form, or through artistic traditions, takes into account the training of the gross, subtle and causal bodies.

For the Asian artist, creative training is about bringing the physical, emotional, mental, cosmological and philosophical aspects of one's existence into a single 'body' that is capable of both experience and expression. While artistic practices are within the larger frame of spiritual, meditative practices, the artist's role remains sensual and celebratory, rather than involving withdrawal. In this light, the artist often draws from diverse traditions of Indian thought rather than one particular school, amalgamating her expressions often through myth and storytelling. Most training is rooted in stillness and equilibrium that brings a state of hyper-awareness and allows one to tune into the natural flow and order of life.

Trained in this traditional classical dance form, the three dimensional dynamic line that is moving in space is an important guiding force in my two dimensional visual painting work, as well as in my installation work. I understand line as a dynamic force through the felt experience of my body trying to retain the structural qualities of curve, straight, distortion, as well as the character of the five gross elements, fire, earth, space, water and wind. Each element can be observed in its various dimensions; for example, wind that is gentle, just a zephyr, wind before the storm, the calm of the storm, wind flowing through the body, wind lifting water, wind swirling, wind creating conversations among leaves…



Fig 12: Heroine talking to a parrot as she entices it with seeds to play with her and talk to her, In traditional Bharatanatyam Attire, 2006.

Close observations as one experiences wind in its many expressions allow one to create a responsive body in tune with each kind of wind. Wind as one experiences while listening to the breath of a loved one, wind that indicates familiarity and unfamiliarity of the person we may encounter, wind in different seasons – each of these can be represented by the body in different ways. Our bodies are shaped by the elements.

Careful observation, acknowledgement and conscious practice allows one to find ways to train the body in response to all life around us. The line that would exemplify fire would be very different from one that would embody wind. However if one were to express a candle flame dancing, one encounters, both fire and wind, a gentle fire, swaying to a gentle wind. This fire has a still axis and hence a gentle swaying line, where the lower body is still, could be representative. This would be very different from a raging forest fire, where there is great dynamism to both fire and wind, requiring dynamic movements across a stage. The line here is energetic, forceful, uncontained, bold and fierce. It could be both terrifying and glorious in terms of its immensity. The artist's training lies in observing fire as the candle flame as well as fire as the forest fire, knowing how the body can be disciplined to express the possibilities of both forms of fire. Using line rather than any of the other elements of form is a unique practice, as line acts a thread that connects all life, the thread of breath, the vibration of which creates form. The in-breath and out-breath, the life-force (*prāṇa*), provides the guiding axial line that can flow in and out of everything that is living. Visualizing line as an interconnecting thread is one of the many intuitive practices that comes from the tradition.

Years of practicing with the body have taught me to inquire into line in its varied dimensions to embody the presence, physical characteristics and emotional qualities as felt while intuiting the life-force of another being. For instance, when representing an old heron that I observed at Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh, what I sensed in the being was a quiet exhaustion, an extraordinary patience and waiting, a body that is content in its aging, an acceptance and seeming pleasure of the everyday. As I photographed the heron, for a moment our gazes met each other. At that moment, there is a beautiful

transfer of these aspects of the being of the heron into me as a seamless exchange. And when I come back to draw – or perform – the presence of the heron, it is an act of calling forth its being back into a manifestation in creative expression.



Fig 13 and 14: Grey heron in Sukhna lake, Chandigarh, December 2016.

The old heron (From a collection gifted to my sister, Novemeber 2016)

The old heron has heard it all

The old heron has seen it all

Now he rests on the same branch

Day after day after day



The old heron is still and quiet

For he has heard it

He has seen it all.

Meet him

Sister mine

For there are conversations

You must have

With his

Old age

And fortitude

With his stillness

And strength.

Back home, I watch the painted storks in Jakkur lake for a long time. The most evocative of these moments of observation lead me to spot a mother bird feeding her young one. Her actions are methodical as she feeds the chick with her long beak. The hungry little one opens her beak, raucous and impatient. Their feeding seems to go on for over fifteen minutes as I watch. In the mother bird there is a perfect coordination of movements. And as I stand by observing, I learn this coordination in my mind. I work on my body movements figuring out the distance between my feet, that will enable a stance akin to that of the stork, the sway in the dipping, bending and rising of the neck through the feeding process, the subtle movements that show the care involved in the feeding process. Alongside floats an awareness of the patience that the bird has, and the training that she offers her young one. There is a certain intimacy in the flow of this knowledge that happens through the *porous* channels of the gross body, subtle body, and causal body. In this light, the act of painting becomes very much an act of dancing in my work.

6. Line as a Tool, Method and Philosophy

The artist's quest for line within this framework lies in an essential question – what is it that the line will delineate, structure, enumerate, separate, enclose, or bring to the vision? The quest for line is, by the nature of this inquiry, a sacred and ritual act of rediscovering, suggesting, revealing and representing cosmic harmony in form and symbol. To the artist, the quest for line is a two-fold action. On the one hand, there is a manifestation of the cosmic harmony as an independent outcome, which can be enjoyed and experienced by the spectator. On the other hand, in order to create such a line, the artist must be able to tune her body and mind beyond technical skill to experience this reality deep within herself. Cultivating the mind through intense

practice (*sādhana*) is an action that allows negating all the things that can hinder the flow of reality/ cosmic harmony through the artist's body. The relationship between the artist's body-mind and the line that is drawn are like a dance of entwined forces. And the act of perceiving the outcome remains within the ritual of perception, where each time the aesthete/artist looks at the work of art/ outcome, what they allow within themselves is the rich flow of this inner truth as experienced by the artist. The act of perception is ritual performance and always suffused with inner breath of being, the life force that flows through everything. Line is a guide, as much as it is an outcome, becoming visible form as well as metaphorical engagement for both artist and aesthete.

Line qualities are defined by their strength and direction, and are related to the five gross elements (*pañcamahābhūtas*): "There exists a correlation between the five elements (*bhūta*), their subtle forms (*tanmātra,* ie *śabda* or sound, *sparśa* or touch, *rūpa* or form, *rasa* or taste, and *gandha* or smell) and the corresponding sense organs which perceive them (*indriya*)" (Baümer 1996, xv). Line character can also denote moral qualities. A straight line indicates honesty and straightforwardness; a crooked line could indicate dishonesty, a curved line a sense of both inner and outer beauty (Baümer 2002, 2). Line is not form, but something that delineates the essence or inner life of the form and line is drawn from all five senses and elements. It is this complex correlation that makes line in Indian art intriguing and extremely difficult as a practice.

To me as an artist, this pursuit of line that is in alignment with the elements, captures essence and character of the form, and meditates as well as mediates between form

and expression. Line (*Rekhā)* is synonymous with *Sūtra,* the thread that links, binds and interweaves all life. In this understanding of line, the idea of interdependence and connectedness of life emerges. As an artist draws a line that is well practiced and emerged from countless hours of resonance with life, she begins to perceive the subtle line-thread of breath (*prāṇa*), the cosmic in-breath and out-breath and the individual in-breath and out-breath. And this perception allows her to experience the interconnectedness of life through line. The written word too is line, both as poetry or text and as calligraphy. The dancer is also expected to practice line (*rekhā*).

The *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmmotara Purāṇa* (dated between 2nd BC and 2 CE), discusses the link between dance and painting:

> What is meant by the derivation of painting from dancing is the movement in common to both these expressive forms; it asserts itself in purity through dancing, it guides the hand of the artist, who knows how to paint figures, as if breathing, the wind as blowing, the fire as blazing, and the streamers as fluttering. The moving force, the vital breath, the life-movement (*chetanā*), that is what is expected to be seen in the work of a painter, to make it alive with rhythm and expression. Imagination, observation and the expressive force of rhythm are meant by the legends of the origin of painting, to be its essential features. (Kramrisch 1924, 10)

The methods indicated in this text clearly focus on both the visible, and the tacit invisible, the life-movement and essence of a subject. The artist's capacity to delineate the invisible (*adṛṣṭā*) in artistic form through the quality of line is discussed in terms of suggestiveness, symbolism and detailing (Kramrisch 1924, 10). In a

conversation noted in the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, Sage Pippalāda tells his students that the act of using a line to divide space points out the sacred nature of drawing a line and how it is as powerful as the act of creation (Baümer 2002, 21). Line is the essence of all definite forms in art. Line, *rekhā (in Sanskrit)* is both structural and symbolic, and is essential to delineate a sacred space in both two and three dimensions. The creation of line is both "ritual and artistic action" (Baümer 2002, 35).

For the artist, working with line is a philosophical inquiry. In the drawing of mystical diagrams, *yantras* or *maṇḍalas*, line creates a threshold between "inner sacred space" and "outer unordered space" (Baümer 2002, 12). Lines create a highly charged symbolic space. The line is often an intuitive command that the Indian artist strives to arrive at.

Deepening perception to observe the nature of consciousness implies capturing the life-line/breath-line of any subject through and beyond its form imbuing the final drawing with presence/manifestation. The life-line is the line of universal order and rhythm, or a intuitive perception of Indian categories of *Brahman, Ātman* or *Puruṣa*[8] that indicate a universal consciousness. Framed in mysticism, poets seeking language to interpret these ineffable experiences of feeling oneness with a universal consciousness make recourse to poetic metaphor, paradox, and negation (Matilal 1990, 142-155). In visual art too, the same methods are used to express the ineffable. The line creates metaphor and a paradox of what it delineates. It negates what the essence is not. It hides and plays with form to indicate the presence of the other.

[8] *Brahman, Ātman* or *Puruṣa* are complex concepts in Indian philosophy that indicate cosmic being or self, consciousness, and universal principle. *Brahman* refers to the ultimate reality; *Ātman* refers to the universal self that is identical to the innermost essence of the individual self; *Puruṣa* refers to cosmic self or cosmic consciousness

The artist is therefore not looking for likeness of form, but is really gathering the essence of a form in relation to the subject's consciousness as perceived through the artist's deep intuitive *porosity.* This 'essence' as perceived by the artist could be layered and different in each instance of creative process and expression. The perception of the rhythm and vital breath that pervades all life forms and finding a way to tune into that with one's own rhythm, finding the same frequency and staying in that space of rest and equilibrium while creating is at the core of the practice. However, the power of the arts lie in the celebration of the sensual world of diversity and procreation and hence, essence is also the distinguishing factor of a bird, its behavior, its form and movement, its presence in a landscape.

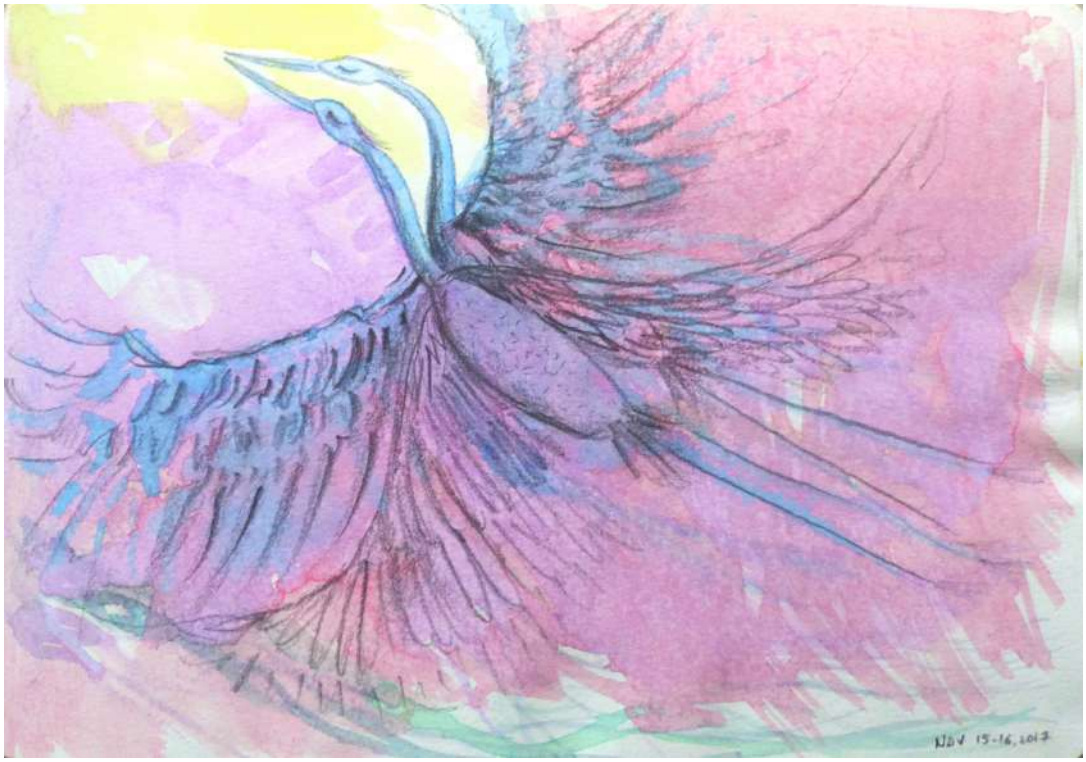


Fig 15: Soaring Together, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

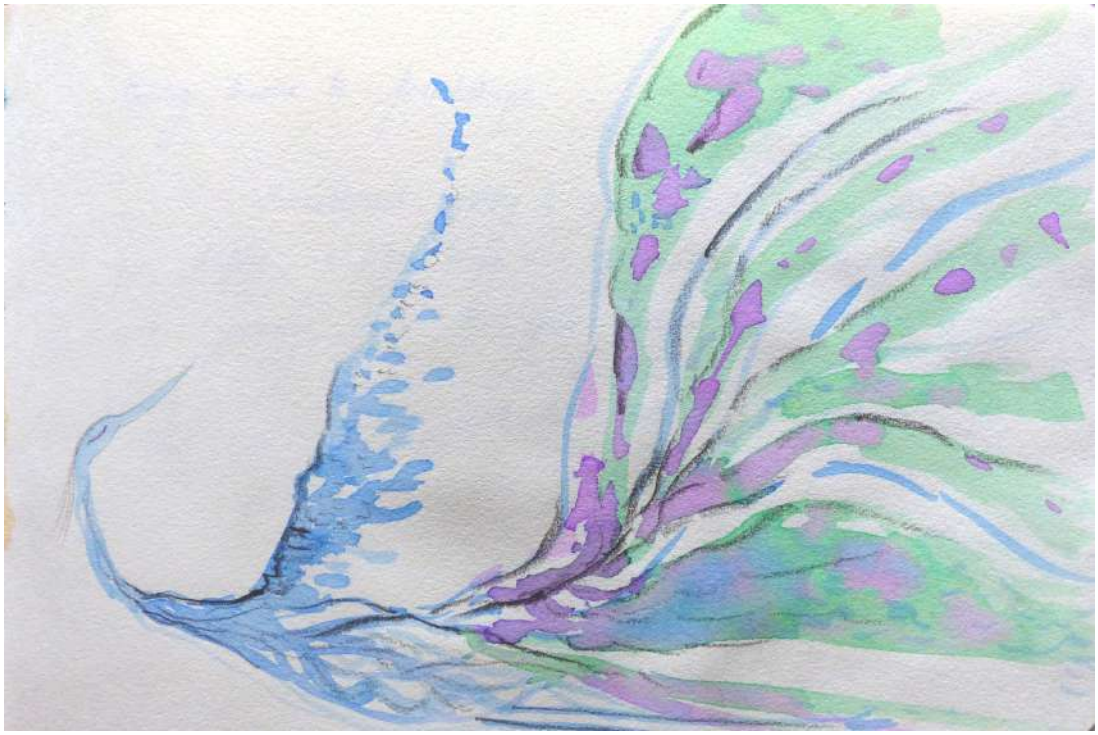


Fig 16: Dreaming. Both works created in response to the sound of piano and violin and one of the Four romantic pieces by Antonin Dvorak, played by Dan Sedgwick (Sonata, Work in progress 2016-17) and Marjorie Gere. Watercolours in journal sketchbook, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

When the artist and the bird form a tacit relationship, the intersubjective nature of the experience is an act of breathing in the being and presence of the other into oneself, allowing for an intimate yet mystical understanding of the other. Emotions can permeate through the artist in such moments, the physicality, presence, tension and actions of the body of the other. Silent communication of acceptance or denial of the other can also permeate through. These would be some of the basic experiences that are possibly experienced by not just artists, but many naturalists as well. These mystic experiences can happen in fractions of seconds, when a moment of wisdom can flash through, where there can be healing from grief, understanding how the presence and being of the bird can offer a resolution to a conflict that is in an altogether different human dimension. Each encounter is unique, and each presence leads to a different experience. For instance, my observation of grey herons, brought about a strength in the body that allowed for physical healing, whereas my observation of tailor birds, led

to unburdening of grief and sorrows that had been weighing me down. The artist achieves this ability to draw in the other by training her own consciousness to be still so that the other can permeate through.

Thus, in this worldview, the act of drawing a line is a ritual – sacred yet artistic. For the artist, drawing the line is a tool that helps her to separate the universal consciousness from personal consciousness by delineating their boundaries. However, drawing a line also allows the artist to meld back into the universal consciousness again. The artist does this by drawing the essence of a form, the line of life/breath, not its muscular structure but the subtle line that flows through the form. This line of life is essentially an experience of the universal consciousness, which the artist then finds resonance in.

I spend a lot of time sketching the mythical bird Jatayu, considered to be the Indian vulture (now an endangered species) and the myth of how *Jatāyu* fights to save *Sīta,* the heroine of the epic *Rāmāyana*, from *Rāvanā*who abducts her. *Sīta* is deeply moved by the valiant battle of *Jatāyu* and prays for his salvation at the end of the battle, when he falls down, his wings slashed by *Rāvanā*. I oscillate my inquiries into meaning-making between the endangered species and its intimate connection with human life in Indian myth. To find my lines, I move between my observations of the vulture in quick sightings in Bandipur, and then subsequent research through films and photographs. The massiveness of the bird, its energy and force, are guiding elements, its long wing span and the fact that it is a scavenger, something that is protective through its capacity to clean up the dead carcasses, calls out to me.

I play with my compositions of the relationship between woman and bird, on what is essentially the battleground of the sky. The line that delineates *Sīta* and the line that delineates *Jatāyu* contrast, and yet flow between each other. Imagining these lines and the relationships that they can evoke took me several weeks of sketching. The line that started with tremendous force and weight in wingspan and size, eventually gentled into a strong, contained yet supple line for the bird, a line that indicates not only the bird, but its compassion as indicated in the myth. This is the tacit line, a line that needs to be suggestive, hidden, and yet evocative. Working with the myth allows rediscovering human relationship with the natural world in all its intimacy, and opens doorways to perception of the other. It allows one to travel into human imagination, beliefs and values to discover the lines of relationship between human and bird, and how each shapes the other.



Fig 17: Sita and Jatayu in flight, Exploring the bonding and fondness that Jatayu and Sita have for each other. Dry pastels and charcoal on cartridge paper, 12 in X 7 in, 2018.



Fig 18:Sita Beseeching Jatayu, Chinese Black ink on Cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.



Fig 19: Sita and Jatayu in a conversational dance. Playful memories that draw them closer when the battle with Ravana begins. Chinese Black ink on Cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.



Fig 20: Agony and Hope – Jatayu and Sita, Watercolour and pastels on cartridge paper, 14.75 in X 43 in, 2018.



Fig 21 and 22: Call for help, Jatayu and Sita, Ink and charcoal on cartridge paper, 14.75 in X 43 in, 2018.







Fig 23 and 24: Protecting Sita – Moments of vulnerability and strength. Chinese black ink on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.



Fig 25: Vaakuruthi - Swearing Protection for Sita. Sita in the heart of Jatayu. Ink and watercolours on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018



Fig 26: Moods of Jatayu, Ink, watercolours and Charcoal on Cartridge Paper, 17 in X 10 in, 2018.



Fig 27: Fear and anger – Moods of Jatayu, Ink and soft pastels on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.



Fig 28. Listening to disturbance, worry and wishfulness – Moods of Jatayu, Pen and Ink, Photocolours and watercolours on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.



Fig 29 and 30. Playfulness –Moods of Jatayu, Chinese black ink on watercolour paper, 7 in X 5 in, 2018.



Fig 31 and 32. Conviction – Moods of Jatayu, Chinese black ink on cartridge paper, 8 in X 5.75 in, 2018.

7. Process/Journey

I pause at this moment to draw back and ask what it means to unravel the world through this framework of aesthetic experience. What are the steps and methods, the process of this particular journey? What is 'being' in this process and what are the actions of this 'being'?

My quest is to understand my relationship with birds, but my training is to see them in interiority as well as exteriority. I grapple with the perceptions that arise from two different states of seeing/being. I am aware of a sensorial consciousness at one level in my external observations, but I am drawn again and again into something that is hinting at a cosmic order of oneness, a seeing that teases innerness. I am doubtful of these emotions and experiential states when I begin my research. My observations are tentative, often tacit, not framed in words. While I have an implicit training in Indian arts, particularly *Bharatanāṭyam*, a classical Indian dance from South India, I am yet to uncover either the knowledge framework or notion of being that guides my practice. My initial research is led completely by the assurance of practice and journaling about practice. I have no method to follow, except one guided by intuition, emotion and a deeper cognition of subtle being.

I start with my senses, my body and its responses to birds. Two of my poems (written in 2017) below record some of these journeys.



Fig 33. Paradise Flycatcher, At The Valley School, Bangalore, March 2017.

1

The paradise flycatcher

lights up the tree

She comes by, converses with it

flies from branch to branch

and leaves.

Is it a flowing river or tree root,

the prāṇa[9] *is the same, it feels like*

my body, that root, lake, river

and bird in flight!

[9] Breath



Fig 34: Great Tit on a branch, Near The Valley School, Bangalore, March 2017.

2

Sometimes all one needs

is that great tit

taking over

mind and body

with the lightness of his

being

on a stark

leafless tree

Life,

abundance

hope

new direction!

These observations leave me overwhelmed, frustrated and contented. Contentment comes from my experience, but I struggle to understand how this experience happens. So I start to inquire into the nature of my experience. I ask what happens when I watch a bird. I slow myself down to articulate. However this journey takes a few years to unravel each layer of my observation. There may yet be layers unrevealed to me. I find the need to trace my perception to my own traditional, ontological roots.

In reflecting on the moment of writing the poem and the poem itself, I jot down my notes.

I see a bird – in the first poem above it is a paradise flycatcher. As I am observing the bird, my mind has captured all the distinct characteristics that help me identify the birds. The rufous coloured, short tailed female paradise flycatcher is sitting on the branch of *Ficus benghalensis.* However my observation is tracing the line of the paradise flycatcher to the hanging roots of the banyan, to the spreading branches, all the way down to some of the exposed roots. I am sitting at the base of these magnificent roots. I have just walked down from a small lake, mostly dry in the

summer season when I visited *The Valley School*[10]. There is also a distant memory of another river and banyan, a common sight in rural India. I realize that in bringing the loop of memory, my mind-heart (*uḷḷam*) has strayed to another physical landscape. This memory associates another sighting of the Indian paradise flycatcher elsewhere, that one was a magnificent male with its long tail.



Fig 35. Banyan Tree, The Valley School, Bangalore, March 2017.

Somehow, I keep tracing all these diverse lines into my heart… This is intrinsic processing of the scene in front of me. I am suddenly very sensitive and conscious of my breathing, which otherwise remains an unconscious everyday process in the background. This hyper-awareness of breath makes me deeply connected to the elemental wind flowing in and out of all life forms. I find through this breath, through

[10] The Valley School is one the schools established by philosopher J. Krishnamurti in Bangalore and has a large part of its campus devoted to afforestation work.

the flow of wind, a flow of life. I have now stopped tracing the physical form of the bird from my external perception and am watching the bird through my inner eye. This is a seamless process. But wind is not the only element that draws the relationship between the outer and the inner. Water reveals itself as the sustaining force of life. As the bird in flight moves through the sky – space and void are the elements that get added to my perception. But I remember again that the paradise flycatcher lights up the tree in my poem, so fire was integral to my perception. The roots of the banyan are in this rich Indian brownish red soil. The earth is the most forceful element, because she connects us all to the ground. This approach to perception that entwines the outer and inner through the elements into a singular whole becomes evident to me in my perception.

However, my experience does not stop in this entwining. It moves into yet another dimension – this I see as a transformation of consciousness. I have redefined in and through this experience the contours of my body and its physicality. This is what transforms my experience of birding. I have somehow managed to draw the paradise flycatcher into my innerness, the specificity of its physical contours have shifted the specificity of mine. I have now within me a paradise flycatcher-size contour that teases the nature of my consciousness and my perception of the bird's consciousness.

With the great tit, which I spot on the second day, I am already in a highly sensitized state. I watch, and the innerness of the bird hits me straightaway. The reverse process happens in this experience. I first emerge in lightness of being that I draw from the bird, and then slowly move into exteriority – I am able to contemplate the expanse of life with an inner lightness and quietude. The first experience led to intense lines that

converged, the second experience to light, gentle lines that expanded. There is simultaneity of space-time that characterizes this experience.



Fig 36. Sketch of the Banyan tree, closeup, The Valley School, KFI, 12 in X 7 in, 2017

These encounters have helped me to unfold several aspects of my being. At the same time, they have led to reflective processes that draw other beings into me. Unfolding and infolding occur simultaneously making me more receptive to the world around

and to hidden layers of my own being. I use the word unfolding to describe expansion of senses and the word infolding to describe internalization of senses. I go back to research the Indian philosophical and aesthetic theories as well as my personal practice to understand these sensorial experiences that I have encountered.

8. Unfolding and Infolding

Kapila Vatsyayan notes in her seminal work *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts* (1997), the notion of senses, *indriyas,* is of paramount importance to understand the Indian notions of training the senses and the methodology of perception and action that unravels from this. There is a constant call to perfection of the senses in order to transcend the world of sense and form to contemplate on the subtler reality, largely articulated by the notion of *Brahman.* An inquiry into both philosophical and aesthetic traditions that arise from *Vedic* ontology and epistemology follow a certain pathway. A paradoxical and metaphorical approach to experiencing allows for acuity in unfolding, and infolding, of the senses. Once the senses have been heightened and quieted, the ground for transcendence is prepared. This is not a denial of body or senses, but an intensified way of creating co-relationships between the inner and the outer, the subtle and the gross, energy and elements. From this arises an organic system where the senses correspond to various elements, landscapes, cosmic bodies. The microcosm is mapped on to the macrocosm. (Vatsyayan,1997,11-13)

The nature of aesthetic experience, both the training as artist and aesthete thus emerge from correlation, correspondence, exchange and a quieting of sensorial experience at the gross level to hear the subtler senses at play in the inner self, *antarātman.* However, “the impact of the outer phenomena on the senses is never replicated in the

form of artifacts but its inherent substance and essence is experienced in the spirit of the artist and subsequently expressed through the particular art form" (Sthapati 2002, xix).

The nature of aesthetic experience is a key to unfolding consciousness as it permeates, flits through or pervades the mind-body continuum. In my work, I pursue the enquiry of aesthetic experience to unravel the threads of ecological consciousness. My inquiry is two fold – one is to understand the very nature of the aesthetic experience; the second is to evolve techniques and methods of depicting form, space, embodiment and language. This unfolding requires one to see beyond the limitations of Cartesian duality to find the essential experience that one's consciousness undergoes and the true nature of being. Any seeing includes an empathetic, psychical or metaphysical vision of the interrelatedness of beings as denoted by the notion that "everything is related to the whole" *Sarvaṃ Sarvātmakam (Yoga sūtra Bhāṣya III.14).*

The question of how could one experience reality when one is part of the whole, a microcosm within the macrocosm, is a great paradox that engages Hindu philosophy and aesthetics at the core. How can an individual comprehend the whole, or how can there be an experience of completeness and totality? This infolding and unfolding of the cosmos within oneself, where one can experience the outer reality in one's own being in which the separation between the inner and the outer dissolves, is at the crux of all action that emerges in this worldview. The paradoxical nature of the question is also answered through metaphor and paradox with the imagery of two birds (*Ṛg Veda, Mūṇḍaka Upaniṣad*), paralleling the experiencer and the seer, which are considered inseparable, friends, alike. One experiences, enjoying life, the other oversees without

indulging and participating. They are both one. When one realizes that the witness is the same as the witnessed, there is a moment when they diffuse into each other, experiencing the primordial whole. This *porous* experiencing of totality is in Indian thought seen as the height of experience.



Fig 37: Two Babblers, pen and ink with stylized rendering capturing their quirky attitudes, 8.27 in X 11.69 in, 2014. This image has been published before in (Ilango and Kalyan, 2015).

This paradoxical metaphor, the infolding and unfolding of cosmos into self and vice versa forms the crux of all aesthetic training. A well-trained artist uses the sensorial realm of experience, unfolding this sensorial world through metaphors, iconography, symbolism, physical extrapolation of the sensorial realm and its emotional counterparts to celebrate oneness of the inner and the outer. The image of the dancing

Śiva, *Naṭarāja*[11] embodies this principle as *Śiva* dances on the lotus, considered the innermost heart of the devotee, and within an aureole of flames considered the cosmos. The equilibrium between the two allowing multi-level, multi-dimensional infolding and unfolding back and forth into states of oneness becomes a single iconographic translation of the essence and meaning of life as seen within this ontology.

Watching a bird does not stop with its outer form or precision of flight. It turns and morphs into an inquiry into line, the *sūtra*, an attempt to find the bird in its link to the line that connects all of us between sky, earth and inner self, the *ādhidhaivika* (cosmic), *ādhibhautika* (terrestrial) and *ādhyātmika* (personal), the tripartite levels of reality perception as mapped in Vedic thought (Baümer 2001, xiii). The fourth concept *adhiyajña* (ritual sacrifice indicating inner transformation) extends the tripartite reality into a creative space where transformations into oneness can happen (Subash Kak, Personal Email Communication, January 31, 2017, Kalyanasundaram 2019)

The part and the whole, the microcosm and macrocosm, the finite and the infinite, the one and the many are entwined, interwoven, diffused, in a flow of exchange, paradoxically both existent and non-existent. Great emotion suffuses the being, devoid of all character of joy or sorrow, and yet it rises at the confluence of both. The transcendent emotion and aesthetic emotion coalesce into deep experiencing of multiple levels of interconnectedness.

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[11] *Naṭarāja* is a symbolic form of the Hindu God *Śiva* as a dancer. A single iconographic image combines his roles as a creator, preserver and destroyer in a never-ending cycle of time.

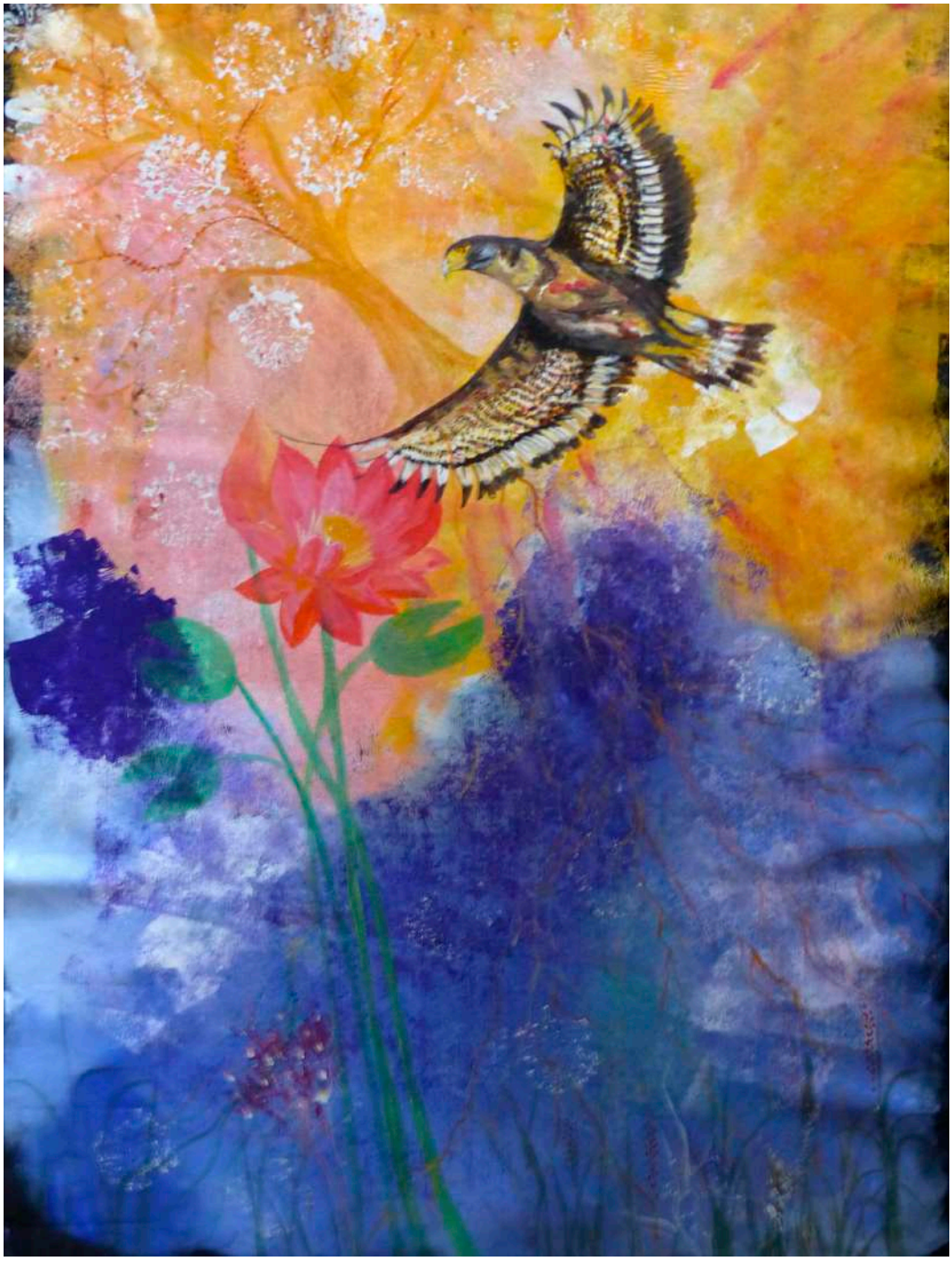


Fig 38. Intrinsic, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 32.75 in X 45.75 in/ 2.7 X 3.8 ft, 2016.

Intrinsic

March 2, 2016

From the Nabhi

the lotus blooms,

Deep within

the cosmic bond

unravels

into subtle relationships

Intrinsic

this connect with

flowing time and space

in all its multiplicity, season,

form.

Emotion plays with

reason

and tree roots

soaked in mountain

sea river

entangle with

heart sky

ravines

and the gait of the

serpent eagle

embeds

into swaying

kamalam

rising from the

navel.

9. Aesthetic Method Towards Ecological Consciousness

Ecological consciousness in Indian thought is interwoven with ethics of everyday life. Nature and culture are entwined and this principle is echoed in philosophy and aesthetics. It is from this sense of kinship that artistic processes have been evolved in traditional Indian thought. There is a seamless flow that connects the individual self with the larger environment and cosmos. Naess is said to have drawn his notion of self-realisation from Gandhi and adapted it to evolve his own ideas. His notion of the self goes back to *Advaita Vedānta* and Indian philosophical frameworks of self.

> "Naess always capitalized it thus: Self-realization. And he metaphysically grounded the distinction between self- and Self-realization in the Sanskrit distinction between the *jīva* (the narrow self) and the *ātman* (the universal Self). Practically speaking, Self-realization in Ecosophy T is attained when one realizes that oneself (or perhaps better oneSelf) is embedded in one's environment and continuous with it." (Calicott 2014, 382)

While line seems too simple a process to comprehend this kinship between human and the natural world, it is both tool and method that allows for a deeper intuition to emerge in consciousness and cognition. The method of practice towards eco-art that I

then arrive at, emerges through Indian categories. In what follows, I give a broad overview of this method.

9.1. Contemplation: Self, Transformation as Ritual, Practice and Action

Self in Indian thought is innerness, and simultaneously all pervasively cosmic. The inner and the outer are intrinsically bound in this conception of reality, nature, and consciousness. *Uḷḷam (heart)* and *Ātman (universal self)* are two concepts I use to contemplate on the self. Any creative act is a *yajña*, a ritual act of transformation that happens through intense meditative practice (*sādhanā*). All of these can be processed only in inner space (*antarhṛdaya ākāśa*) and hence mapping consciousness within this expansive inner space is critical to both perception and action (Baümer 1992, xv).

Actions – Watch self, meditate on it, observe it. As in the Vedic poem of the two birds, cultivate the witness within the self as the observer. Create art as an action of contemplating the creative essence of life; allow this action to tune being into a state of high vibrating force that creates a state ready for self-transformation. Allow the high level of awareness that is created in this process to inform all action, by activating the inner compass of the heart.

9.2. Transience: *Dvāram (Doorway)*, Body Contour and elements of transaction

Transformation can only happen at moments of transience, a shift in being. This time is linked to doorways (*dvāram*) where transitions occur in consciousness. In Indian thought the relationship between body and life form the very basis of being The body is celebrated for giving us the experience of enjoying the creative origin of life through our own contours. Space. Time. Form. Line. Energy become

elements of transaction that allow transmutation between forms, states of being, states of consciousness and as well as realities.

Actions: Become aware of liminal boundaries where change can occur. This requires the ability to observe time and space in highly nuanced packets of spatiality, duration, stillness, dynamism, void and fullness. Observe these boundaries at the interface of the inner and outer to see when, where and how seamless exchanges can happen between the two.

9.3. Creativity: Integral multiplicity, materiality, paradox

The cosmic, the terrestrial, and the self are bound to each other in the Indian view of reality. The correspondences that one can draw across all living and non-living forms in all layers of reality lead to the idea of plurality arising from oneness. This provides the framework for infinity and recursion in creativity. The paradox (*māya*) of observing one in the many and many in the one, allows for playfulness (*līlā*) in our unraveling of creativity.

Actions: Observe the threads that bind life together, observe multiplicity while reading oneness. Draw and sketch to capture these. Look for diverse ways to represent plurality and oneness. Discover different artistic devices to represent these states. Be aware of how the body is *porous* and how it is connected to the outer reality and inner reality. Develop the body as a tool of heightened perception. Delve into the paradoxical experiences that emerge in acknowledging this state of reality. Allow these experiences to reframe/describe nature of reality. Find ways to express these in and through the arts.

9.4. Experience: *Rasa* (Aesthetic flavor or aesthetic essence), Rest, Bliss, Sympathetic aesthete

In traditional Indian worldviews, there is an integral vision of the world and an understanding of its balance based on complementary concepts of inner and outer, finite and infinite interwoven through a coded language of metaphor, into an organically interrelated and multilayered system of concepts (Vatsyayan 1997,162-163). This leads to an integral multiplicity of expression, ideating and visual forms. This process of unraveling creativity through paradox and integral multiplicity leads to experience at multiple levels of being, both in the artist and the aesthete. In the Indian model, the artist is also an aesthete, having drawn from first hand aesthetic experiences of the universe. Therefore the artist (*kalākār*) is also the sympathetic aesthete (*sahṛdaya)*. In Indian aesthetics *sahṛdaya* refers to someone who is able to resonate with the heart of another person/being and therefore intuitively grasp emotions felt by the other person/being. In this way, the artist is able to evoke the most unified and peak aesthetic experience (*rasa*) from within their heart. This fullness of experience enables the artist to reside in a state of mindful equilibrium (*hṛdayaviśrānti*) and transitory yet deep states of oneness and bliss experienced with all forms of life (*ānanda*). These three concepts of aesthetic essence, equilibrium and bliss indicate the core of a transformative aesthetic experience. When an artist becomes a sympathetic aesthete of the natural world, she is able to experience a sense of oneness with the natural world.

Actions: Be aware of emotional states, their transience, their heightening and their flavours to draw out the richness of experience. In order to be aware of emotional states, develop the quality of *hṛdayaviśrānti*, a state of restfulness from which to

observe emotions. As an artist, cultivate resonance with the natural world as a *sahṛdaya, a sympathetic aesthete.* In these quieter states, you might come upon a resounding joy of bliss.

9.5. Transcendence: Transformation /shift in consciousness

When the artist touches a state of inner quietude through relishing the essence of creativity, there is a moment of complete oneness with one life. Transitory, albeit powerful, it allows for transformation and deeper shifts in consciousness. Oftentimes, love and compassion are a natural flow in this state of being.

Actions: *Vimarśa* (Self-reflection). Tacit or expressed in creative work, be aware of momentary transitions that lead to transformations in consciousness. Allow the being to be flooded with inexplicable joy. Remove all internal obstructions. Observe the arising of compassion as a state of being. Reside in resonance with all life in this state. Stay in this state as meaningful actions emerge. Reside in the witness consciousness. Become aware of the joyous state of *ānanda*, that is in stillness and repose.

10. Conclusion

Contemplative self-awareness remains at the heart of the Indian method for observing the essence of life as well as oneself. I am already bound by the ethics of the cosmic order of harmony (*ṛta)* in my perception. *Aesthetic essence (rasa)* and *self-reflection (vimarśa)* lend me the threads for my practice.





Fig 39 and 40. Painted storks, Grey heron and Seagulls at Pulicat lake, December 2016.

What do I owe these birds, I wonder in my furtive missions to uncover their outlandish/ eccentric joy of being. I am just muddling around, hoping to find lines for my art. But somewhere near me, out there in marshes that get turned to urban skyscrapers, lakes turned to plastic ditches, oceans swimming with debris, there are birds wading, swimming, feeding, giving birth, rearing young, and of all the indignity

that we perpetrate on life in all its forms, this indeed is the most heartbreaking. In that sorrow I find lines that soar with the birds and yet they are bound by the heaviness of human mindlessness.



Fig 41. Turkey, Hessarghatta, Bangalore, July 2016



Fig 42. Pond Heron, Jakkur Lake, January 2017.



Fig 43. Green Bee Eater, The Valley School, Bangalore, March 2017.

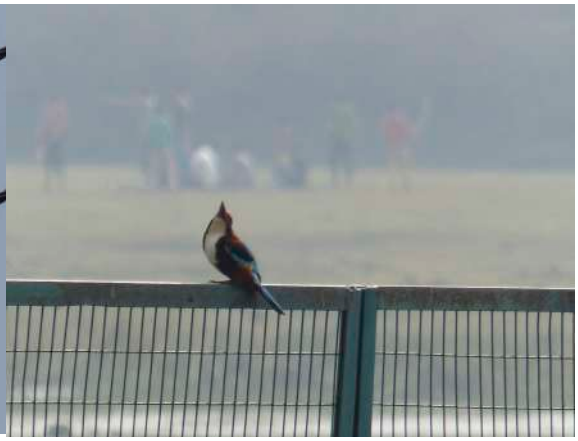


Fig 44. White Breasted Kingfisher, Morni Hills, Chandigarh, January 2017.

Why should this be the quest and concern of the artist's line? Are there any objective or direct answers to this subjective inquiry? Is it possible to research these traversing and nuanced emotions that defy disciplinary boundaries and lend themselves to curious observations of birds? The artist searches for years to discover that line. That line is discovered not just by observing the bird, but going through these emotional layers: not through skill alone, but in a moment of exuberance or

stillness that the birds share with her. A preening bird, a darting bird, a swimming bird – they are all aware of your presence. A bird that you watch through your binoculars too seems to be aware of your inquisitive inquiry into their personal lives. The owls I have noticed have a sharp opinion about these intrusions and sometimes tacit permissions are required for the birds to accept your presence in their midst. The owls of course can be most condescending if you do not meet their high standards of negotiated agreements. That line that I find after all these negotiations is not just skill, but conversation, it is my friendship with life; it is the way I honour the birds, but more than that, it is the way I discover myself in relationship.



Fig 45. Hawk, night and villagers returning home, Watercolours and ink on cartridge paper, 16.25 in X 11.75 in, 2019.

Through that line I become bird – swooping, turning, gliding, landing – in gentle strength and that inexplicable stillness that guides flight. I for one am curious about the

relationship between form and consciousness and in that I choose to use the artist's line to inquire, research, comprehend, investigate, reach out and be bird wing, tail, feather, beak, body and the partnering sky-winds.

Chapter 12

Sādhanā - Curated Practice through Indian Categories

Rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva
Tadāsya rūpam praticakṣaṇaya

He becomes the original form of every form
It is his form that is everywhere to be seen.

- *Rgveda 6.47.18* (Kak 2002b, 149)

Sections

1. From Intuitive Practice to Building Frameworks

2. Inquiring into *Porosity*: The Journey of Practice

3. Self: *Yāṉ*, *Ātman, Cit*

4. Transformation: *Yajña*

5. Practice: *Sādhanā*

6. Interiority- Exteriority: *Antarhṛdaya Ākāśa, Kṣetra*

7. Transience: *Dvāram*

8. *Porosity*: *Uḷḷam*

9. Transacting Elements: Space. Time. Form. Line. Energy

10. Key – *Vāc*

11. Participating Elements: *Adhidaiva-Adhibhūta-Adhyātma*

12. Real and Unreal: *Māyā*

13. Experience: *Rasa. Dhvani. Bhāvana. Kalpana*

14. Joy: *Ānanda*

15. Resonance: *Sahṛdaya* and *Rasikā*

16. Consciousness: *Cit*

16.1. Rise and Manifestation of Consciousness

16.2. Dynamics and Transformations of Consciousness

16.3. Transcendence and Dissolution of Consciousness

17. Ethics: *Dharma* and *Svadharma*

***Sādhanā* - Curated Practice through Indian Categories:**

This chapter will look at a framework of practice through Indian Categories and discusses the curated journal (which reflects reflective artistic practice across the last five years). Drawing from the full journal, select pieces have been chosen for the thesis. It is a collection of notes and creative work that show creative possibilities within the paradigm of the *porous* and the journeys taken through the quest and expression of the *porous* self.

The journal is curated from the practices undertaken during the last five - six years of the doctoral research and reflections on twenty-five years of my work, to enable crafting a rich methodological framework of *porosity* in both theory and practice. The journal seeks to make visible this *sādhanā*, this meditative nature of the practice, while unraveling artistic processes and journeys, choices of material and media, evolution of line, space and form in non-linear ways, showcasing the way consciousness moves, guides, dissolves and rises again in meditative artistic practice.

1. From Intuitive Practice to Building Frameworks

In writing this thesis, the journal came first as insight and propelled the research inquiries into Indian theories and practices. While it is the last chapter for academic purposes, it is by virtue of intuition; the first guiding chapter that helped me discover my own internal processes. The thesis was an unraveling of the practice.

The full journal seeks its research methods to be exemplified in its very form. While there is a certain sequentiality of a *porous* consciousness emerging into awareness, playfully transforming and continuously dissolving, the very nature of the inquiry is a

continuous and recursive narrative. There can be no beginning or ending and insights and intuitions, experiences and transformations continuously emerge and submerge in relation to nature and self. Much like the metaphor of the snake eating itself, this *porosity* is a process of alchemy that happens at the doorways of the interior and exterior.

The inquiries happen through the medium of form. Form is a clever seamstress as she is a sorceress and seer, and she guides, dictates, participates and allows for the pliable consciousness to be re-crafted through her benevolence. And it is through form that the inquiry molds itself supported by the tricksters, space and time. Form is the synthezing principle for the artist. Form is vision and utterance and a *porous* shape-shifting element, whatever the choice of media. In crafting form, the artist crafts consciousness. And in crafting consciousness, the artist merges with all life finding the great rest of *ānanda*. In all this there is creative ingenuity, a certain frenzy of being possessed, the paradox of multiplicity of selves, inner laws bound by the outer, imaginative improvisation lending itself to sensorial experience in the gross, the subtle and the transcendental.

The body is tool, *kṣetra*, hall of sentience, sensory celebration, *porous* paradox and the very heart of the ritual of transformation. Embodying these inner transmutations that have taken place in the great ritual between the inner and the outer, the artist invites the *sahṛdaya* to share and bathe in these experiences. Between the two, they carry yet another interior paradoxical truth of *porosity* as each carves the other in reflexivity.

Rainforests and oceans, rock, mountain and tree, snake, eagle and boar, bee and moth, and the great outer sky intensifies into the inner, even as the inner evening in its deep cerulean blue hues intensifies into the mysterious night of the owl in the richness of endless shimmering black.

2. Inquiring into *Porosity* - The Journey of Practice

Hovering in still flight

Red dragonfly

Lights up the sky

This poem reflects on a moment of watching a dragonfly like the one I saw at Rajapalayam in 2013 is one, which suddenly brings about stillness to all my senses. Something unexpected happens and I become fully alert and tranquil. I am startled by the instance and I am stilled by it. I am in elemental panic because it is too beautiful and yet it seems inconsequential. Yet it is swallowing me whole. It terrifies me, but I am at peace. I think such a perfect moment is one of great bewilderment, out of depth feeling, alertness, quietude, vulnerability and very tender. Such a moment is ripe with poetry. I think in that space, if one seeks to create something, then somehow magic might happen. However, I finally wrote the verse in 2015. Until then, the beauty of the moment remained simmering within me taking no particular form or shape. While I could have chosen visual art to interpret, the final choice of writing a verse came in a flash in conversation with a friend.

In making some of these seemingly intuitive choices, there is a certain timeliness and rational construct as well. Sometimes art is created in reflection or contemplation and

sometimes in responsiveness to a situation. Unraveling and unpacking the journeys of artistic processes within oneself helps in building a methodological framework for a contemplative pedagogy for the arts at one level and allows for deepening of personal practice at another.

A deeper reflectiveness in the process also allows one to become aware of one's own creative process and traverse the distance between the restless need to create and the stillness at the root/ core of one's creative self.

My journey begins a little while before my doctoral work begins. That is inevitable I suppose. It starts perhaps a long time ago, as my journals from the past embody. I can go back over twenty- five years of documented writings and images to trace the path of these ideas. The journal has a collection of my writings, images, thoughts that tease out a way of being. The current inquiry rises from this way of being *porous* to the natural world and all life in general. The question then is not whether *porosity* exists or not, but why does it exist? and what is its nature?, what allows for *porosity*? Can it be practiced? Can it be made visible? The practitioner's point of view starts from years of embodied practice. The interrogation begins when watching out alertly for the instances of *porosity* where the artist seems to find profound meaning. This research is therefore stemming from a nature of being, its truth in the artist's personal practice. Whether the same state of being can hold true for others in varied textures is another part of the mystery. However, what is this nature of being for the artist herself and can she make this visible to others? This is the point of this *Sādhanā*, a curated journal of practice.

Here is a self I know, visible through its creative work, the forms in which it has embodied itself over the years. In every instance that I have chosen to exhibit here, the self speaks of a *porous* relationship, a membrane that seems to dissolve into a greater reality. Again and again, the call of these words from a different time ask for the shattering of the self as we know it to discover a greater oneness. I repeatedly speak of moments of great clarity that arise from the shattering of the self into oneness. I also speak of insights of these moments as the true nature of creativity, a nature of being that liberates us from any boundary and allows us to open into limitlessness. Often these come out as utterances rather than intellectually constructed thoughts. The chapters of the journal trace my ideas from 1996, showcasing the emergences, reflections, insights, mystic outbursts and perceptions that revolve around this sense of self. These lay the foundation for further inquiry into the nature of self, art and creative practice.

3. Self: *Yāṉ, Ātman, Cit*

- Conception of reality, nature and consciousness

As an artist, the self is the most malleable, transformative and challenging encounter everyday. As discussed in chapter 5, through researching into Indian arts, aesthetics and philosophy and my practice of visual and performing arts, I was able to reside in a working consciousness where an artist could simultaneously live in ritual, mythical worlds while contemplating on the philosophical nature of both reality and existence. I began to train in order to endure, interpret, engage with versatility and diversity and create. I enjoyed traversing time and space, spiritual and secular, form and formless, myth and ritual, different dimensions of thought and science, humour and gravity, sensuous, erotic and sacred in my work.

When playing with the nature of reality and consciousness, it becomes possible to engage with multiple selves of oneself, become aware of the many selves within each of us. The absurdity and the complexity of self/ selves that we are, allows for rich creative possibilities.

In the prose piece written in 2013 and published on my blog, I delve into reflections on the absurd fluidity of identities that *porosity* enables.

Absurdity of Selves

Nov 16, 2013[1]

There is a certain absurdity to being who I am. I can't say it is wonderful all the time. But then it is there, this strange absurdity of being, of a reckless, rash, thoughtful and

[1] *Absurdity of Selves,* http://www.sriviliveshere.com/pulse/absurdity-of-selves

quirky combination of selves. Most of the time, when I am suddenly asked to introduce myself, I am confounded - Which of my selves should I introduce, I wonder: the micro-organisms, the coral, the reef or the ocean or the waves? I wonder if others may perceive this weird confusion as profound silliness, confused identity or if they may have the patience to see it as a palpable mystery. And similar to my perception of my many selves, I am thrilled to meet the many-ness in the oneness of people with seemingly singular identities.

Conflicting and confusing, mesmerizing and meandering, hilarious and eventful, I enjoy and come away often overwhelmed by meeting people. In fact it takes me a long time to process everything because I am obviously seeing too much and then I am also going into tangential zones of imagination and creativity. Then to appear quite simply polite, I drag all these meaningfully multiple forces of perception and keep them in an almost strangle hold, not that the forces care much about my idea of restriction. They are slippery and sneaky, wonderful and precocious. And they are ticklish as well, giving me enough reason to burst into laughter every few minutes or so. I like that, though it is sort of cranky to burst out laughing on serious occasions.

And quite often these selves hold their holy meetings, all joyous and wacky, all serious and reflective and engage in some kind of an ecosystem evolution. It is terrifying at best, mystical at worst, a complete upheaval throughout. And when I observe their meetings with that 'Nth' self who is being observed by yet another, I am drawn back to nature again and again to learn. Suddenly, when I switch off and get drawn into the uncanny depth of a leaf, a tree, a flight of birds and a sudden breeze, I am embraced by this great ecosystem, which I mirror in all my sheaths, physical,

emotional, intellectual and metaphysical. Then my absurdity is no surprise, it is natural, it is real and it is profoundly simple.

For some time if we can shut of the clamor in our lives, without our super-imposed human individualistic identity and watch the dance of a leaf and an ant, waves and sand, clouds and skies, we might find an abundance of selves in conversations around us; Evolving ecosystems of exchange, thought, transformation, holiness, conflicts, confusions, hilarity and blessedness in absurdity.

In healthy perspective, I find it even more unintelligible and wander off to wonder if I am driftwood, lake, iguana or dark night.

In the following poem, I reflect on a particular state of self that emerges in a moment of *porosity* and engulfing wild love for the world that moves through the being in such a state.

In love

Nov 12, 2015

Mellifluous soul rhythms,
Poring forth through
Simmering body flutters.

Alive,
In fluid rock
Tempered by sea

Sand, wind, young sapling

Music wildly beating

In warm heart

amorphous shaped

weathering away

into clay

pliable

erotic earth

restoring

sense

Alive,

senses

in smile

accepting

generous

gentle

wry

embracing

simmering

flowing

river in sea.

Tempestuous being

storming

through

fragile strength

weightless

feather-wind

seeking

velocity to escape

finding quiet

slow pull

back down into

the sensuous

earth-self.

Alive,

In finely ground dust

Corporeal

Ethereal

Paradoxical quest

In love

4. *Yajña*

- Sacrifice and Transformation; allowing for openness, change, preparedness, The Ritual and performance of transformation

The *yajña* begins when there is a willingness to change, to undergo transformation that is visceral and fundamental. The fiery nature of the inquiry burning within is the fire that starts the *yajña*.

Going back to the central question of the thesis,

How does experiencing oneself as a *porous* being impact one's ecological consciousness, artistic inquiry and creative practice? How does artistic inquiry impact *porosity* and consciousness in turn?

The *yajña* starts with the frame of *porosity*, not before its uncovering. This is critical to the nature of research that is set forth. The inquiry is into the nature of *porosity* and not into why *porosity* must be studied.

As articulated in the *Mahābhārata*, the quality of any *yajña* is measured not in its loftiness or output, but in the nature of the sacrifice and the transformation that is internal. My practice emerges from the centre and undeniable truth of death. As a practitioner of the Hindu tradition, cremating the dead and scattering the ashes back into nature is a custom that I have watched in my family as I grew up. Poignant and moving this returning of the ashes to the earth, sky, and waters of the earth, merging the body, spirit and a life well lived back to the source that it came from, makes the nature of dust profound. And in that dust that death turns us into lies the ultimate

porosity of our forms. It is in being rooted in death that I find that the humility of my practice emerges from. It is when death becomes the centre of life that we return to the inner simplicity of being alive. There are no ties, for in that last frame, when even our memories don't belong to us anymore, the greatness of life seems to lie in its ability to disintegrate into its basic elements. All the emotions that steer us, our values, our material acquisitions, everything stops at that moment. We come and we go, and as the word *'līlā'* captures in its essence, it seems to be merely a playful pursuit of life seeking itself through our forms.

Every transformation begins in meditating on death. At the heart of my practice lies this deep engagement with understanding transitoriness of life, of relationships, of all that we love and hold.

Death, my beloved, my friend!

Dec 28, 2015

Draw me in

Vibrant and beautiful

Death!

In your embrace

A thousand deaths

may I die,

to learn

one moment of

Living.

Death

My friend, my beloved!

Embrace me, envelop me

in your great warmth

Let your exquisite

tenderness sculpt my soul.

Death my love!

My life

Allow me the vast

Expanse of your

Nothingness

So I may flow endlessly…

Draw me into the forces of dying

Beyond that momentary darkness

Draw me into the luminescence

Draw me further and further

into your rich depths

My friend, my beloved

Draw me in

So I may learn one moment

of living life…

One sheath after another

Let me come apart

In your arms

Farther and farther in

Draw me

Shatter me

Embrace me

Into your resplendence

Moment after moment

Teach me to die a million little deaths

Quintessential ones,

Before you gift

Me the greater death.

My love, me beloved,

Meet me by the inner sea

And rock my world

With your finality,

Your stillness

Draw me in

Draw me in to

Dance with you,

So with great vibrance,

I may come away with you

Dancing

Laughing gaily,

One footstep after another

In the drunkenness of joy!

Draw me into you death,

My silence

My solitude

My beloved!

Reach far into my soul

And scatter me away

Into a zillion star dust

Blow me away into

Windy night and

Misty morning

My love!

Hold me tight and

Then let me go.

So I may learn one moment of

Living life.

Death my great one!

My little One!

My eternity

My ephemeral vast

Enfold me into your endless depths

Into your kindness

Embrace me in your strength and

Contentment

Draw me in

Dance with me

Oh enchanting friend.

Sit by me this evening

And let me ponder

The gifts that you bring!

Luminous joy,

Flowing river,

Hold me tight,

Let me go.

From the collection Kaivalya:Meditations on Living and Dying

And from within the restfulness and stillness that arises out of death, ecstasy flowers open.

Ānantam

This body

in tune with

that harmony,

That harmony in tune

with this.

This body in tune with

Gaurs, minivets

great banyans

storks and cranes and wild ketaki

torrential rain

and gentle waves lapping

at the feet,

herons in flight

and frogs hidden in shrub and rock crevice

deodars and rain trees

tiny rocks expanding into grand mountains

Snakes in alert rest

and black winged stilts in sinuous flight

embraced in light cascading through hills

black headed ibis catching a fish

grasslands whispering

phoenix worms composting

and making humus

moss and mist

carpets of pongamia and jacaranda

This body in tune

with starlight

and

invisible life.

From the 'Yajña – Transformation' collection April 7- July 23 , 2017

5. Practice: *Sādhanā*

– Deliberation, contemplation, meditative practice on form, embodied inquiries. The Practice. Embodied inquiries. *prāṇa*

Practice has been extensively discussed in chapter 12. *Sādhanā* is both the craft of technique and form as well as the crafting of being and consciousness. *Sādhanā* is everyday practice at being oneself and rediscovering oneself anew. In the following poem from the collection – '*Iyalbu (Iyalpu)* - *On Being'* captures a reflective moment of grasping the difference between shared human experiences that can be considered gifts of being than ones that are transactional. The poem reflects on the need to empty oneself of all that holds us back from being in relationship to reach into the heart of *porous* beingness. And this process of preparing oneself perpetually is *Sādhanā*.

Gift

More and more
my doubts are cleared
and I come to think of
this time here
as something that can only be shared
not taught
or given
or taken.

All of these relationships with life

gifts of being.

While the leopard

sits still

staring at forest-ness

I work on being.

Hard work, for I must

throw out more that I can keep.

Skin deep porousness

extends and oftentimes begins

beyond the fabric

of human life.

(From the collection 'Iyalbu – On being', Feb- Dec 2017)

In this second poem, part of my reflections from 2016, after continually probing into states and times when I had intense feelings of being *porous* and in resonance with all life around me, I wrote on Being and Non-being.

Being and Non- Being

There is life

and there is death-

One in love with the other

their being and non-being

closely bound.

Between their form

and formless selves

shape shifting mysteries

emerge and dissolve.

Beginning of dawn

I am foetus.

At sunset

I am humus.

In the time betwixt

I am tree.

Sādhanā is continual practice of being, and, finding vocabulary, form, articulating, putting oneself through the constant doorways of intuition, trust, mistrust, conflict, confusion and creative expression. It is both the mundane and the transcendental. It is the everyday engagement with life with honesty and sincerity lost in the thrall of the mystery that is life with awe, humility and reverence.

6. Interiority- Exteriority: *Antarhṛdaya Ākāśa, Kṣetra*

Allowing the outer and the inner to connect. Setting. *Kṣetra*. Mapping consciousness in space and place through art

Terrain

Slowness
deepens
subtlety.

The body
embeds itself
layer by layer
into landscape.

Heightened awareness
is mischievous play
altering the terrain
of the self.

How we respond and connect to place and other beings is at the heart of building *porous* relationships. The following journal entry captures the details of experiencing Pulicat brackish water lake as a landscape – seascape in December 2016 through photographs, reflective prose and poetry, I gather the interiority of a landscape in my experience, learning how the heart can be open to other beings, in the inner landscape.

Pulicat Lake

Sea and Bird Wing

Srivi Kalyan, Dec 31 2016- March 29 2017

(All photographs by Srivi Kalyan)



Fig 1, 2, 3: Painted storks and egrets at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

SEA, STORK & CRAB



Meetings



by the brackish water lake

Fig 4: Painted storks and egrets at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

Fig 5: Crab shell at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

They walk unperturbed
by my presence
A bunch of painted storks
black headed ibis
egrets, cormorants, gulls
I walk closer and closer
and watch…
My presence is accepted
and it is a meeting
of sorts,
a good beginning…

The sea in its expansiveness always calls to my inner spirit. I always think of the sea as my soul mate. For years I have run to the sea to think, to be, to find myself, to celebrate, to quieten myself down, to cry, to just find that sea within me.

Pulicat was wondrous. The brackish water lake, birds and the sea and my search for flamingoes. My body was tired. It has been an exhausting year of work for me. The back pain has returned. I could not seamlessly blend with the landscape as I often do.







The pain remained a barrier between us, an incessant reminder of what I needed to let go to find myself again.

Fig 6,7,8: Black headed ibis fishing at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.



Priorities shifted as I gently let the flight of birds guide me. Painted storks, cormorants, herons, swallows, black headed ibis catching a fish, gulls, greater egrets and their abundance, and the ever elusive flamingoes, whom I did not meet.

The storks let me walk close to them. They shared their space. They taught me to reside within my body in grace and sensuousness, in respectful reverence of the form that I inhabit.

Fig 9: Painted Storks fishing at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

Sea - Lake and Bird Wing



Who would have thought
that a little cormorant
would capture the sea - lake
in his flight!





Fig 10: Cormorant flying at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.
Fig 11: The Bay of Bengal, December 2016.
Fig 12: Cormorants at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

Olive Ridley



He was dying

possibly a trawler had

torn his body apart

Intelligence shone beyond

the deep pain

I carry all those stories

into my body





Fig 13, 14, 15: Olive Ridley Turtle on an island between Pulicat Lake and the Bay of Bengal, December 2016.

Sculpting

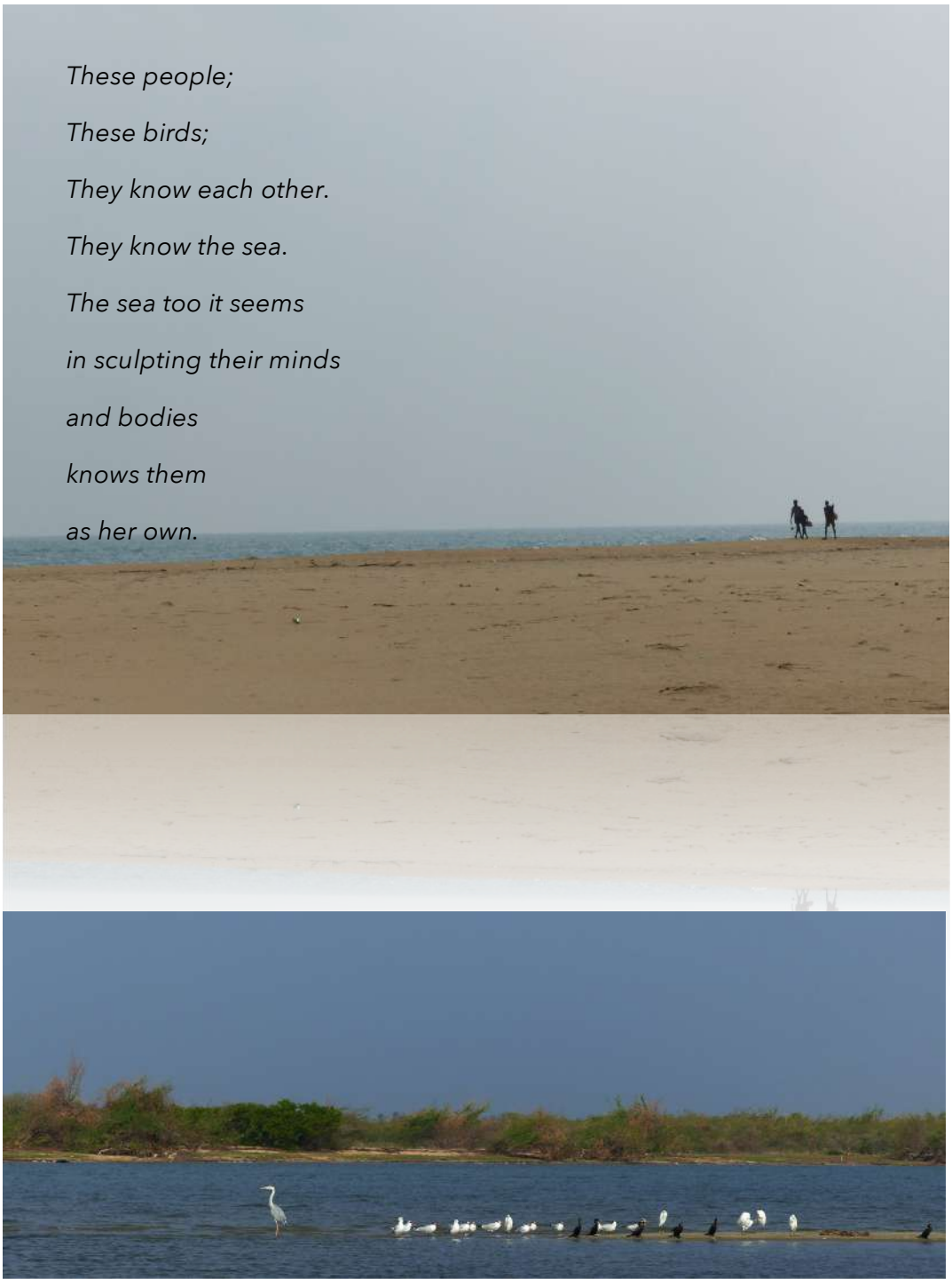


Fig 16: People walking on an island between Pulicat Lake and the Bay of Bengal, Dec 2016.
Fig 17: Grey heron, Egrets and Cormorants on a strip of land on Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

Journey



We intersect in our journeys

It's a long purposeful walk

for both of us.

I watch him

he moves on unperturbed,

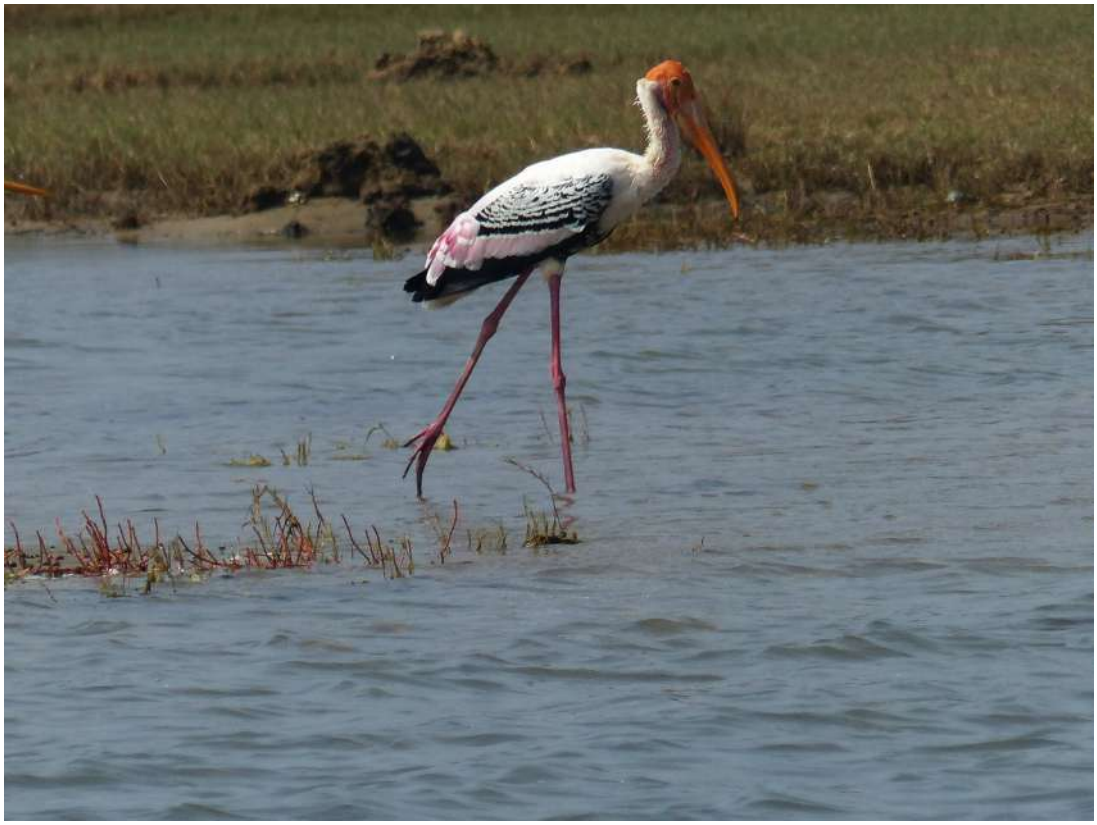
I am irrelevant.

I think this is how it must feel

To be insignificant

Fig 18, 19, 20: Tracing the journey of a gastropod on an island between Pulicat Lake and the Bay of Bengal, December 2016.

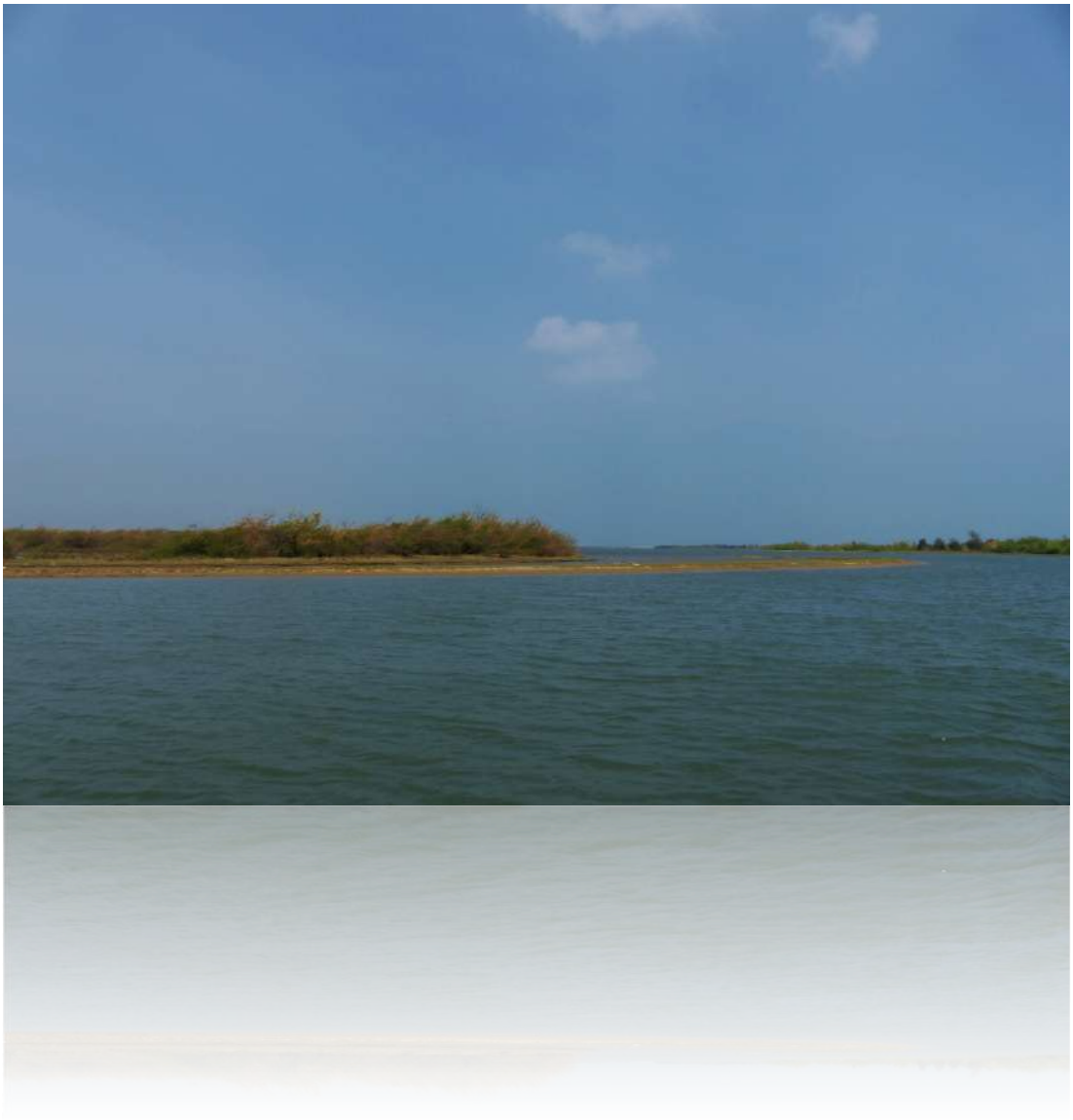
Time



Sometimes one must accept
that the world will change,
these beings will be destroyed,
landscapes and waterscapes
will find new places and new life
one world will end,
one kalpa, one yuga…
one new born
they must all reside
in one time.

Fig 21: Painted Stork walking on Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

Intimacy



The sea and I, we share our moments. I know of the sea that floods my body, overflows, erases all history, submerges great mountains and flows with new life. The sea is a great song within me. I might never have fished, swam or endured the sea as others who know it intimately. But the great sea unfolds into me, drawing me within its subtle depths. It is from the sea that I learn of desire to live in bird wing and jelly fish, coral and red roots. It is from the sea that I uncover weathering and sculpting of the formless and that which is beyond form. It is the sea that whispers through my body, embracing me like it does the olive ridleys and in those instances I become ancient being, as primordial as the universe in its aeons of existence.

Fig 22: Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

And when the sea calls, I must go back to it, for there is nothing more deafening and quiet as the sound of the conch hiding the sea. And in that, form and line break away from premeditated artist to flow across space as *Kṛṣṇa*-the deep colour of twilight moving into night, the painted storks resting and feeding, sea rolling unto itself, into lake, sparkling sand and snake tracks, endless wave, and rock and tide pools, seaweed, bathing buffaloes and jelly fish, all the way into me.

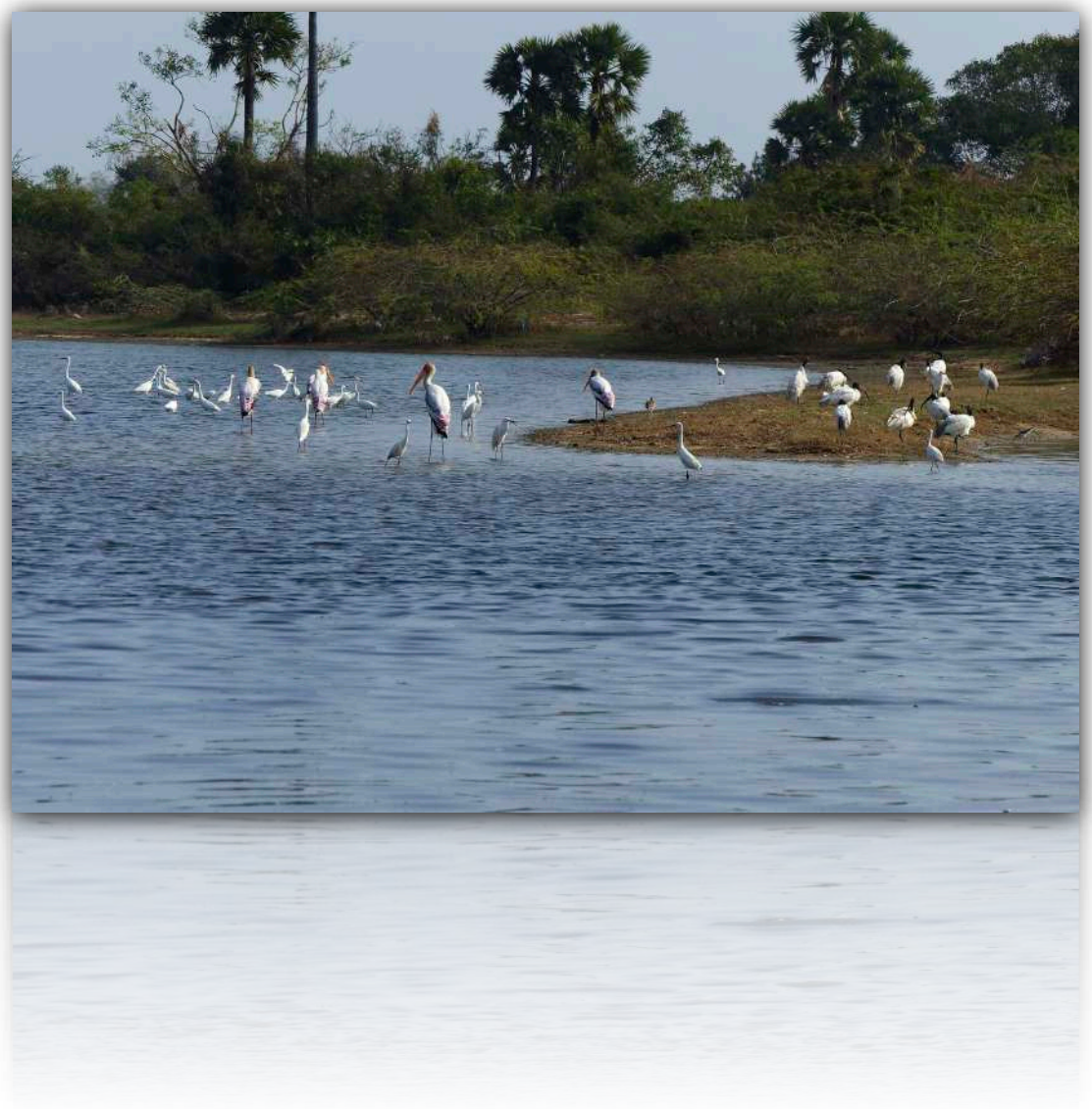


Fig 23: Painted storks, Black headed ibis, and egrets at Pulicat Lake, December 2016.

DYING



These tired landscapes of body
mind, excited human life
extensive entertainment
built home, mall, recreation space
restaurant, party time
growth and development
and a fight for life.
Dying self
and
dead fish -
We have long
unspoken
conversations…



Fig 24: A view of the Bay of Bengal from an island between Pulicat Lake and the sea, Dec 2016.
Fig 25: Dead fish on the beach by Pulicat Lake, Dec 2016.

7. Transcience: *Dvāram*

– Inquiring into the doorway, the liminal boundaries. Frame of transience

The outer landscape and the inner one are intrinsically connected. Wide open earth, massive banyans, endless forests, still waters, onset of monsoon... one alert moment and they all flood and open the gateways of the inner to similar vistas. How do we miss this point?

Knowledge, openness, transitoriness, willingness to perceive the unknown - These are all instances of doorways. In the following poem, I reflect on a journey through the Olympic National Forest and the meeting the river and sea through those journeys as I wonder about the doorways that let us to find these points of meeting.

Spatial – Temporal

What if we entered the garden
through the jasmine vines
and not that well laid out rock cut path.
They both lead there
to the rose bushes and geraniums,
to that lily pond
with its wild flowers.

It is a rather spatial problem
this thinking about earth and sky
Inside my head there is a story

of a Kalpavṛkṣa,

a tree to which

all life is connected, ocean, sea and sky

and they are linked by cosmic cycles and rhythms.

But that's the jasmine vine pathway

overflowing with abundant blossoms, a green vine snake

too coiled somewhere in an adjacent branch.

It is a little darker there, and I am told,

unwise to walk in the night.

But when I enter through that path,

somehow the rainforest comes alive elsewhere

and I am cognizant of how all life is linked.

The space is not on the outside

though, because yesterday

I walked by the great Pacific ocean

and the Hoh river

joined the sea.

She came through the forest

I came down the road on my car.

We were fine meeting by the sea,

except she didn't know me

nor I, her.

If I had walked

through the forest

would it be a different conversation?

Does it matter, if I can never

reach the sea through

the forest

or that meeting point

on time?

Is it a temporal problem of being then?

or a spatial one

that in my head

I seek to traverse what neither

beetle nor bird desires,

but somehow rock and sand

don't bother with all these questions,

nor does glacier

or mountain skin.

They all tumble into sea

and find their way to coral

and octopus camouflage.

In my head though

that aesthetic view

comes from conquest and convenience

adventure and success

and a thousand human concepts,

spatial and temporal

in relation to earth and sky

our contrived sense of being

extended in the body of a car

accessible

and illusory of nearness.

Somehow the river, sea, rock, driftwood

and I - We have a successful meeting.

I am thrilled

The space is vast and time endless

in that temporary thirty minutes in cold wind

and playful mist.

The second poem is from my collection – *Śṛṅgāra – Love*, evokes the sentiments between *Śiva* and *Pārvatī* as lovers, and love as the doorway to *porosity.*

Pārvatī

Pārvatī laughs at Śiva's chagrin.

She knows

he will come to her time and again

after all that pretense of

meditative stillness.



Fig 26: Pārvatī wearing skull garland as described in Sankara Pallaki Seva Prabandamu by Sahaji Maharaja, Pen and Ink, 8.5in X 11 in, 2012.

She braids her hair

and taunts her old lover.

She invites him to sit beside her

in solitude.

He laughs at her mockery,

and claims her

root and all

and bound by his charm

she lets him take up

half her body

to find his solitude.

Unbalanced man,

she softly whispers in bed,

you cannot even rest

without

me.

Śiva sighs

in pleasure

and even

the third eye

falls asleep

as

her fingers

gently

soothe his heart.

8. *Porosity*: *Uḷḷam*

– Deepening inquiry into nature of *porosity* – Being in tune with oneself.

I go back to the first chapter to the pieces of writing from 17 years ago to reflect back on my early encounters with *porosity* and with the *uḷḷam*, capable of dynamic transformation, dissolution and resonance.

I wrote as a twenty two year old, in Tamil

Nāṉē eṉ iṟuti nilai.

Etu iṟuti nilai eṉṟa ciṟiya vaṭṭatiṟkul nāṉ eṉṉai pulappaṭuttikoḷḷa virumpavillai

I am my own final limit.

I do not wish to reveal myself by defining a small circle of limits (Translation)

This was written in the spirit of the mystic, as a reflection of the limitlessness of the inner self.

From this poem arose another one of my poems

Āṉantam (Tamil)

December 2003 - Jan 2004

caṭṭeṉṟu cintaṉaiyil āṉantam

kāṟṟu vāṉ kaṇ mūccu

maṇ maḻai maṉam uṇarvu

eṉṟoru putiya marapē āṉantam

Translation

Āṉantam (Tamiḻ)

Suddenly, a moment of joy arises in thought!

Wind, Sky, Eye, Breath

Mud, Rain, Heart, Feeling

Everything interwoven,

soar into a new lineage of joy(bliss)!

This particular poem *Āṉantam*, written as a prayer in complete resonance with the natural world, remains at the heart of my work. A moment of great insight and enlightenment that I captured in Tamiḻ, it pays homage to the concept and authenticity of feeling ' *Āṉantam*'. The bursting forth of this feeling through my being, opened up a new world, a new lineage to how I worked. In some ways it opened the doorways back to a lineage of being that traces its sources to the ancient Indian thought traditions.

This thesis is an unfolding of, and an inquiry into the feeling of this poem, this complete interweaving with life, with *uyir* - the life force. The poem is the spirit of the thesis that I seek to uncover in its truth, *mey*, body. It is my response to the ecological crisis as an artist. It is also my celebration of life, a gentle call to others to respond with a transformation of being.

9. **Transacting Elements**: Space. Time. Form. Line. Energy
    - Applying/ Deepening through practice/ Transactions of *porous*, Understanding how elements and principles of art may work, how poetic structures may change, how movement and physicality may alter.

I spent time in observing, sketching, photographing and capturing the energy of Banyan trees over a period of two years from 2016-18. These are some sketches and photographs from my journal pages. The banyan at GKVK agricultural campus in Bangalore, the Doddaalada mara in Ramnagar on the outskirts of Bangalore, the banyan trees at Chitrakala Parishad Art College, Thimmamma Marrimanu Banyan tree in Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh, the Banyan trees in and around the Valley School in Bangalore, the ficus trees in Bandipur, were all part of the studies I did during this period.

Ficus trees are unique in their form due to the aerial roots and rich canopy. There is a constant flow of energy that is interconnected between the roots, ground and sky. This made me seek them out as subjects of study to understand energy. The area around the Banyan also is often enveloped in stillness, even amidst the great number of life forms that reside within it. Owls, parakeets, mynahs, macaques, squirrels, insects, bees abound and fill the space with sound, yet, the stillness and silence around the banyan are immense. This is what drew me to work with banyans and find the strokes, forms, nature of space and flow of time as I sketched and worked with their forms. Some of these later evolved into full scale paintings as the one described in the earlier chapter – *Nekil̲cci.*



Fig 27 Sketch of Banyan Tree at Chitra Kala Parishad Campus, Bangalore, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.



Fig 28: Sketch of Banyan Tree at GKVK Campus, Bangalore, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.



Fig 29 and 30: Dodda alada mara, Ramnagar, 400-year-old banyan tree located in the Bangalore Urban district of Karnataka, June 2017.





Fig 31 and 32: Banyan Tree, GKVK campus, Vidyaranyapura, Bangalore, May 2017.



For exploring into space and time, I delved into frogs in landscapes. Frogs and toads have evolved for millions of years and are *porous* to the environment. This was my reason to study them closer as a subject. I learnt basics of frog watching and travelled through the Western Ghats during the monsoon to observer and understand the world of frogs.

The sheer size, skin and precarious vulnerability of their lives moved my understanding and perspective of landscapes from large scale to really smallscapes. Leaves, twigs, rock ledges, pebbles, suddenly threw open vaster landscapes in front me. Space-time unfolded anew through the world of frogs.



Fig 33: Nyctibatrachus Sub-adult, Stream near Honey Valley Resort, Coorg, Karnataka, June 2017.

Landscape

So far, I thought of landscape

as sweeping mountain and valley

sea and splendid desert,

forest and open field

rolling hills and river.

Watching frogs,

Suddenly

landscape becomes

rock, pebble, crevice,

leaf, bark, twig,

humus

and tiny rock caves

upstream and downstream.

Either way,

landscapes unfold in

the inner terrain

and expand their contours.

(From the collection 'Yajña – Transformation' and journal entry – Rediscovering Time-space)



Fig 34: Rhacophorus lateralis, Small Tree Frog, Water colours and ink on water colour paper, 8.25 in X 5.25 in, 2017.

Completion

The fig trees

complete me,

one form extending

into the other.

Neelanethrus

seems too gentle to

exist

I wonder at him

and am unsure whether to be

afraid for him or delight in him.

Then I meet the lateralis sleeping on the door jamb

and Rao's golden backed frog sitting

hidden in mud walls along forest floor

and tiny shrubs

and I am baffled at the

vulnerability

of life.

The leeches are visceral

and I think about mosquitoes.

and all those things we swat away

and kill without thinking

I cannot make sense.

I fall in love with trees

and think I must be a

Śālabhañjikā.

Does it matter?

That completes this

and this completes that

and neither is complete

and everything is complete!

(From the collection 'Yajña – Transformation'

and journal entry – Rediscovering Time-space)

10. Key – *Vāc*

- Understanding the key of *porosity*.
- Questioning consciousness and reality through the frameworks of oneness and duality.
- Uncovering creativity in this frame.
- Reframing language.

A poem on *Vāc* and paintings of *Yāli* have been presented in Chapter 10.

In the following poem, I use a sensuous, language of felt experience framed in a beingness of now, capturing the sensory nuances of an evening walk.

Evening Walk

Powdery rain,
flood fluttering lightly
on bird wing
stilled and slithering
on leaf veins
dropping to envelop
frog skin
permeating through
root mysteries
lying low in
underground
meandering river.
Dewy water

touching my face

with endless

eloquence,

little

rivulets on my skin

roaring in

silent sensuous flow.

Drenched,

drained of will

sonorous invisible residue

percolating through

body

in resonating curving

earth to be

underground

meandering river.

11. Participating Elements: *Adhidaiva-Adhibhūta-Adhyātma*

– bringing the boundaries together to a single plane.

– Transecting cosmic, terrestrial, self

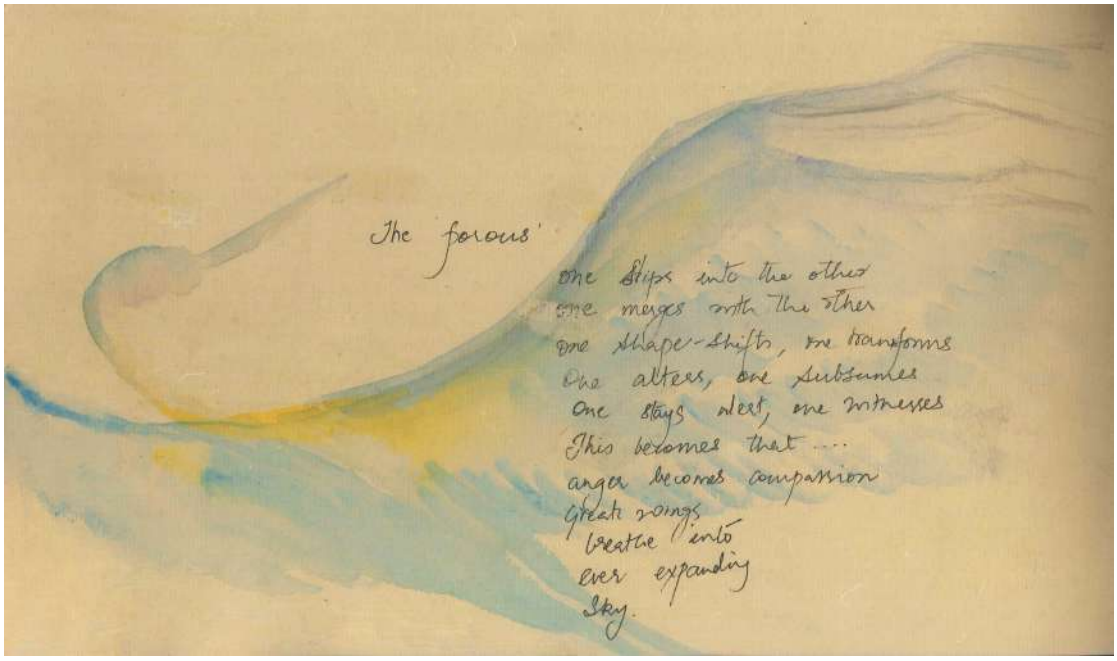


Fig 35: Sketch and poetry for exploring the porous as a sky-self, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

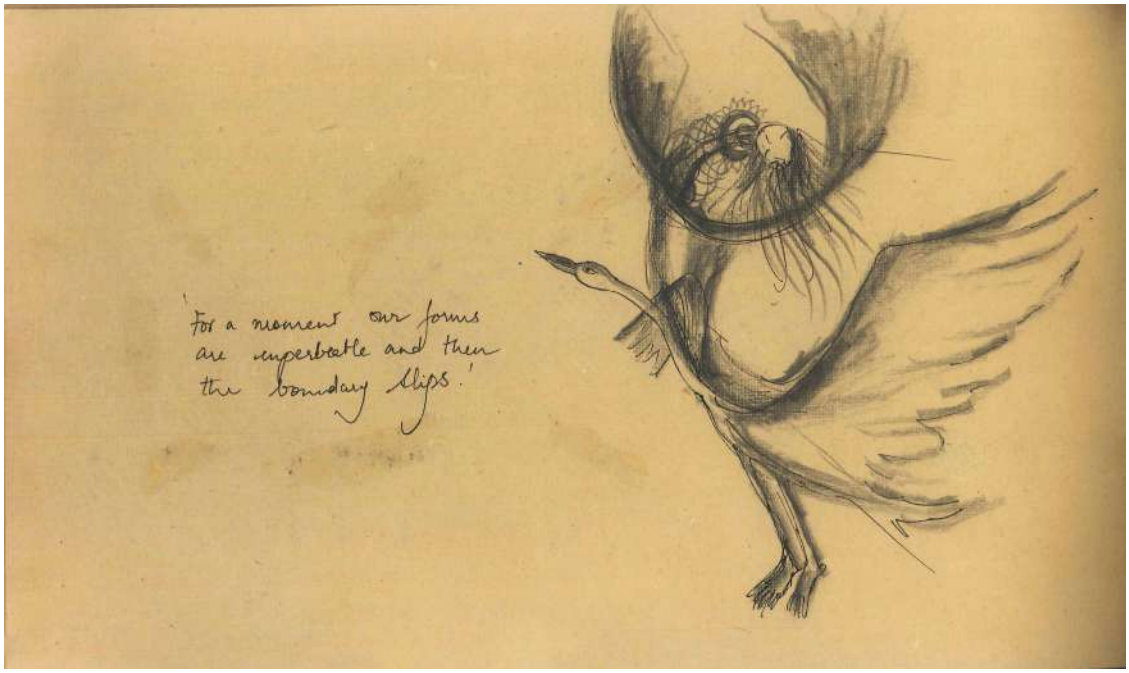


Fig 36: Sketch and poetry for exploring a moment when boundaries slip between two forms, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

Intimacy

The earth and sky and cosmos

one body

and then multiplicity

making love

in so many bodies.

Sensuous shivers

light up my body

as the earth curves

into one half of my self

and the sky as the other.

And their intimacy shatters

through my thoughts

into physical visceral body.

(From the collection On Being- Iyalbu, 2017)

12. Real and Unreal: *Māyā*

– *Māyā,* layers, truth, paradox, real and unreal, uncovering, critiquing, questioning, understanding notions of reality and nature of reality, positioning the artist's advantage in questioning nature of reality

One of the biggest challenges in pursuing experiences of *porosity* to understand them are that they are elusive and the only thing that makes them real are that they were visceral experiences when I encountered them.



Fig 37: "This Becomes That." A journal sketch in planning for a series. The sketch uses folk style form and imagery to capture seamless flow of life and death, through a continuous narration sequence, that looks at the paradox of one form transmuting into another, 12 in X 7 in, 2016.

Consciousness is very pliable material and allows itself to be shaped into multiple forms, nuances and new relatonships. That which shapes it is also consciousness. The witness that observes the shaping is also consciousness. The awareness in which all this play dissolves is also consciousness. The unexpressed also is consciousness. This paradox of duality, multiplicity and oneness makes the crafting of consciousness a rich practice.

Māyā

Māyā,

I would catch her

If she didn't hide in Śiva

But Śiva laughs

at my ignorance.

I can see him,

but I am hidden

in Māyā, it can't be me;

he says

I grasp at the fineness

Of her flowing billowing hair

And her laughter carries into me

Desire, desire me, he calls out

In a mock sexual taunt

For I have divided up body

and mind and it tickles him-

this biological metaphysical divide.

He is insatiable,

I yield

Tired of running, bridging, conversing

It was a merry dance while I rushed about

Why now, I ask him,

Love,

I have caught you,

he says fondly,

Māyā.

It was I,

I who caught you

I say determined

to have the last word.

Now, he whispers

And I go still…

Cheat, I call out to him

after a while

I never meant to transform

Dissolve, immerse

into endless sky

I like duality

I like the zillion forms

On the planet

I like our differences

just fine, I scowl

And he bellows with

laughter

On the cosmic ocean

Where there are no waves

Viṣṇu enjoys Śiva's games and

Consciousness yields itself to stillness

13. Experience: *Rasa. Dhvani. Bhāvana. Kalpana*

- Theories of experience, using experience/ aesthetic theories to deepen *porosity*

Our relationship with the natural world is one of aesthetic solitude, when unbounded *rasa* is evoked within us. The following work was commissioned by my sister, Sandhiya to capture these moments of aesthetic solitude in nature that she had experienced. Recounting several of her treks, trips and memories in India and the US, we chose the moments when she had felt deeply moved and at one with the natural world, at peace and in a state of bliss. Her deep bond with falcons and her joy in watching parakeets, her swimming with turtles and eating breakfast with moose, each of these memories and presences of other beings were captured in this work. The emerald lake at Mount Timpagonos in Utah with the moose walking in the waters, *Pīpal* tree from Chennai and villages in South India filled with parakeets, the deep sea, corals, fish and turtles from Hawaii, the sound of the Pacific ocean along the west coast of the US, rainforests, fields – All these and more are Sandhiya's aesthetic moments, memories and experiences. As an artist, spending time listening to her stories and recreating them in evocative artwork was a journey of travelling with her, as an artist as well as a *sahṛdaya*, finding the rhythm of the resonances that she felt, and allowing these rhythms and resonances to flood the work I created for her.

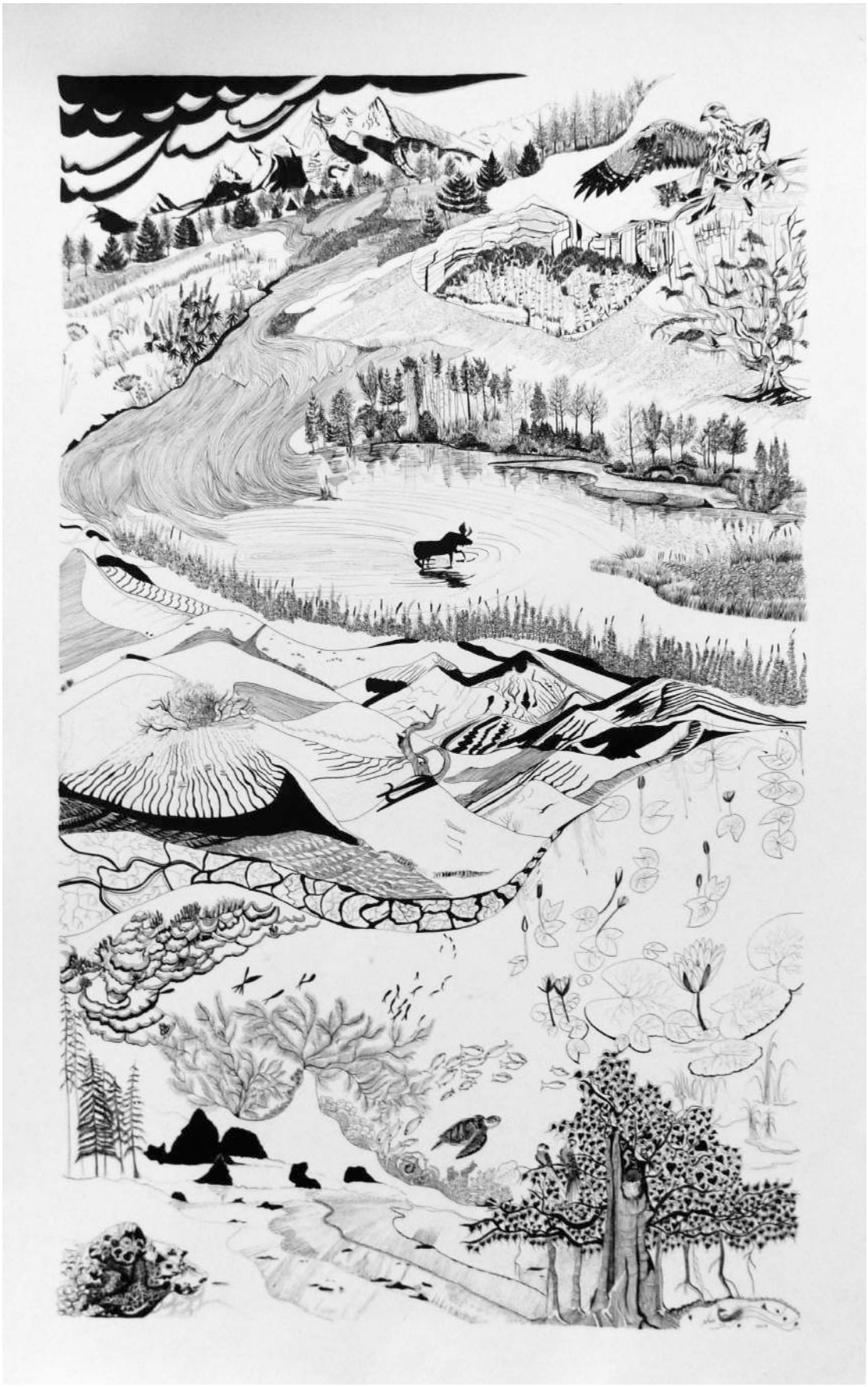


Fig 38: Memories of Twilight, Pen and Ink on Water colour paper, 21 in X 34 in approx., 2017.

14. Joy: *Ānanda*

- Ecstasy, Bliss, Rest & *Viśrānti*, from beginning to end.

Ecstasy is another of those elusive human experiences. What floods the being suddenly throwing it out of orbit and yet holding it in warm embrace! How is one to fathom these moments of glorious joy that is so restful and quiet and gentle. Yet, the journey to that unexpected moment is harrowing, difficult and wild. And then in solitude, in relationship, suddenly it permeates, infuses into the body like the scent of the vetiver, the scent of the earth when the first rains come, like the sound of flute, the *bānsuri* and the *shakuhachi*. The following two poems capture the journeys in solitude and those in relationship and conversation when encounters with *ānanda* happen.

Hṛdayaviśrānti

Dec 19, 2015

No, Not flat,

Never...

Equilibrium

is not that flatness

of a horizontal line

that fills our imagination.

Hṛdayaviśrānti

such turmoil goes on

before, even after

Perception, emotion, sensorial reflection

deep diving inside, within,

disturbing, wrenching,

refusal, acceptance

endlessly controversial

Even that joyous perception

of dew drop on grass

sometimes must wait

fifteen years, for that word

to emerge from the long simmer

A single line may take ninety

years to arrive

artist in equilibrium

not in angst,

it is before,

even after

but in viśrānti,

in that exquisite rest of all

all emotions,

in dance, this

moment of repose.

Clarity strikes

in that ruthless intensity of

existence at play, Līlā

Compassion teases out

oneself from within oneself

from within oneself

from within...

It is a terrain of

such exquisite diversity,

but when I say the word equilibrium,

miraculously someone out there

conceives a flatland,

flatland for whom

I wonder

the lizard or the ant,

the scorpion

or the winds and dune

flatland, I murmur

not mine though,

this intellectual probing.

perhaps it is the restless

within the other,

that thinks of repose as

boring flatland.

Here mountain, river, sea

and storm rage

Tectonic shifts

volcanic erupts

intuition

rocks

reality

changing

its viscerality

change

so fundamental, so brutal,

deep suffering

terrifying,

throbbing silence

Waiting to become that

rich quivering sorrow

moving in and out of

compassion,

so dynamic

in its very nature

This repose

not a flatland,

never.

Equilibrium, Viśrānti

the heart

of the creative

process.

Changing me

transforming me,

uprooting me

rooting me

in ephemeral

ānanda

flowing like

a rich river

We reside there,

this creative self and I

dissolving

flowing

in rapids,

over broken rocks,

sunshine and moonlit

quivers,

deep gash

in the earth

pebble, bird, tree trunk

sky shadows

and dusty big cats

frolicking puppies

and battered shore

crocodile at rest

and all the way out

to sea.

Ānanda

Dec 19, 2015

The word,

never the same

as the experience.

Never quite transferable;

Not in argument

or in conversation;

Not in the work of art

not in debate

or discussion.

Not possible,

not because

it is difficult

or impossible

but because

you ask me to share

compare

metaphorically evaluate

one reality with another.

In my terms, I speak.

In your terms you hear.

And we meet

in the semblance of

understanding

something.

The word, many more words…

To enunciate,

I converse

so I can reach out.

You talk to me to

comprehend and we meet

in the semblance of

Understanding…

I instead wish

we were silent, you and I

and we might just hear

that which we both

desire to understand

and it might just permeate

into our skins and souls

when we are least ready for

It-

this state of being,

this ānanda.

15. Resonance: *Sahṛdaya* and *Rasikā*

– Being one, training one, Aesthete. Soulmate

Sorrow carves deep into the soul. And it must be allowed to sculpt, to chisel away into the being. Yet, sorrow and self are like sculptor and stone indeed and the stone is an active creator and creative principle. The stone must yield, it must resist, it must play with the chisel, it must craft itself, even as the sculptor cajoles and threatens. Sorrow flows through the path, spreading like fire, like fine roots, but the path itself is engineered together by both sorrow and self. Rarely spoken about, we often think that grief and sorrow have been inflicted on us. We cry and beat our chests, we go into depression, we fall apart and some of us come back richer for it, others slip into forms of instability. Of course, who is to say, which of these experiences is richer – to come back to civilization or slip away into a greater frenzy!

Yet, we must teach our children, this wonderful relationship that we share with sorrow; that we can yield and resist, much like what the land does to the great flow of the river.

It is as Gibran writes,

“The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,

the more joy you can contain.’

Such beautiful poetry lies in these lines. I have ruminated on it for over twenty years now and have been broken apart and pieced together several times in these years. And yet it is today that this insight gently walks in.

The self too is strange, for the self is intangible and constantly transforming and yet there is an underlying unity to the self; a certain continuity; but that is another deeper conversation to be had that I will leave for another day.

For now, let me stay with this beautiful image of sorrow carving deep into the soul and self embracing sorrow unto itself. It is like the great curve of the earth into which dust and nothingness enfold themselves and it in that curve of one dynamic being enraptured into the other that creativity lies.

And strangely, as I write that, I can begin to comprehend and sense, what the mystics, the sages, the artist-seers and gods speak of. I can see that the sensuous and the sacred must go together, for the sensuous, the great suffusion of beings, of intimacy is the very nature of the universe. In their allusions to great love, the poets did not just talk of love and sex and eroticism, but they spoke of this life principle and drew it into the proportions of human self and experience. If anything they did not transfer the human experience to how they saw the universe, but they translated, transferred and enriched what they observed of as the principle of life into human experience at the human scale.

This brings me to the fantastic frame that Shulman, Rao and Subrahmanyam open in their book *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800,* where the reader takes on a participatory role in engaging with historical text and a dialogue ensues between reader and writer, where each challenges the other to engage with meaning through a play with ‘openness’ in the text.

Rama Mantena (2007) in her review of the book elaborate this thought with precision,

> "Because history takes different generic forms from one era to the next, what counts as history is something greater than just genre. If we push their conception of texture further, what in actuality, 'Textures of Time' proposes is that the ideal readers of these texts take on the role of historians in that they are called on to do the work of distinguishing the factual from the fictive. As readers, they are called on to act as judges. The radicalness of this proposal is the 'openness' attributed to the text. By proposing that a historical narrative is constituted in the act of reading it, Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam give a fresh perspective on the question of historical form/ genre."

Here is a wonderful clue, the participatory nature of reading a work that matches a certain quality of the 'Indian' mind. The question of whether there is something culturally one in the idea of 'Indian' is a nuanced inquiry. For now, I will play with this idea that speaks of a certain consciousness that enjoys creativity as a participative act between creator and reader, artist and *rasikā.*

We like the idea of creating our stories together. The poet hides in her work, a play of paradox, multilayered and mysterious, playful and with great care. It is not unlike a treasure hunt. There is a great sense of humour here that we must understand rather carefully. Even as the poet writes, she takes great pleasure in imagining what her *rasikā* may uncover or not. The *rasikā* and she too share a sensuous play of exchanged experiences, even when time and distance and space set them apart. But in the mind of the poet, there is already great mischief, because she hopes she will flummox her reader, even as she yearns to be understood, to share her joy, her *ānanda*

with the *rasikā*. The *rasikā* too is formidable. She too is aware of the mischievous thread and is waiting eagerly to best the poet in her reading of the poetry. Oh yes! It is wonderful interchange, not unlike what can be observed in traditional concerts even today.

And so the shared language is of critical importance, for indeed these are like love letters: the interplay between the *kavi* and the *rasikā*; the *sahṛudaya*. Neither one is greater than the other. They are a unit and must be treated like one. And unless we read into that relationship, we may not quite unlock how we read our art, poetry, music or dance. This humourous, challenging spirit of the 'Indian' beingness that seeks to unravel shared experiences be it in food or poetry is indeed a big clue. The gods too are humourous and enjoy speaking in riddles.

Inside food

hidden rasa!

Sour turns sweet

On the tongue

Unfurling great delight.

It doesn't matter whether one is drinking sweet lassi, eating *vattal kuḻampu* (Tamarind gravy) or biting into a luscious *koḻakoṭṭai* (Dumplings), the burst of hidden flavours in Indian food is an essential clue to *rasa*. Often I have spoken to the older women in my family who relish their cooking, my grandmothers and others. They enjoy teasing and taunting and surprising the guests with their food. They take great relish when the guest articulates that particular hidden flavor that he has discovered and appreciates

the chef; the tangy with the hidden sweetness of sugar, the bitter neem leaves, soaking in exquisite sweetened jaggery, the gentle light *pāṉakam*, with its sharp heat of ginger; these are but a few of the tricks of the chef to play with alchemy, with *rasa*; taste.

parokṣa priyā iva hi devāḥ pratyakṣa dviṣaḥ (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.2.2)

"The gods love what is paradoxical and detest what is obvious" translates Subhash Kak (2002). I have been reflecting on this statement for about twelve years now and today again this is woven into the insights that emerge.

Going back to the idea of what and how the poets and rishis translated the principle of life into human scale, the reading of these texts must now happen in that space and relationship and shared language that the artist and aesthete share. Be it the *rasa līlā, Śiva* and *Pārvatī, Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, *liṅga* and *āvuṭaiyār*, the sorrow and self, the creative principle lies in the intimacy intertwined between the experiencing self and the witnessing self. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* captures this in the beautiful metaphorical poetry of two birds sitting on the same tree.

Quoting Kak (1996),

> "This is a metaphor echoed in the *Ṛgveda* as well. Universal consciousness, as a unity is called *Śiva or Bhairava*. *Śiva* makes it possible for the material associations of the physical world to have meaning. But the domain of the union of *Śiva* and the phenomenal world is puzzling and astonishing.(1.12) This is a restatement of the metaphor that goes back to the *Ṛgveda* where the mind is seen as two birds sitting on a tree where one of them eats the sweet

fruit and the other looks on without eating. One of the birds represents the universal consciousness, the other the individual one. There is only one bird; the other is just the image of the first energized by the fruit! There is a paradox here which is left unresolved. But certainly root consciousness (*Śiva, prakāśa, cit)* is what makes it possible to comprehend. In later texts the capacity of consciousness to reflect on itself is called *vimarśa*."

Hence, the more we probe into these paradoxical relations, the witnessing self and its very ability to witness and the experiencing self must share that intimacy in a conscious way too. Perplexing indeed, for the witnessing self is witness and not participant. However, this relationship is not unlike the one the artist and aesthete mimic too, and not unlike two birds or animals, bored, intrigued by each other, even as they are on two different trees or places. They reach out to each other through a humorous exchange of calls that test and tease the other to join in the marvelous play of a vibrant morning.

So one layer is to see the intimacy of life, another is the witnessing self and the experiencing self, a third layers is the enjoyment of this intimacy of life through artistic creation and exchange and here lies the relationship between the *kavi* and the *sahṛdaya*. There is yet another paradoxical relationship between the seer and the seen too. And the 'Indian' mind/ self revels in these paradoxes. Therefore when *rāsalīlā* is read in the mind of the reader, there is already ensconced a greater language that has observed the intimacy of life. The human scale, human love is a pleasurable metaphor and yet it unlocks the magnificent principle of intimacy of life, the curve of one dynamic being enraptured into the other, where creativity lies.

Forever our seers speak of unlocking this potential, and it can be done in so many ways, because the generative principle is the same. And yet like sorrow carving itself into the soul, joy too must be carved in, each reflecting the other. And in that we come to Gibran again,

'Your joy is your sorrow unmasked,
and the selfsame well from which your
laughter rises was oftentimes
filled with your tears
and how else can it be?
The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,
The more joy you can contain.'

- The Prophet, Joy and Sorrow (Gibran, 2008)

Here too the metaphors of intimacy unravel, for in the poet's sorrow lies the aesthete's joy and in the aesthete's tears, the poet's laughter.

16. Consciousness: *Cit*

- Rise and Manifestation. Dynamics and Transformation. Transcendence and Dissolution.

My work in consciousness, evolved from my Masters thesis submitted in Partial fulfillment for M.A History of Fine arts in 2004 (Kalyanasundaram 2004). The study looked at consciousness through the lens of visual arts in India and by closely studying 125 works of art across Architecture, sculpture and painting ranging across the ancient, classical and folk art forms, I pursued my inquiry to understand how Indian artists chose to interpret different stages of consciousness. Set under three large categories, Rise and Manifestation, Dynamics and Transformation, Transcendence and Dissolution, I explored the possibilities of form in interpreting and representing states of consciousness. Drawing richly from Indian philosophy and mystical traditions, I interpreted the different stages and states of consciousness using the arts and aesthetics as my method and subject of inquiry.

16.1. "Rise and Manifestation of Consciousness

The individual consciousness rises out of all pervasive *Brahman* and this leads to desire for manifestation. With the rise and manifestation of consciousness, creation of form becomes inevitable. This is the point when creativity begins as desire for life deepens. The rise and manifestation of consciousness is non-linear and cyclic process and continuous.

Awareness of the self and perception make it possible to be cognizant of the rise of consciousness. Language as consciousness forms the basis of relationship, and meaning making. It is both tool of consciousness and consciousness itself.



Fig 39: The water one, Digital painting on Photoshop. Water, River Ganges flowing in and through Śiva as he becomes aware of his own beingness, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

What do the waters
of the earth share?
How many voices do they hold?
How many parched throats
have they quenched?
How many stories
does a droplet share?
and how many the surging wave?

Poem: 2003-2004

Exploring rhythm and order and how interiority and exteriority correlate as well as resonate helps to make sense of how an otherwise elusive nature of beings functions. Creativity lead the rising consciousness toward expression, articulation and maturity, towards form and manifestation.

16.2. Dynamics and Transformations of Consciousness

As consciousness and form continually rise and manifest, the dynamics and transformation of consciousness begin. With self-awareness, action begins.

Actions transform into individual, dual, and multiple nature of consciousness. Individual identities and states of consciousness, in relationships coalesce into dual states of melding and transfusion. In reflection, heightened states and quest for deeper meaning, multiple aspects of consciousness emerge creating a dynamic interface of possibilities.

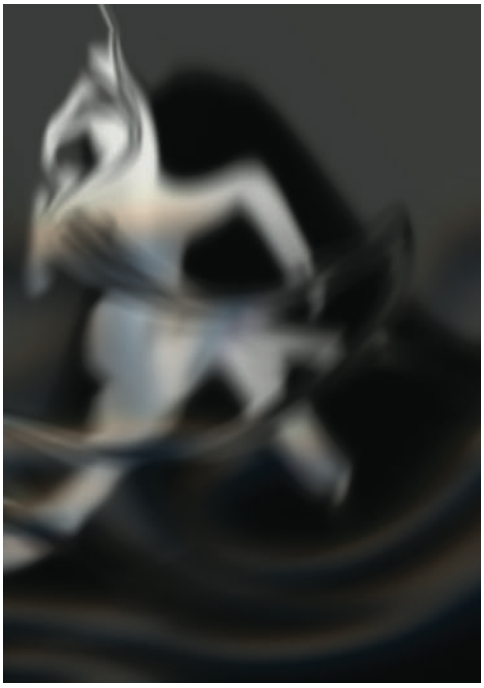


Fig 40: Liṅga, Digital Painting on Photoshop. Śiva in his play between form and formless in continuous dynamic transformations, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

To rest in peace
within that which is real
that which engulfs one's being
is the answer to a thousand questions
And in that Freedom
is rebirth and death

Poem – 2003-2004

Transformation and Change are emphasized in this phase as one form changes into another, one physicality into another, one quality of mind to another, forces enacting upon the self constantly in its reflective as well as relational states. Dynamism, Force, Change, Flux, and Metapmorphosis become principles of the transformation of consciousness from one state to another.

The metamorphosing consciousness becomes the vital force of life, breath, and changes into energy, space, and time. Breath is the invisible form of all manifestations and expressions of life. It is the essence of body, movement, rhythms of being as well as consciousness.

Energy, Space and Time are vital to existence of life and the interactions between the three are essential for the dynamic nature of consciousness. They are abstract elements that are also the links between interiority and exteriority offering a paradigm when self and cosmos can meet, find alignment and resonance. Time in its totality

becomes the force behind the dynamics and transformations of consciousness.

Power is the value category that is yet another critical element in the dynamics of consciousness. Power that can be will, strength, goodness, or destructive has the energy and force required for revolution and transformation in consciousness. Individual, social, political, or spiritual revolutions that are moments of great transformations of consciousness reside in the value of power.

16.3. Breaking Through and Beyond/Transcendence and Dissolution

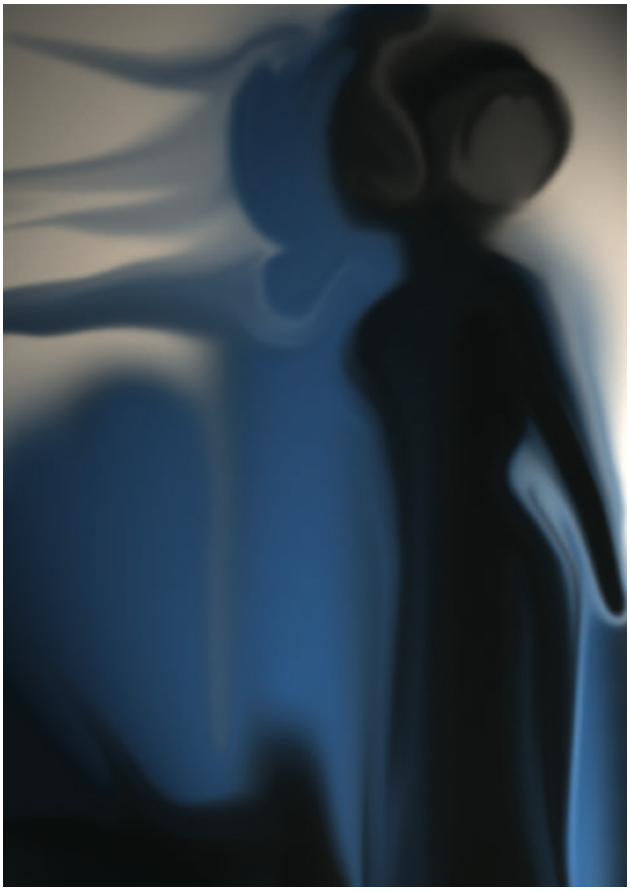


Fig 41: Shivangi, Digital Painting on Photoshop. Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, perception as an act of creation, 11.3 in X 16 in, 2002.

They watched a butterfly
for perhaps
two centuries
or perhaps a second
Maybe it was a butterfly
Maybe a leaf
and strangely
they had learnt
the secret of life!

Poem: 2003-2004

Death is at the heart of life. Death is the centre from which we must understand the seriousness as well as lightness of life. Death is both physical and mental. It is an everyday ongoing process in our bodies as well as minds. Each of our changes however minute involve the death of something. The death of self as ego, is the essential step for life to begin flowering in resonance.

‘Love rises, and the play of forms in love begins to create newer realms of living. Love breaks the limits of knowledge and easily flows into the doorways of the unknown, the beyond. The unknown takes over and merges with the known. Life is created anew.’ This is transcendence and in its own way, it is mundane! ”

(Sections 16.1, 16.2 and 16.3 - Kalyanasundaram 2004; 2019, Adapted)

17. Ethics: *Dharma* and *Svadharma*

Dharma and *Svadharma*, Context sensitive, and intrinsic righteous action are the hardest to reflect on, comprehend, debate and perform. For the artist, the simple act of drawing a line can be the most profound action. And how does she think of that line? What meanings does that line imbue and unfold?

Line

Earth Body

Clay Self

One entwined into the other

What is a moral decision?

in a political world?

The clay self animates itself

into a thousand forms

and becomes earth body

one undulating line that

sweeps across mountain, river, sea, cloud

rain, storm, desert, raccoon,

frog, tiger, elephant, painted stork,

grey heron and ladybug…

Just one undulating line,

that connects all our feet on the ground

and the air….

One single line

and fragmented morals

for a divisive perception,

How can the two meet?

Earth Body

Clay Self

One entwined into the other

What is a moral decision

in a political world

driven by consumptive divisiveness?

One line in harmony

disintegrating into newer and newer worlds…

Old leaf falls down to make new forest.

(From the collection Iyalbu- On being – 2017)

There cannot be one answer to this question of 'what is righteous intrinsic action?'. The complexity and vulnerability of *dharma* as a concept is best exemplified in the character of *Yudhiṣṭhira* in the *Mahabharata*. So leaving myself with the story of the *yakṣas*, *Yama* (the God of Death) who questioned *Yudhiṣṭhira*, I wonder what my answers would be to the God of death who questions me at each point. I place my thoughts in the world of *Yama*, in the centrality of death that makes life possible and leave myself to ponder upon intrinsic action.

Chapter 13

Conclusion

ALIWEN (Large Native Trees)

I will seek refuge in the most ancient of trees
And converse with the mist
Its steps visible and invisible
Hold the image of the sacred for my people.
I will seek refuge among the mountain flowers,
I will cut the distant dream and clear my
Thoughts with maqui leaves.

Maria Isabel Lara Millapan
Poetry of the Earth, Mapuche: Trilingual anthology

(Huenún, Palacios, Brock, Salgado, and Véliz. 2014)

Sections

1. Summary 1: Practice through the *Porous* Framework – A Postulation
2. Summary 2: Transdisciplinary Theory/ Framework of *Porosity*
3. Summary 3: Theorization of Practice
4. Summary 4: Theorization of consciousness
5. Discussion
6. Dilemmas and Challenges
7. Future Possibilities
8. A new beginning…

Chapter 13: Conclusion re-emphasizes the methods, theoretical framework, and frameworks of artistic practice as well as practice of consciousness that have been evolved through the different chapters of the thesis. Following the summary of each of the methods, theory and frameworks, discussion on *porosity* as a theory, challenges and dilemmas and future possibilities for research are presented.

1. Summary 1: Practice through the *Porous* Framework – A Postulation



Fig 1: Shiny Blue Delight - Kingfisher and Dragonfly, Acrylic and ink on canvas, 2016.

This thesis focused on developing a methodological framework for Eco-art practice and crafting of ecological consciousness through the lens and principle of the *porous*

self. In order to achieve this, a comprehensive set of ten non-linear methods that would work as a layered experiential and creative process were postulated in Chapter 1. Each of these methods have been explored in depth through the thesis to show how an artist can use them within her own cultural framework and practice. These ten non-linear methods offer a broad open framework of *porosity* that can be practiced by different artists.

i. Investigate mysticism/ different perception possibilities in relationships with the natural world
ii. Be a Naturalist
iii. Trace Cultural Roots
iv. Re-interpret Nature
v. Manifest and Translate in the Arts
vi. Develop Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness as and through Artistic Practice
vii. Develop Emotional range
viii. Co-evolve
ix. Stay *Porous*
x. Evolve new conceptual and emotional vocabulary

2. Summary 2: Transdisciplinary Theory/ Framework of *Porosity*

Following this broad framework, I re-emphasize the summary of transdisciplinary framework / theory of *porosity* from chapter 4



Fig 2: Grey heron fishing – Clay modelling, 5in X 8 in approx., 2015.

The following principles emerged as essential to the practice of and inquiry into *porosity.* They are also a system of ideas that allow for emerging a transdisciplinary theory of *porosity*. As a theory of consciousness, *porosity* opens up a relational paradigm within which a new world of engagement with ourselves and the natural world opens up. Extended as a theory of aesthetics of engagement, experience and practice, *porosity* brings important questions to the field of arts.

i. *Porosity* as a theory rests best within the paradigms of an integrated theory of environmental aesthetics, ethics and philosophy. It is only as an integrated theory of all three fields that it can emerge as a theory of practice, value and action.

ii. *Porosity* is a theory of consciousness, and needs to be unraveled in multiple dimensions and layers to bring out its principles as a state of intrinsic ecological consciousness, and to develop actions that emerge out of this state.

iii. *Porosity* is an aesthetic consciousness state, in resonance with the concept of *rasa*, and its, values, actions and practice are best resolved in the dynamic spatio-temporal state between the mundane and the transcendent.

iv. *Porosity* is a state of being where perception alters notions of reality

v. *Porosity* cannot be completely comprehended through intellectual arguments, and requires to be studied as a symbol in order to unravel intuition, insight, and states of reality that emerge in this metaphysical state of being.

vi. *Porosity* needs to be studied equally through practice, as practice unravels layers that cannot be cognitively unraveled without the experiences, insights and intuitions of practice.

vii. *Porosity* needs to be reflected within an embodied ecosophy, where the concept of body needs to be extended beyond what is currently understood in the field.

viii. In order to investigate *porosity*, notions of reality need to be suspended, and active inquiries into paradox emerged.

ix. Values as inherent in *porosity* or extrinsic to but required for active states of *porosity* need to be emerged in context-sensitivity.

x. *Porosity* can be an active state of dwelling for an artist, however it requires continuous self-reflexive, contemplative practices and codes of conduct in alignment with *ṛta*, *dharma* and *satya* for the doorways of *porosity* to remain open.

xi. In a state of absorption, flow, dynamic exchange and openness, *porosity* is a principle of consciousness that emerges in the states of being between mundane and transcendent.

xii. To stay in a state of *porosity,* play, *līlā* becomes the path and the means of engagement with the world.

xiii. The artist is first and foremost the aesthete, *sahṛdaya* with a brave, courageous and expansive heart and it is such a heart in which openness and dissolution become possible. To be *porous*, one must be an aesthete first, with a heart that can resonate with the cosmic order.

xiv. *Porosity*, as emerged through Indian Philosophy, Ethics and Aesthetics in tandem with contemporary concepts on Environmental Ethics, Philosophy and Aesthetics is transdisciplinary as a new set of concepts, vocabulary, actionable knowledge and practices are emerged drawing from the richness of varied

traditions that draw from both reductionist and holistic paradigms, past and present, current environmental crisis and cosmic order.

xv. *Porosity* is a complex theory and is non-linear in nature, allowing for plurality and multi-dimensionality, relational and context-sensitive values as its attributes.

xvi. *Porosity* is a principle of consciousness.

3. Summary 3: Theorization of Practice

The third summary is the theorization of practice from chapter 10. Practice starts with aesthetics of engagement, and includes relational experiences, research with material, form, tools, techniques, methods and consciousness, use of aesthetic devices and artistic directions of creative expression. All these aspects must be treated together as a whole for a disciplined and insightful practice to evolve.

Principles of Engagement

i. Be open to Non-linear relationships
ii. Acknowledge intuitive and tacit knowledge
iii. Investigate Paradox
iv. Study emotions with care and diligence
v. Annotate form through cultural nuances
vi. Study cultural notions of space and time to investigate consciousness
vii. Slow journal moments of transition in consciousness
viii. Reinterpret relationships between idea and image

ix. Build a layered understanding of creative process in crafting consciousness

x. Make Art

Principles of Practice



Fig 3: Mothers and kids – where does one begin or the other end?, Watercolours, pen and ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2018.

What is practice as defined here?

There are two layers of practice that are unfolded and inquired into this paper.

i. The creative practices of Visual Art, Writing.

ii. Crafting consciousness through and as artistic practice

My practice emerges through seven key principles of practice:

Artistic reflection, Ritual practice, Philosophical inquiry, Metaphysical embodiment, Physical transience, Mythological storytelling and Aesthetic play.

Principles of Experience

Some of the principles of experience that the *uḷḷam* goes through that have emerged so far are:

Melting, Dissolving, Amalgamation, Coalescing, Alchemy, Cracking, Disintegrating, Surrender, Balance, Embody, Transform, Transcend, Transmute, Permeate, Transfer, Sublimate, Play, Reflection, Contemplation, Simultaneity, Becoming, Being and Non-Being.

Principles of Research

i. Subjectivity
ii. Experientiality
iii. Intuition
iv. Alogic/ Ineffable
v. Form

Aesthetic Devices

Continuous Narration, Recursion, Seamlessness, Shape shifting temporal and spatial play, Fluidity, Permeability, Malleability, Transitions and Transience, Repetition, Interweaving, Transparency, Simultaneity, Rhythm, Myth and Symbolism, Simultaneity.

Form and Principles of Form

The priniciples of form under investigation include but are not limited to:

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practice, Embodied Practice, Play with materiality, Metaphor and paradox, Time-Space-Energy, Axis, Translation.

Artistic Directions

Aesthetic, Romantic, Scientific, Interpretative, Illustrative, Activist, Symbolic, Metaphysical, Educational.

4. Summary 4: Theorization of Consciousness



Fig 4: Monsoon stories – Bandipur, Depicts a moment of complete surrender and sublimation to the monsoon, when water weaves everything into a unified whole in torrential rain, as each form and self diffuses into another in rhythmic response to the music of the skies, Chinese ink and dry pastels on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

The fourth summary is the theorization of consciousness as artistic practice drawn from chapters 11 and 12. For a more detailed discussion on a *porous* theory of consciousness, chapter 4 can be referred to.

The method of practice towards eco-art that I arrive at emerges through Indian categories. Each step is a set of actions that constitute Reflection, Meditative Practice, Heightened awareness, Aesthetic perceptiveness, Translation into form, Relishing, and Gratitude for life. The entwining of ethics and aesthetics in Indian thought provides the required inner compass for these actions.

i. Contemplation: Self, Transformation as Ritual, Practice and Action*, (Ātman, Uḷḷam, Yajña, Sādhanā)*

ii. Transience: (*Dvāram)*, Body Contour and elements of transaction, (*Antarhṛdaya ākāśa, Adhidaiva-Adhibhūta-Adhyātma)*

iii. Creativity: Integral multiplicity, materiality, paradox (*Uyir - Uḷḷam - Mey, Vāc, Pratibhā, Māyā*)

iv. Experience: Aesthetic Experience (*Rasa, Dhvani),* Imagination and Intuition *Bhavana. Kalpana*, Rest (*Viśrānti*,), Bliss (*Ānanda*), Sympathetic aesthete (*Sahṛdaya, Rasikā*)

v. Transcendence: Transformation / shift in consciousness (*Cit, Ānanda*)

Looking back at chapter 1 and the original contributions that this thesis seeks to bring out, the following six aspects have been extensively studied across the chapters.

i. Nature of self as *porous* - *Porosity* as function of *porous*. Bringing awareness of *porosity* back to self and thereby to investigating materiality, consciousness

and creativity in a framework of resonance. Part 1 and 2 of the thesis dealt extensively with this.

ii. Evolving a transdisciplinary framework to study *porosity* looking at cross-cultural concepts, categories and challenges. Part 2 of the thesis covers this extensively.

iii. Theoretical frameworks of *Porosity* as a principle of consciousness. Part 2 of the thesis dealt extensively with this.

iv. Indian frameworks – aesthetic, mystic, philosophical and their intersections with ecological consciousness in a contemporary[1] framework. Part 2 and 3 of the thesis dealt extensively with this.

v. Practitioners framework – Not a critique/ commentator's framework, but an immersive inquiry into the traditional as well as contemporary models of practice informed by intuition as well as contemporary application and artistic research. Part 3 and 4 of the thesis dealt extensively with this.

vi. Redefining Creativity in an ecological yet universal frame through porosity as a principle. All parts of the thesis dealt with different aspects of this.

5. Discussion

Aesthetics in environmental work, particularly conservation has always been seen as suspicious of people's rights. The arts are often seen merely as decorative or supportive inspite of individual artists and eco-art movements doing impactful work. The importance of aesthetics and arts in transforming the individual, and in turn transforming communities and societies has not been sufficiently explored. This is partly due to the fact that the arts as well as philosophy have been fighting for their

[1] Contemporary is used as relevant to our times and not in terms of contemporary theory

right as disciplines that are integral to and vital to human knowledge, life and experiences. The entwining of ethics and aesthetics is also not always clearly visible or even there as arts take on a purely intellectual approach. The need for aesthetic and artistic literacy, capacity for philosophical argumentation is very strong in our society and will be vital to shaping informed, empathetic and ethical global citizens and future leaders.

Looking back at Ernst Cassirer's (1956) argument that we are at a moment in civilization as confused humans without a framework to live by, it is important for us to create such a framework that is ecological and global for the self and yet remains culturally located. *Porosity* as a principle of consciousness offers such a framework.

Asian traditions offer important insights into body and self that can help us break away from Cartesian dualities and provide alternative frameworks to engage in. To immersively engage in these traditional knowledge systems needs us to move beyond limited intellectual paradigms of inquiry and delve further into experience and practice. It is only through practice, insight and intuition that the traditional knowledge systems begin to make sense and meanings emerge in what could otherwise be dismissed as mystical, metaphysical or unreal.

Indian aesthetics have much to offer to contemporary environmental aesthetics.
In *porosity,* aesthetics moves from its creative expression/ experience of the aesthete to aesthetics of perception and engagement.

Creativity has been treated too lightly by a civilization that is hooked to novelty and invention. Deepening our engagement with creativity, by repeatedly questioning what it means to be responsible, and how essential it is to understand the limits of creativity will lead the way to a civilization that prioritizes wisdom over novelty.

To have an intrinsic ecological consciousness in an informed and insightful way, arts and aesthetics can offer powerful tools alongside philosophy, ethics and mysticism in an entwined whole. When reductionist and holistic paradigms work in tandem, focusing on what they have to offer each other, rather than feeling limited and arguing out their differences, a stronger and wiser human culture becomes possible.

Do we care enough

- for ourselves as a species and for all that we co-evolve with to transform our own consciousness?
- to work hard on crafting an intrinsic ecological consciousness?
- to draw richly from the arts?
- to trust moments of mystic communion in nature?
- to cut through the preposterousness of varied human concepts that stop us from feeling, thinking and acting as intelligent human beings?
- to find the vast possibilities and rich textures of our own consciousness that can reach far into the natural world?
- to build a relational paradigm for our engagement with the world?

The significance of the *porous self* in artistic processes and in relation to ecology and consciousness bring new directions to artistic research. With its central focus on

classical Indian tradition, philosophy and aesthetics, the inquiry into *porosity* also makes valuable contribution to adding voice in artistic research which is otherwise predominantly euro-centric at this point. The thesis has focused on developing a conceptual vocabulary based on the theory of *porosity* enabling new studies and further research in this area.

Porosity as a relational theory of consciousness that can be intentionally chosen, practiced and unfurled, allows for resonance and vibration between beings opening a new space in environmental ethics, philosophy and aesthetics. *Porosity* brings us back to the heart of aesthetic responsiveness, the *sahṛdaya*, who finds intimacy in resonance with life.



Fig 5: Gift of wind series, Painted for my then 3 year old niece as a birthday gift capturing a moment from her experience of running in the wind, one with the elements and the natural world around her, Watercolours and pen and ink on watercolour paper, 5 in X 7 in, 2017.

It is a revolution in consciousness that is much needed at a time of ecological as well as social and political crisis. In that sense, *porosity* is as much a political inquiry as it is a metaphysical and aesthetic one.

6. Dilemmas and Challenges

The practical challenges of the thesis lie in

6.1. Artistic research and the Limits and Expectations of Academia.

Given that practice as doctoral research is still in its nascent stages in academia, one of the biggest challenges of the thesis has been articulating practice while providing substantial theoretical research, and art historical –iconographic analysis in order to supplement practice based research. This has resulted in extensive work, that while in itself was very rewarding to work with, also has become voluminous. However, in order to justify practice within academic framework, this kind of extensive research has been carried out.

6.2. Transdisciplinarity across Cultural Frameworks

One of the challenges of building transdisciplinarity across different cultural frameworks is that the varied nature of references and discussions across diverse epistemologies and ontologies can be too extensive. This impacts the terseness of the thesis and leads way to a more complex, circular logic.

When one cultural framework is studied in relation to another, the dominant paradigm's lenses are often used. In this case, Hinduism/ Indian aesthetics, not being the dominant paradigm, and however being central to the thesis, the critical lens of perception is drawn from its frameworks. However, in light of how the dominant

paradigm differs from this framework – ambiguity, paradox and self-knowledge, which lie at the heart of the Indian epistemology become challenging to explain.

6.3. Hinduism as a Plural and Complex Narrative

When the framework being closely studied, in this case, Hindu/ Indian philosophy and aesthetics, is also a complex plural narrative, the challenges of explaining interpretations, possibilities and dimensions of different schools of thought become difficult. I have stayed with my own experience of the living tradition for my interpretations to guide the theoretical research.

6.4. Psychological and Psychic Challenges

Some of the psychological and psychic challenges include and are not limited to the following.

Encounters of *porosity* are gifts of beingness. At the same time, they are also tumultuous, overwhelming and demanding. The force and tenacity of *porosity* can be unwieldly and difficult to balance in everyday life until it is tempered and disciplined by practice. Even after much disciplining, like the seasons change, abrupt change is possible and great immensity of being can open unexpectedly. In moments of such immensity, where one is not used to the flow of energy, and the physical body is not trained or ready to take in the vast flow of life, confusion, conflict, exhaustion are possible. When demands of everyday life are parallel to the flow, and channeling is not possible, it can be overwhelming to shift between states of being and dealing with other everyday responsibilities while making sense of *porous* experiences.

Porosity is about vulnerability of being – the complex mind-body-emotion-consciousness whole. One of the big challenges and dilemmas of practicing *porosity* lie in how unprotected we can be in moments of great vulnerability. Whether we protect ourselves from dangers in the natural world, or in human relationships, moments of *porosity* can be both source of great strength as well as unexpected weakness.

Moments of *porous* experience also often emerge in a world, which is in-between the 'real world' we inhabit and a more mystic world. Travelling between worlds can be jarring and difficult, making transitions painful and exhausting.

Porosity is about transformation and it can lead to fundamental changes of being over time, and sometimes instantaneously. Such transformation can lead to a new self-identity that is dynamic and fluid. Rediscovering oneself in this dimension, finding the right articulation and expression of one's experiences and emotions can get challenging under such transformation.

6.5. Romanticization and Sensationalization of the Concept of *Porosity*

Another aspect that needs to be considered is romanticization and sensationalization of the concept of *porosity*. Being *porous* to the world around us makes us vulnerable, and at the same time, it would be easy to romanticize or sensationalize a concept like this. However, the reality of living in a *porous* world, could also mean that one is *porous* to darker emotions and experiences as well. It would be naïve to presume *porosity* only as a glorious emotion and assume that it can lead only to positive and meaningful experiences. It can become destructive when it is not scaffolded and

supported, protected and cared for. Hence, it is critical that this state of beingness and consciousness, this principle is also checked and balanced by ethical, axial frameworks and philosophical scrutiny on a regular basis by practitioners. Alonside practitioners should also understand the supportive and protective measures that can scaffold strength and openness of *porosity* as a framework.



Fig 6: Songs of Wilderness, Acrylic on canvas, 10 in X 10 in, 2017.

The Porous Self is the music of wilderness within a human being. It is a nature of consciousness that is layered and woven within the realms of our identities as humans. Unseen, unheard, quiet and nuanced, it is a realm of subtlety needing to be uncovered with patience and diligence.

...

Yet, one must come back to the impervious city to make meaning, to protect, to survive, to speak, cajole, leave it be. And in this strange relationship between the porous self and the city, between its subtleties and the hunter, its poignancy and tenacity lie tremendous possibilities. And to plunge into those possibilities this self must be protected and then nurtured; it must find its voice, self-defense and strength.

…

without that courage to reach far within ourselves, we will remain raging defensive creatures, quiet reclusive beings or simply indifferent ones tormented by what we cannot set free from within ourselves – wild wind, scents of the night jasmine and the albatross in flight.

7. Future Possibilities

My practice only looks at text, image and movement in a limited fashion. Working with *porosity* and sound, theatre, three-dimensional work, and other forms of art including those that may be created with new media offer multiple possibilities. Practitioners who would like to delve into the framework of *porosity* could expand it to other art forms.

Porosity offers much to extend it in an environmental art education framework. While within my work, I have expanded it through Hindu philosophy and Indian aesthetics, learners from different cultural paradigms would bring their own epistemologies and ontologies. An educational framework that values these plural possibilities rests upon mentors. So it is possible to work with training programs, mentoring programs, projects and apprenticeships that consider the model of *porosity* for eco-art practices.

Some of the key points to consider towards developing educational models of *porosity* may be

1. The need for localized aesthetics is critical to develop ecological aesthetic literacy.
2. Provide meaningful support through self-inquiry and artistic practice as a model to emotional/ psychological paralysis that happens around the ecological crisis.
3. Work in plural ways with *porosity* and how it can provide the basis for an ethical, ecological, aesthetic, cultural, and in extension a political self for action in a time of ecological crisis.

The framework of *porosity* can also be extended towards work in EcoJustice and the arts (Kalyanasundaram 2019).

It is possible to extend studies in the framework and apply it to work of other artists and studies of classical Indian art as well.

It is also possible to revisit and adapt classical Indian theories to more contemporary scenarios, and provide a framework that allows young Indian artists to comprehend their own intuitions and insights and draw richly from their own cultural traditions without feeling pressurized by International ideals or time-bound artistic movements.

Several strands from the suggested framework also offer scope for detailed studies. For instance, the chapter on 'Bird and Line' looked at a close study of how line as an element could be expanded in the practice of *porosity*. Likewise, it is possible to study

other elements of art more elaborately in relation to nature. While some preliminary studies have been undertaken in the journal, detailed studies that bring theory and practice together are possible.

While these projects are not included as part of the thesis, based on my work over the last six to eight years in education and curriculum design and conversations with artists and students it would be possible to consider further qualitative studies of *porosity* that evolve from specific inquiries and projects that individuals may develop.



Fig 7: The Common Pochard – In a moment of repose, Watercolours and Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 22 in X 30 in, 2019.

A new beginning…

The *porous self*, *uḷḷam*, then emerges through and expresses itself in five simple principles for me as discussed in chapter 1 –

Play: *Līlā* – the lovely play of life.

Love and Compassion: *Śṛṅgāra, Nēcam, Aṉpu, Śānti, Karuṇai* – as a root of all relationship.

Artistic Practice: *Sādhanā* – Meditations of celebration.

Righteous action: *Svadharma* - Reflective intrinsic action

Time: *Kāla* – Reflections on living and dying

Even if one were to leave behind the complex methodological frameworks designed for *porosity*, these five principles offer a free frame for intuition to guide the artist in emerging everyday practices that are *porous*.



Fig 8: Unfurling interiority - Lotus and Lily Pond, the lotus is a symbol of the heart and often visualized as a symbol to show the unfolding of consciousness and enlightenment. Here the consciousness traverses through pond, transforming in that journey of porosity with the lilies and lotuses blooming at dawn enroute to Puri from Bhubaneshwar, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

Porosity is about gentleness of the human spirit. And gentleness is perhaps most difficult because it is so fragile and yet so full of strength. To be *porous* is to be gentler towards all life and being gentle is very hard because we are hurt, wounded and need to shut down to protect ourselves. We are vulnerable and we cloak ourselves in fear, anger, distrust, grief and pain. And all these emotions are valid too, for life is harsh, complex, and often unforgiving… and yet gentle. To uncloak that which closes us and open ourselves up, we must find our sorrow, solitude and wisdom, to find gentleness of touch – tacit, subtle and sensual, connecting us to all life.

Porosity with the natural world is much like how we love the people closest to us, of which we are also a part. For some of us, this abundant gentleness of spirit opens up first amidst the wild spirit of the earth and sky as seasons glide over each other, neem blossoms by a dusty window, the scent of the earth when the first rains come after a harsh summer; the gentleness of spirit opens up among rocks and trees, vast plains, and embracing mountains, fierce flowing water and moonlight. Twilight wades its way through us, permeating our beings in that mysterious blue that deepens, strengthens, heals and opens us up to starlight and quiet wisdom of the night. As we encounter the gentleness of the human spirit in the heart of all things we are bound to, in the rhythm and resonance of life and from that intimacy of beating at one with the heart of universe, comes a *porous self* – a *sahṛdaya*, in gentle love with a wild beating heart, vibrating through time, space, being and consciousness – the one and the many. And to find that gentleness of the human spirit, we must find ourselves in resonance with life… our *porous selves*.

I spend time watching the sea…it is beautiful.





Fig 9 and 10: Dawn and dusk on the Oregon coast: Scenes from the Oregon Coast, Watercolours and Chinese ink on watercolour boards, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.





Fig 11 and 12: Seals at play on the Oregon coast - Scenes from the Oregon Coast, Watercolours and Chinese ink on watercolour boards, 12 in X 9 in, 2017.

The Porous Self

Crafting an intrinsic ecological consciousness

through text, image and movement

The artist-author asserts her moral right to be identified as the Author/ Artist/ Choreographer of all the creative works that are discussed here and throughout the thesis.

Appendix of Creative Works



A Narrative of Practice Developed During the Doctoral Research

2015 - 20

Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram

(Pen Name:

Srivi Kalyan)

Appendix

A broad overview of the body of creative work that has been produced during the doctoral research.

Practice as Research

A Timeline of Practice

Body of Work

Curated Journal

- Sadhana - Journal of Practice

Paintings

- A Catalogue of Paintings/ Illustrations

A set of 6 poetry collections

- Dukha- Torment
- Yajña – Transformation
- Śṛṅgāra – Love
- Iyalbu - On Being
- Sahṛdaya – Resonance (In progress)
- Viśrānti - Repose (In progress)

Individual poetry collections

- Unto Shiva

3 collections of Poetry and Lyrical Prose compilations

- Kaivalya
- The Healer
- The Porous Self

Short Stories/ Novella

- Yajña - Sacrifice

Children's books and activities

Choreography Ideas

- Bird and Line

Pedagogy and Workshop Designs

Practice as Research

The Porous Self is an inquiry into consciousness - a certain state of being that allows us to revel in life in all its forms seamlessly entwining them with our own. I have navigated my inquiries about consciousness through art - using poetry, painting and dance.

The process of inquiring through art has allowed me to further investigate notions of reality. By challenging form and language as we know it within the dominant discourse, I have been able to find a way articulate another notion of reality embedded largely in the eastern discourse/ ancient discourse where there are similarities across many cultures.

The essence of it comes down to interiority and exteriority - How does one define the self as porous, where interior and exterior can move with ease between each other, because the notion of self is not one that is contained in the physical boundary of the human form. My artistic work has attempted to look at the self as elemental, made of the same stuff as all other creatures around us, opening possibilities of diverse forms of communication. I have also looked at the stillness/ silence that is all permeating through life and landscape as the defining force in which to find an equilibrium of being and communication, expression and action. With these two aspects of self and stillness, I have been able to investigate the substance of form as an expression of being, an intrinsic action of consciousness.

These are intuited journeys on one hand, dwelling in practice. On the other, they are a resurgence of language, culture and voice that comes from alternative notions of reality and an ancient way of being. While I largely draw from Hindu literature, there are eastern influences across, and from more recent readings, there is much to draw from Celtic and Chinese as well. Many of the poets I have drawn from for mysticism come from across religions - Christianity and Islam included. Shamanism and healing practices also remain at the core of my intuitions.

Practice is at the heart of this doctoral research and the appendix has been created to showcase the range and quantum of practice that was developed between 2015 and 2020 in order to develop the theory and methodology of *porosity*. A few works between

2012 -14, when I began pertinent inquiries into the ecological crisis have been included. While it is difficult to precisely take apart the way theory and practice are entwined, much of my theoretical research evolved first from my intuitions in practice. It is in my quest to understand practice that I sought out other forms of research and analysis. Eventually however, the theoretical research guided new practice, as well as gave me the impetus and courage to trust my intuitions, find new language, re-interpret symbols, myths and beings, and find a way to articulate my treasured closeness to all life.

The thesis as discussed in the introduction is a culmination of a way of being and living and therefore reflections of the last 25 years of my practice are part of the curated journal and works from the last 25 years have been used in elucidating certain conceptual evolutions or ideas across the thesis.

A Timeline of Practice

2012-13: Began a creative writing program at Kids Central School with a focus on the Environment. Decided to build a stronger practice around ecological issues through the arts.

2013-14: Interacted with wildlife filmmaker and conservationist Shekar Dattatri. Watching his films was a moment of critical transition. I was deeply moved both by the content and the warm aesthetics of his work, which were non-intrusive to wildlife and showed their lives with a thoughtful affection. Working with young people using his films, collaborating on his project with his colleague and mentee Ramnath Chandrashekar gave me the chance to explore how the arts could be used to inspire ecological consciousness.

2013-14: I made a short film of my teaching experience at Kids Central and made several critical decisions on building a strong ecological focus in my work. Began working with wildlife art and started bird watching. Built design practices as well as educational practices around building ecological consciousness. Became the focus of Fooniferse Arts, a company that I had built. I began writing several lyrical prose pieces on my relationship with the natural world, my grieving for the tremendous rate of loss and began to search for a voice to articulate my inner thoughts, feelings and memories while building new experiences.

2014-15: I joined Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology and was given opportunites to work on wildlife related projects with students. Anupama Arun introduced me to Bandipur as a site of study, which became a space and place for continuous explorations over the next six years. Started building educational practices

2015-16: Started my PhD at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology. Went back to theoretical work I had done during my Masters in Stella Maris College, which focused on Consciousness in Indian art and its relationship to myths and legends. Started connecting the dots between Indian Philosophy, Indian aesthetics, ecological consciousness and my own practice. Continued to evolve my practices in art and built my skills in bird watching, gardening and composting alongside regular journaling and annotating of my work. A huge body of work began to emerge in painting as well as poetry, even as I struggled to make sense of them. Meera Curam and I spent several

hours discussing artistic practice as research and building our understanding of practice as research. Between 2014- 16, my first collections of poetry, novella Yajña and other pieces of art began to emerge. I also continued to write several pieces that were both academic writing and creative writing.

Presenting in Conferences and writing towards paper publishing started out.

2017: Registered with University of Trans-disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology for my PhD. Continued to build a strong body of practice. I had several breakthroughs in practice. Clear styles began to emerge in my work. My decisions on select media, expressions, and aesthetics began to emerge. My poetic voice became clear and distinct with each of the collections of poetry I wrote. I spent time learning to watch other species, travelling to diverse landscapes including rainforests, and went back to spend time with seas at Chennai and other places. Gururaja introduced me to the Western Ghats and frog watching, and it helped me observe terrains and habitats closely. The sea had always been my first love, the place where I could lose myself into the vast emptiness and silence that reverberated. I travelled to the US and travelled to different landscapes in the US thanks to my sister and my friend T.S.Vikram. With my sister, I also built a stronger practice in gardening and composting.

I put together the initial drafts of Sadhana – A curated journal, four collections of poetry, and several paintings in acrylics as well as watercolours, ink, photocolours and pen work. I also began re-exploring dance and movement with my sister. Continued academic writing alongside creative writing.

Continued Presenting in Conferences and writing towards paper publishing.

2018-19: Initial thesis drafts were put together for some of the chapters. Chapter outlines and thesis structure were delineated more clearly. Spent a lot of time on pedagogy, workshops, working with people to explore ideas of porosity, conversations with other artists, collaborations with musicians etc. While these are not part of the thesis work, they gave me both confidence and clearer directions for all of the practices I was exploring and to theorize my work. Continued creating new work, both poetry and visual art. Started practicing Yoga formally to rebuild my body.

Continued Presenting in Conferences. Papers I had been working on with several journals/ publishers came to fruition and a few were published in 2018 and 19.

2019-20: Consolidating some of my practice. Completing thesis writing. Brought together a coherent narrative of practice. Documented all the practice with more thoroughness. Continue creating new work, and discovering the emergence of a clear voice, styles and a practice that is recursive and continues to be built around the central idea of *porosity* with great variation and plurality in my approaches, audiences, tools and narratives.

2020: Submitted thesis towards final examination. Conducting workshops within Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology on Artistic practice as Research. Working towards curation and exhibition of work. Working on building new audiences towards eco-art and shifting ecological perceptions, and perceptions of self through artistic practices.

The Curated Journal



Cover page: *Sadhana:* A curated Journal of Practice.

Documents 25 years of my practice

A journal is a strange extension of our selves, becoming an artifact, research notes, research inquiries, reflective space, a dialogical and interactive surface, an alter ego or a clone, and a hidden self.

But how authentic is any journal that we create? How does curating a journal challenge us to find hidden sides of our own selves, and voices within us that have been silenced by history? In what ways can we create a safe space for sharing journals?

In *Sādhana* – a curated journal, I have developed Indian categories of journaling, which are used to discuss the larger questions of the thesis through a reflective inquiry into practice across time.

To the artist, the one who resides in the traditional 'Indian' consciousness of art making, the practice of art is *yajña,* a ritual of personal transformation. The ritual itself is elaborate, its preparations intense, and in its very nature the *yajña* is all three elements: research inquiry, the process of emergence of form and the performance or final work. It is also the relationship between the artist and the *rasika*; the *sahṛdaya.* The work itself be it ephemeral dance or painting and writing are all imbued with an inner life and texture. It is the simmering of these textures that makes them a new ritual every time they are transacted in new relationships with an aesthete, a *sahṛdaya.*

This journal seeks its research methods to be exemplified in its very form. While there is a certain sequential flow of a *porous* consciousness emerging into awareness, playfully transforming and continuously dissolving, the very nature of the inquiry is a continuous and recursive narrative. There can be no beginning or ending and insights and intuitions, experiences and transformations continuously emerge and submerge in relation to nature and self. Much like the metaphor of the snake eating itself, this *porosity* is a process of alchemy that happens at the doorways of the interior and exterior. The inquiries happen through the medium of form. Form is a clever seamstress as she is a sorceress and seer, and she guides, dictates, participates and allows for the pliable consciousness to be re-crafted through her benevolence. And it is through form that the inquiry molds itself supported by the tricksters, space and time. Form is the synthesizing principle for the artist. Form is vision and utterance and a *porous* shape-shifting element, whatever the choice of media.

In crafting form, the artist crafts consciousness. And in crafting consciousness, the artist merges with all life finding the great rest of *ānanda.* In all this there is creative ingenuity, a certain madness of being possessed, the paradox of multiplicity of selves, inner laws bound by the outer, imaginative improvisation lending itself to sensorial experience in the gross, the subtle and the transcendental. The body is tool, *kṣetra,* hall of sentience,

sensory celebration, *porous* paradox and the very heart of the ritual of transformation. Embodying these inner transmutations that have taken place in the great ritual between the inner and the outer, the artist invites the *sahṛdaya* to share and bathe in these experiences. Between the two, they carry yet another interior paradoxical truth of *porosity* as each carves the other in reflexivity. Rainforests and oceans, rock, mountain and tree, snake, eagle and boar, bee and moth, and the great outer sky intensifies into the inner, even as the inner evening in its deep cerulean blue hues intensifies into the mysterious night of the owl in the richness of endless shimmering black.

Come play with colour and form, with line, space and time, and let the *porous* seep in into that forgotten being! Come stand my friend at the *dvāram* and let the inner and the outer tease each other.

Chapter 12 of the thesis is a short edited version of the full journal.

A few pages from the journal, visual look and feel



1999, Landscape painting, Worked from photograph in a calendar,
Oil on canvas
Final submission for class on Landscape art

This painting is one of the few works I did in the realistic style. I was deeply drawn to metaphorical, symbolic and abstract works throughout my formative years. For this reason, this work is critical in my journey. I always felt that truth and experiences were layered and needed other visual devices to capture the multiple nature of reality that I was encountering and reflecting on.

30/9/2000
What is this strange quality that manifests
unknown to the hand and the mind
It seeps through the being in strange ways
and lifts the consciousness
Maybe it make the being tender
Yet it is as if one were lighter, moving
in an non-existing space
Unknown and untouched by man or his Gods
This strange force penetrates
neither the physical nor the mental, but
something much deeper,
much profounder.
Where all begins and all ends,
one cannot speak of it or for that matter
feel it.

It's beyond out practiced ways of living
and limited consciousness
It is creation of a new consciousness
or perhaps the end of all.

26/09/2000
Perhaps what we are searching for
are mirror images
That which seek in thousand forms
and thousand faces
seeking out of one being and one voice
in projection and dissolution
in our desperate struggle to live
and moments of sheer exhilaration
Perhaps we are searching for
our mirror images

Yet beyond our search lies a realm
of pure sanity
Where the other manifests
In life there is neither you nor 'I'

34

Morning

Red leaves
shelled my being,
the morning changed
in resonance with
tree, leaf
pond heron
and light playing with them.
Something altered
in response
to the landscape,
the mind was free
as were the trees
growing wild
protected in peace.

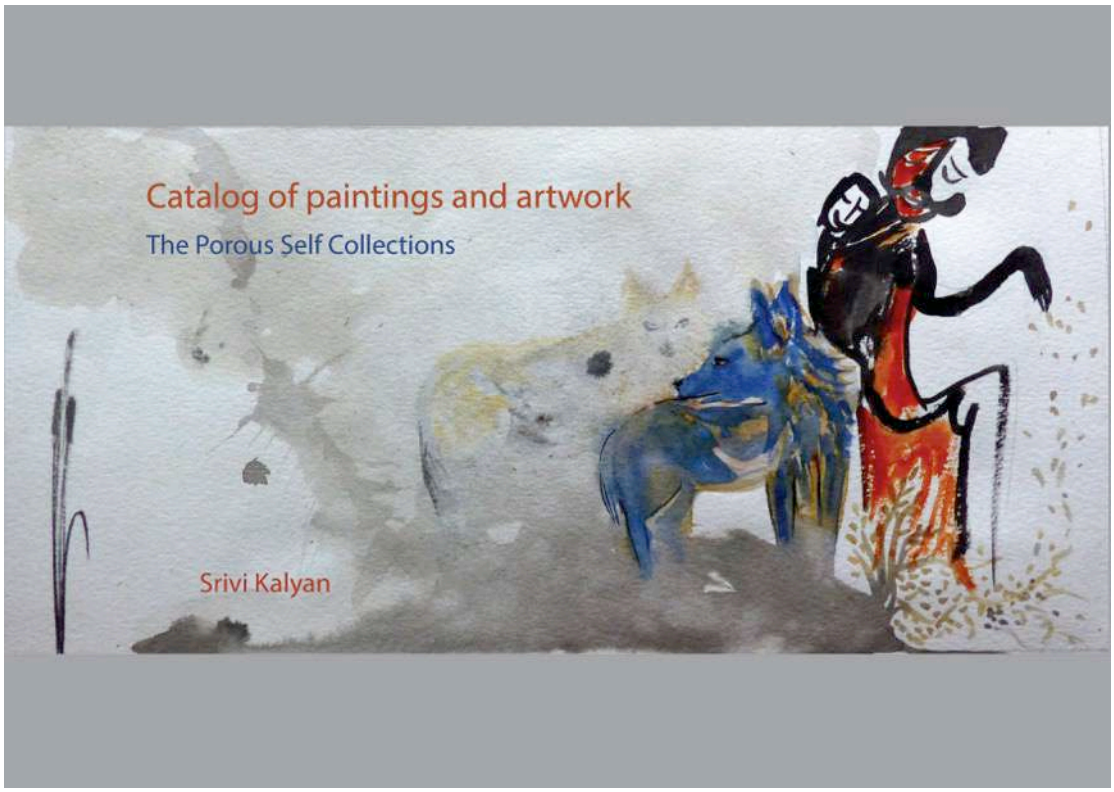




Here it is a certain sharpness of being that a torrent toad appears to have, the first of whom I met in Coorg in a stream near Honey Valley. The second one, I had the privilege of holding in my hand. Torrent toad footsteps on my palm will remain a reminder of what porosity means to me. Profound confusion, distraughtness, frustration to a moment of content stillness - that tiny being can communicate so much in a span of seconds. But above all, coherence of form. There are few humans who train for such coherence of their bodies. To me sharpness of being and coherence are connected as in a trained body. I wonder again at the rules of yogs and yet again wonder how much of it came from observation of these core principles of life in all diversity of forms, and how much was perhaps inspired by frogs.



Ghatophryne ornata
Malabar Torrent Toad



There are several paintings, sketches, and other artwork that have been produced during the research. These are peppered through the thesis. The Catalog compiles each style/ set of paintings in a curated collection of the entire body of work produced.

A few pages from the catalog, visual look and feel





Walking Together

- Tracing the journey of a gastropod on an island between Pulicat Lake and the Bay of Bengal, Chinese ink and watercolours on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.



Time to ponder

- Painted Stork, egret and birds resting on a tree at Pulicat, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.



Unfurling interiority

- Lotus and Lily Pond, the lotus is a symbol of the heart and often visualized as a symbol to show the unfolding of consciousness and enlightenment. Here the consciousness traverses through pond, transforming in that journey of porosity with the lilies and lotuses blooming at dawn enroute to Puri from Bhubaneshwar, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.



Playing with sea, sand, late afternoon, shells, and self.

- At Kappad beach, Kerala, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 12 in X 9 in, 2019.

Ānanda

A set of 6 collections of poetry on Navigating *The Porous Self*

The first is 'Torment' (Dukha), an extended form of grief for the natural world and oneself.

The second is 'Love' (Śṛṅgāra), brought forth as a metaphor of Indian gods and goddesses in love with each other, written in the style of Bhakti poetry. The key is to ask, how we can transform ourselves through the great potential of love, how can we experience the transformative eroticism of the spiritual in our relationship to life. I draw from Bhakti poetry as my inspiration as historically ideas of the sensuous and erotic are entwined with divine transcendence in myth, metaphor and language.

The Third is 'Transformation' (Yajña), as an interrogation of how one can choose to transform oneself at the essential core, where consciousness moves entire planes of reality, existence, being and action.

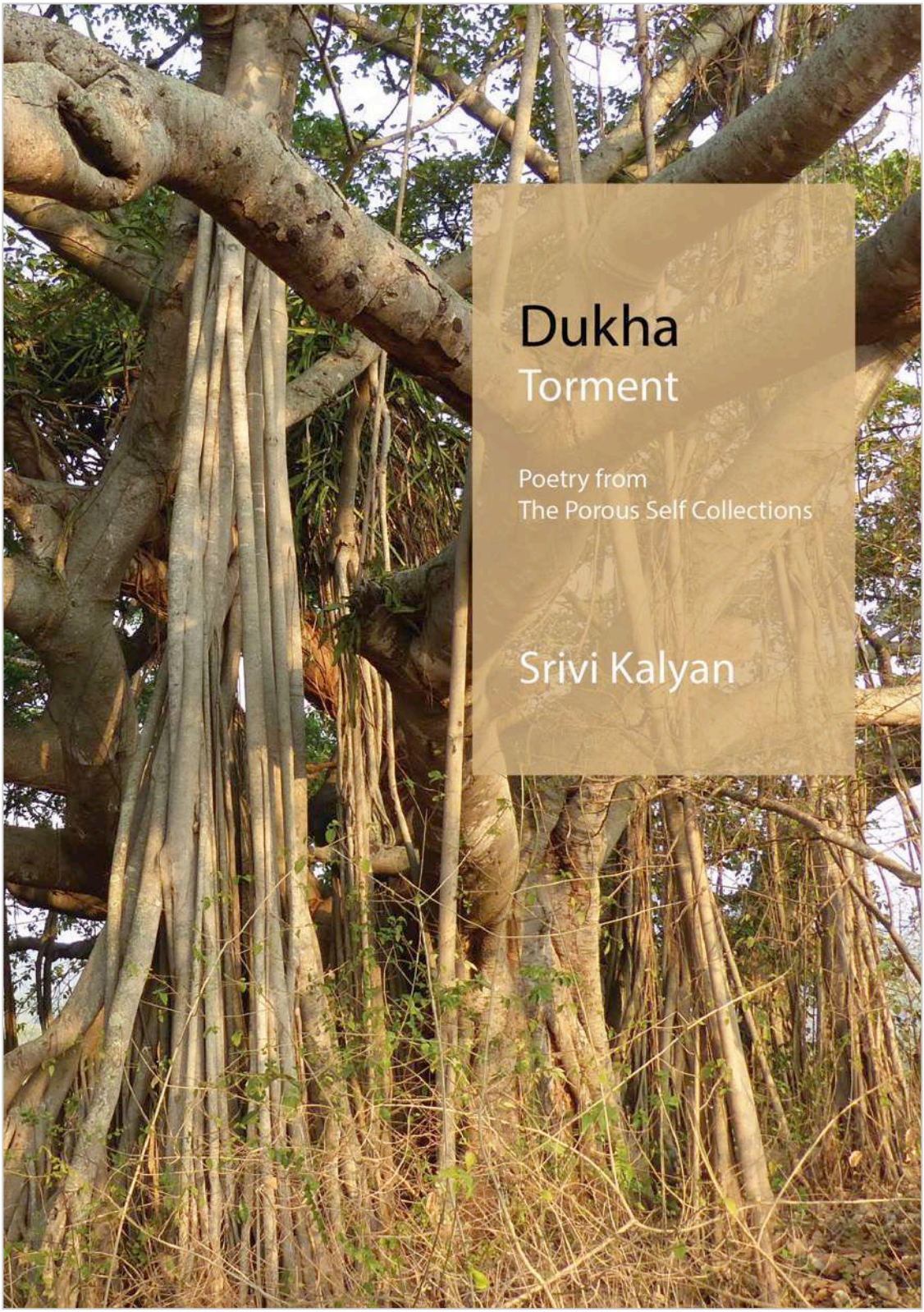
The fourth is "On Being" (Iyalbu), where I inquire into the mundane, the very act of being as an essential link to any kind of action, ecological or otherwise. Evolved through *porosity*, I ask about what it means to look at the everyday with a gentle sense of humour, with this renewed sense of being and how being can flow as intrinsic nature and action.

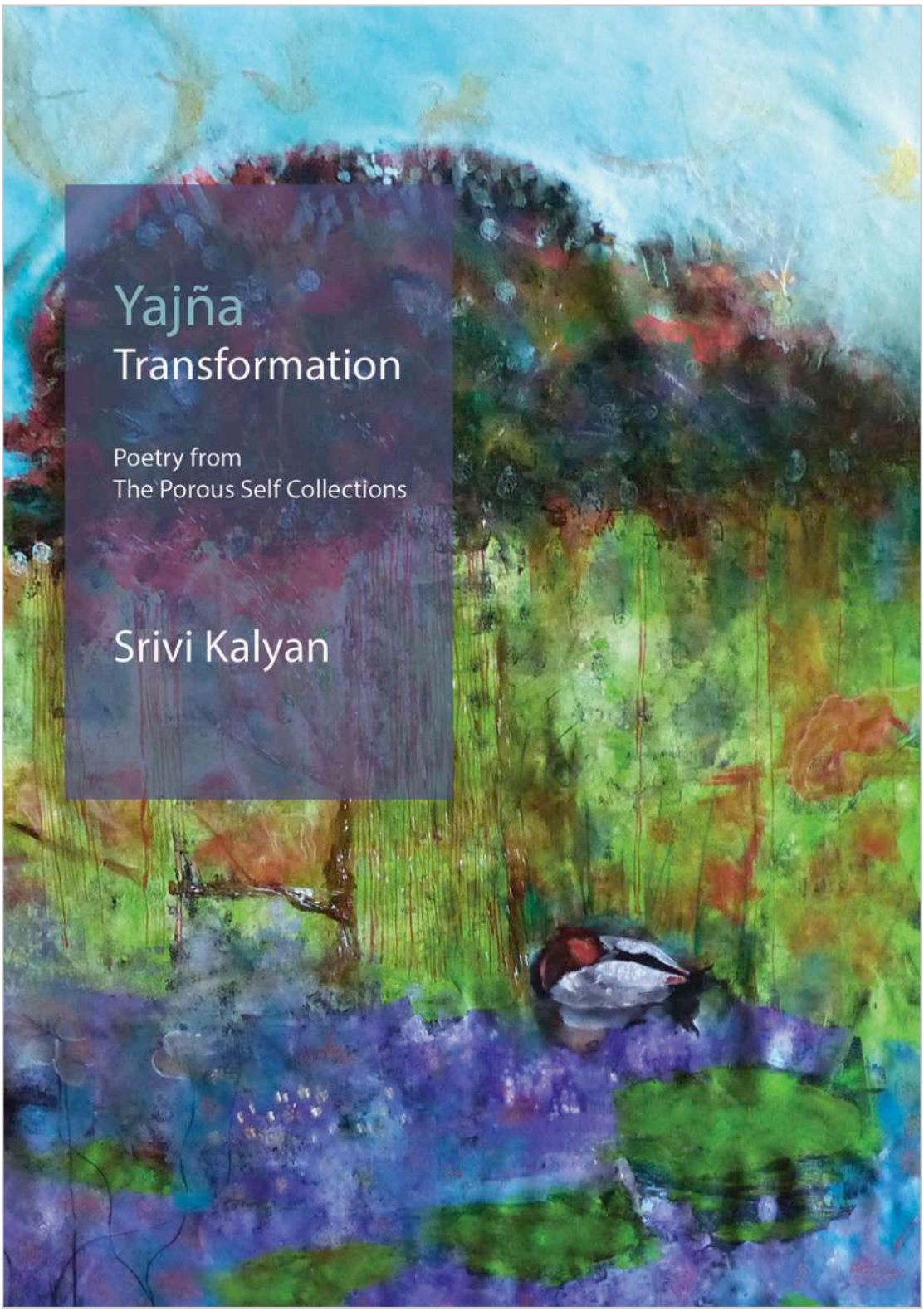
The fifth is "Resonance" (Sahṛdaya), where I inquire into this experience and beingness of the aesthete who can completely identify with the artist and the artist who can be in complete resonance with her environment.

The sixth is "Repose" (Viśrānti), where I inquire into restful contemplation. It is slowness, cosmic in its conceptualization with the AnantaSayana form of Vishnu providing the core inspiration.

Each collection has thirty or more poems that revel, argue, interrogate, experience, articulate, mourn and immerse in varied landscapes, communities and events to investigate into the porous and the process of enabling it in everyday life.

Several poems from these collections have been used across the thesis to discuss, deliberate and evolve my positions and methodologies.


Dukha
Torment
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections
Srivi Kalyan

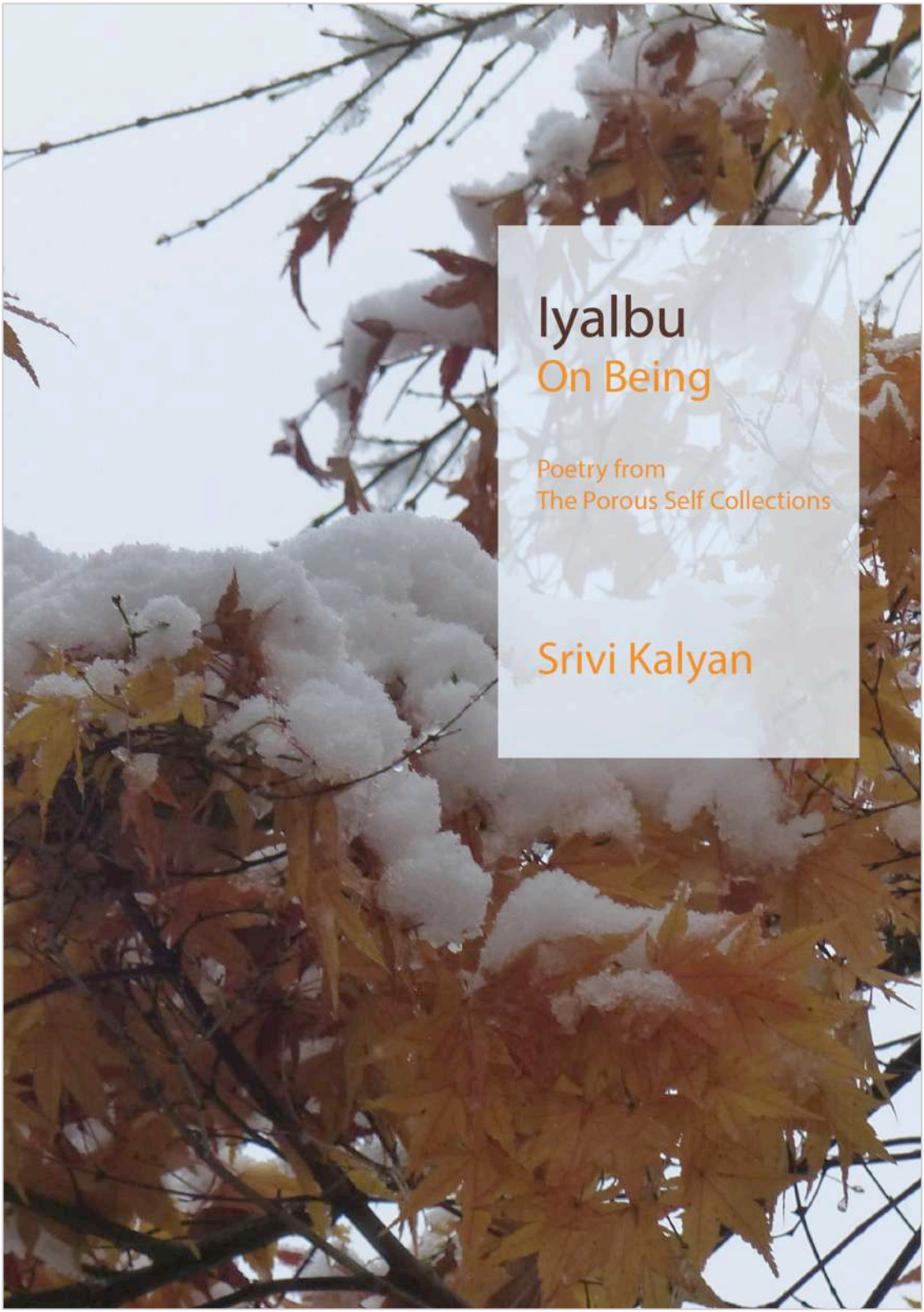

Yajña
Transformation
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections
Srivi Kalyan

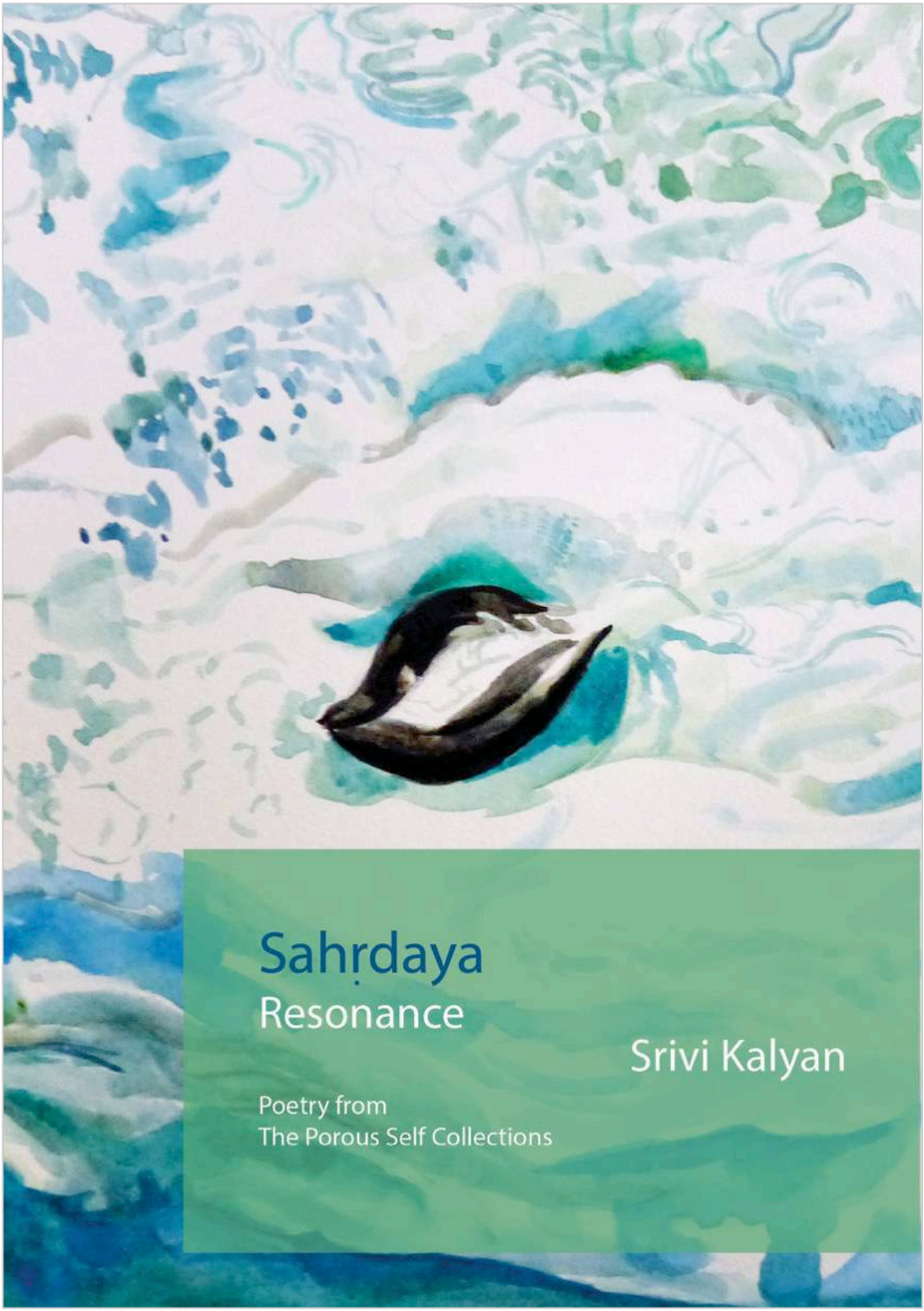


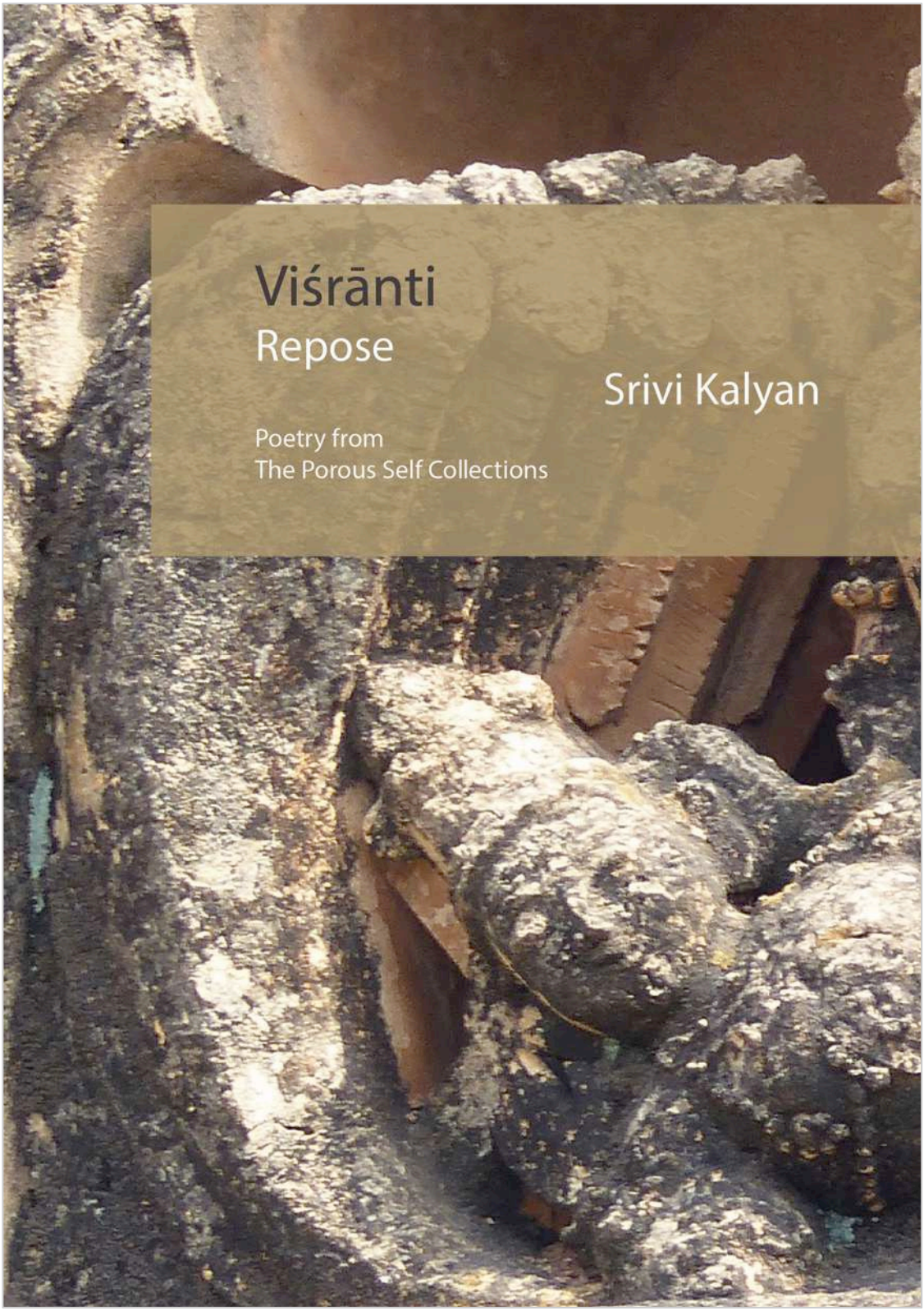
Śṛṅgāra
Love

Srivi Kalyan

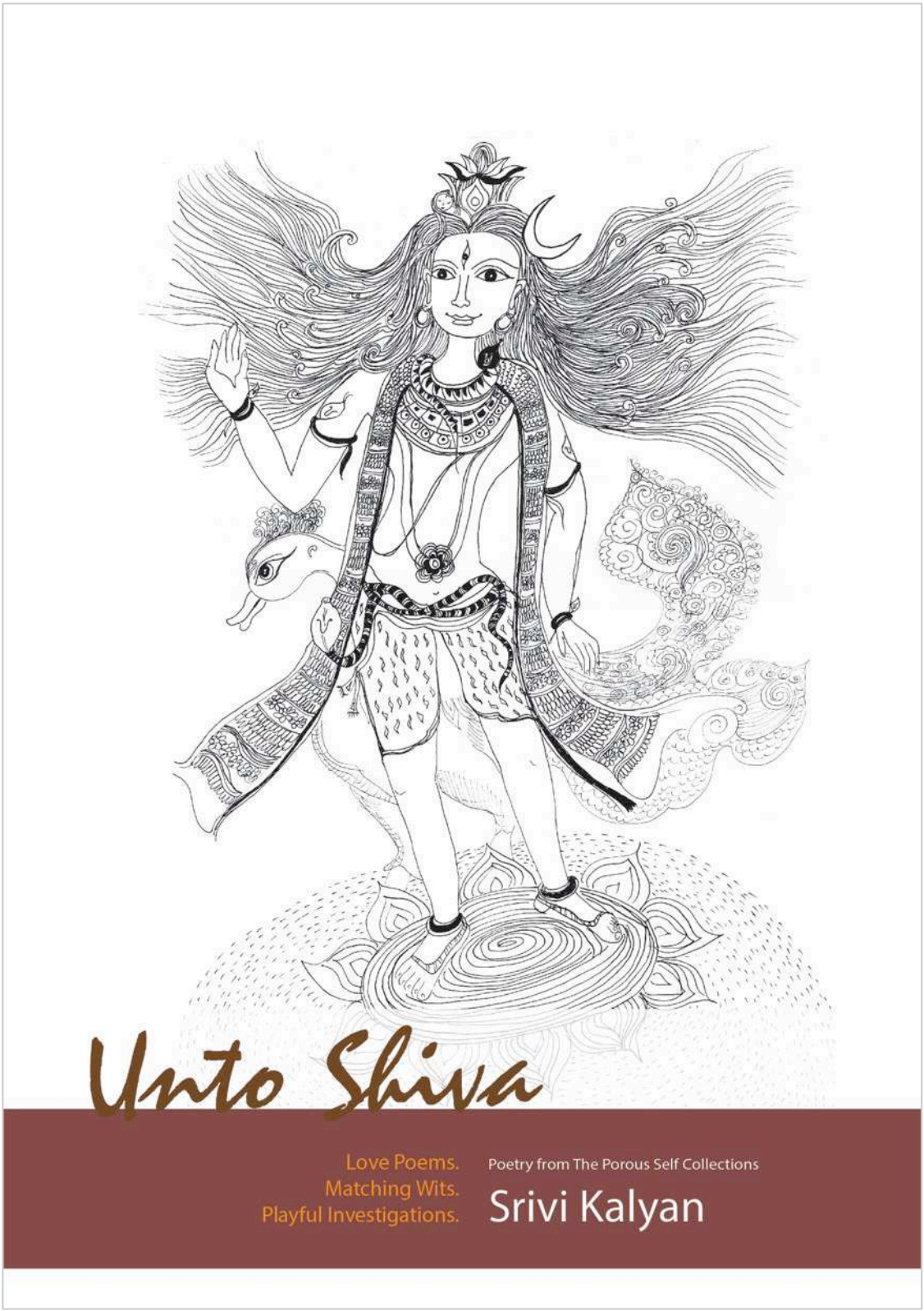
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections


Iyalbu
On Being
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections
Srivi Kalyan


Sahṛdaya
Resonance
Srivi Kalyan
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections


Viśrānti
Repose
Srivi Kalyan
Poetry from
The Porous Self Collections

Unto Shiva is a collection of poetry that delves into consciousness as discussed, intuited, and explored in the realms of Saiva bhakti literature and ideas surrounding Consciousness as related to Shiva as a deity. Several poems from this collection have also been discussed in thesis. They also formed the groundwork for my published chapter with Routledge on *"Creativity as Intrinsic Ecological Consciousness."*


Unto Shiva
Love Poems.
Matching Wits.
Playful Investigations.
Poetry from The Porous Self Collections
Srivi Kalyan

Kaivalya is a single long format poem unfolds into prose and many other short poems, delving into meditations on living and dying in this collection.

Kaivalya

Meditations on living and Dying

Poetry and
Lyrical Prose
from
The Porous Self
Collections

Srivi Kalyan



The Healer is a series of lyrical prose pieces and some poetry that delve into my practices in healing through the natural world.

The Healer

Poetry and
Lyrical Prose
from
The Porous Self
Collections

Srivi Kalyan



The Porous Self is a series of lyrical prose pieces and some poetry that formed the basis of my practice in the early period of my inquiry and are central to the evolution of ideas and concepts that emerged in my later works.

Artist Statement written for the collection in 2016

Poetry as defiance

This becomes that,
frog becomes snake.
Slushy leaves
are now great rainforest,
the mighty streams, we.

There is an instance in which life corresponds with life without the weight and boundaries of form separating it. The knowledge of distinguishing between the human and the other is temporarily suspended in this time-space. The general rules that keep us separated as distinctive forms break to create a visceral fluid exchange of energy. There is a deeper awareness of identity that stays in the background but does not disturb the more immediate resonance of life that is happening with a sharp immediacy. Both space and time turn subtle, and sublime teasing out nuanced relationships that otherwise seem impossible in what we deem as everyday reality.

These experiences of time, space and energy as they collude with each other become the grounds of my inquiry into a porous self. I use poetry as an intuitive artistic process and aesthetic tool to reach into a primordial connection with the earth and all her beings. Language is what differentiates us as a species and in that language becomes the very barrier that disconnects us from other life forms and ways of being sentient. Our narrow definitions of language, consciousness and sentience limit us from communicating, expressing and exchanging experiences in ways that are transmutations of matter and energy. In the words of Cognitive Neurologist Dr. Thomas Bak, “In poetry, you try to condense the meaning into what is really crucial,” “You can express something with very few words but high density of meaning. In prose, you expect the word to be what it is, but in poetry you examine the connection of words in a different manner”. To me

textures of poetry allow for multi-layered selves, states of being, time, space and vision. It often seems that poetry is the rebellion of language to defy itself. In crafting poetry, I find ways to craft consciousness. Using poetry as a way of inquiring into beingness has allowed me to challenge language and find ways to transmute it to evoke a porous self that can experience the world very differently.

My current collection of poetry/ lyrical prose uses certain intuitions, utterances, visions, observations and a crafting of linguistic form. But these are only a few of the many ways in which porosity can be enquired into. It is an open-ended inquiry that allows for a profusion of possibilities. Hybrid forms are as much as a possibility as pure distinct ones melting into a metaphysical landscape, abstraction as wonderful an option as hyperrealism. Cultural symbols, philosophical ideas from Hinduism, mythology, the image of Shiva and Shakti interpreted in Hindu thought as matter and energy trickle into the poetry, bridging the ancient and modern worlds in the ever-continuous present. As I work on this collection, I am challenged by the very perception of reality. This is an exciting prospect as I then find ways to break the grammar and form of language to interpret new realities. Of great interest to me the way time-space-energy-self interactions happen in words. Out of these explorations, many questions emerge. Should the words be continuous, abrupt, flowing into narratives, or pause in disconnected events in a poem?, Is there a visual meaning to how the words are placed on paper, or screen and is poetry then an image or text? Does the word change if it is transacted as voice or performance? Does it change if it is transacted as dialog? I am interested in creation and sharing/ transaction of poetry. *What is poetry?,* is closely followed in my mind by the question *When is poetry?*

It is in this context that I would like to work on two aspects during the period of this fellowship

- As a creative artist, emerging poetry in a self-reflexive process inquiring into the states of consciousness in which different kinds of poetry evolve
- Look at the visual, aural, performative forms of poetry as text and how it alters aesthetic experience and relationships with audience

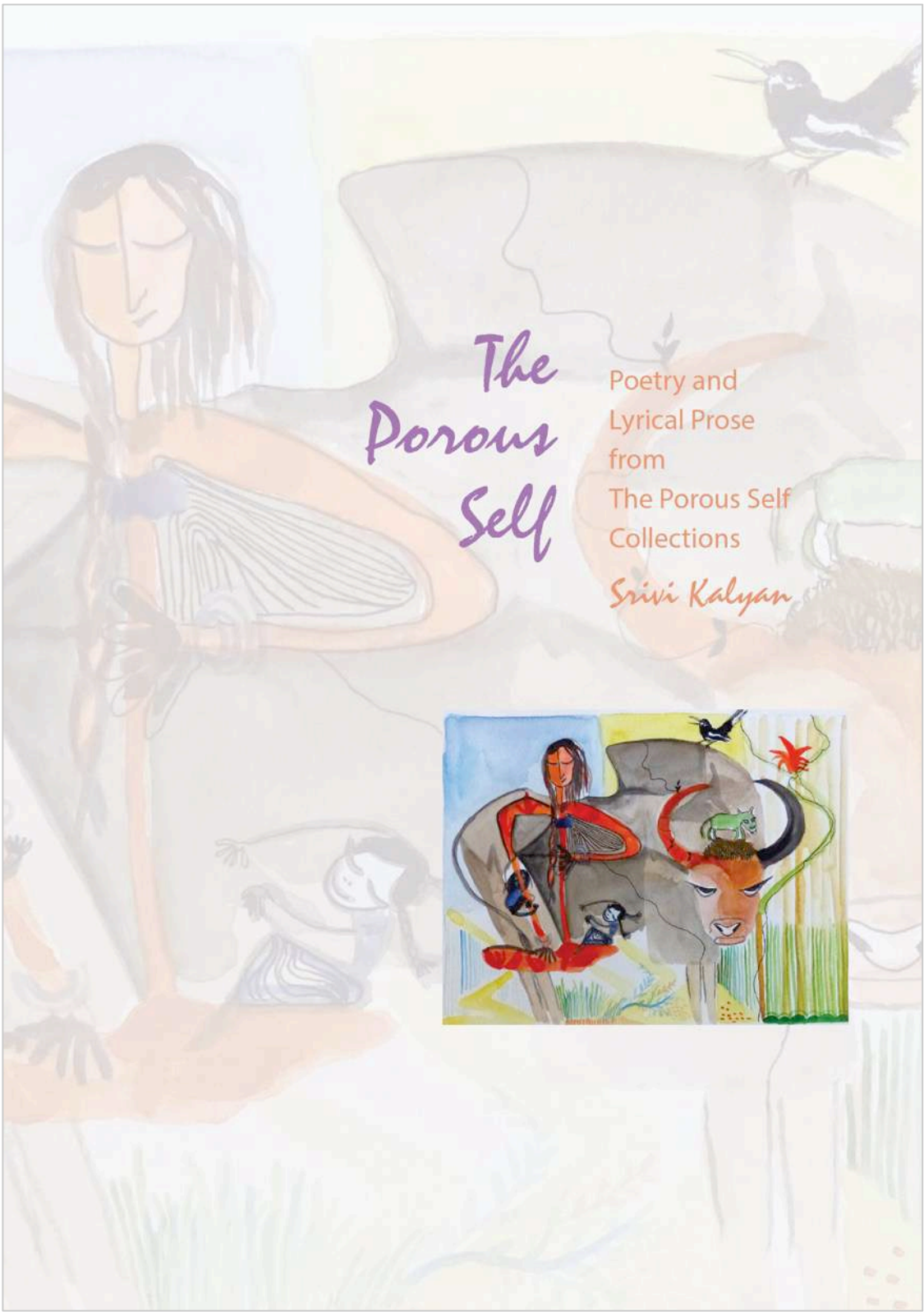
My hope is that this practice and research will give me time and space to probe more deeply into language, cultural nuance and poetry and how aesthetics of poetry can play a critical role in shaping ecological consciousness through artistic creative process as well as aesthetic exchange. I also hope to engage with faculty and peers to discuss the nature of artistic process in poetry and how cultural roots affect this process. In tracing my artistic lineage over the years, I have found myself in the conundrum of working in two worlds, one ancient and bygone yet contemporary and one global, universal and layered. To me the nuances of my poetic thought arise at these junctures and I hope to explore linguistic devices that will make it possible for me to write poetry that is accessible across cultures, while staying rooted in my own lineage.

The challenges of engaging in porous experiences and finding language to interpret these often leave me exhilarated yet exhausted. And I hope that the fellowship will be able to provide perspective and approaches to engaging with these worlds of transience and subtlety.

To me, the more nuanced quest at this point is not so much the human intelligence of expressing through poetry, but in discovering ways to re-enact the intelligences of other beings that I experience in my porous relationships with them. As Abram writes,

> *When we disparage the intelligence of birds, or the size of their brains, we miss that flight itself is a kind of thinking, a gliding within the mind, a grace we humans rarely attain in our contemplations (although if we're following a falcon with our focus, we sometimes find our thoughts soaring as well). – David Abram, Becoming Animal*

Can poetry be that flight of the bird? How can language come to possess this rare gracefulness of the sentience and consciousness of another being, another form of life? What then does the act of writing poetry constitute?


The Porous Self
Poetry and Lyrical Prose from The Porous Self Collections
Srivi Kalyan

Yajña – Sacrifice is a novella that I began writing in 2002 and had not completed. The story came together in 2015, with my fresh inquiries into the porous self. The story inquires into what is a meaningful sacrifice and how our everyday lives are in their own way sacrifices of magnificent proportions. Alternating between an ancient past and a contemporary story of five people listening to an old storyteller, Yajña questions what the essence of our lives are and how we must choose our ethics for the mundane, for ourselves.

YAJÑA
SACRIFICE

SRIVI KALYAN



A novella from The Porous Self Collections

Short stories and illustrated books for children, delving into feeling a deeper connection with nature is part of my ongoing practice. Several explorations into this realm, to translate concepts of porosity into art exercises, stories, conversations while taking them out on walks etc. have been developed as part of this practice inquiry.

The Sarus Crane Dreams



Srivi Kalyan

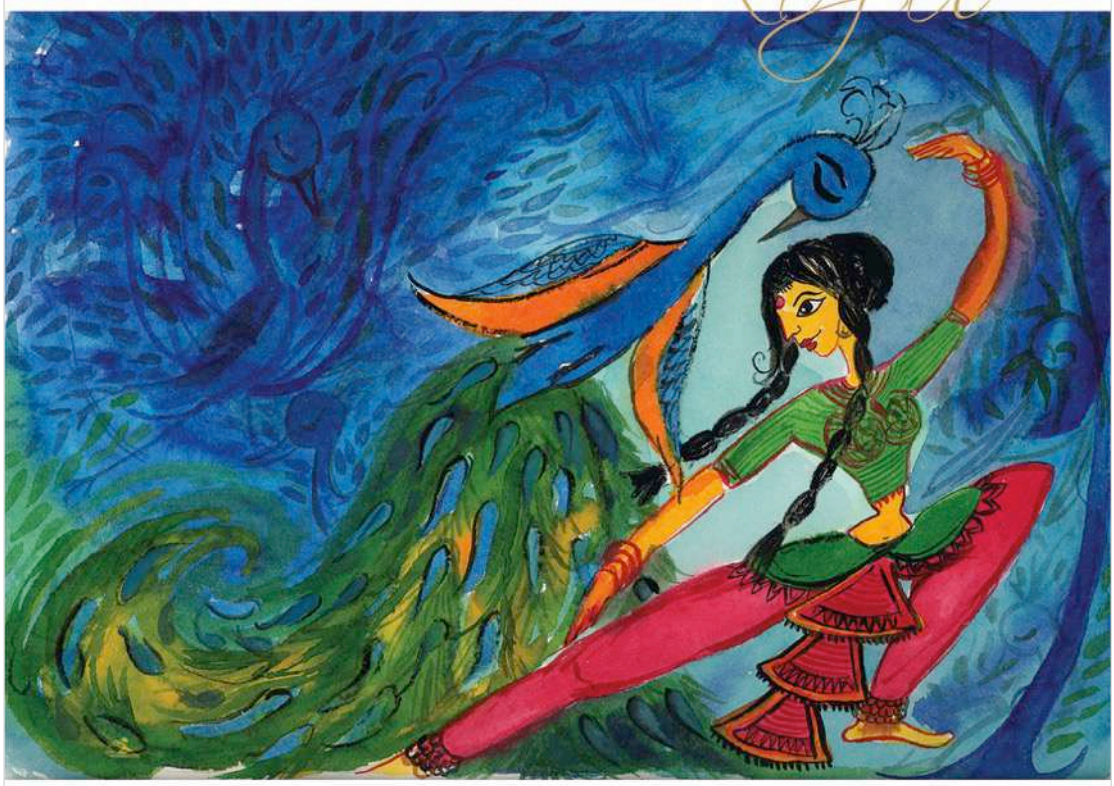
Children's storybook
from The Porous Self Collections

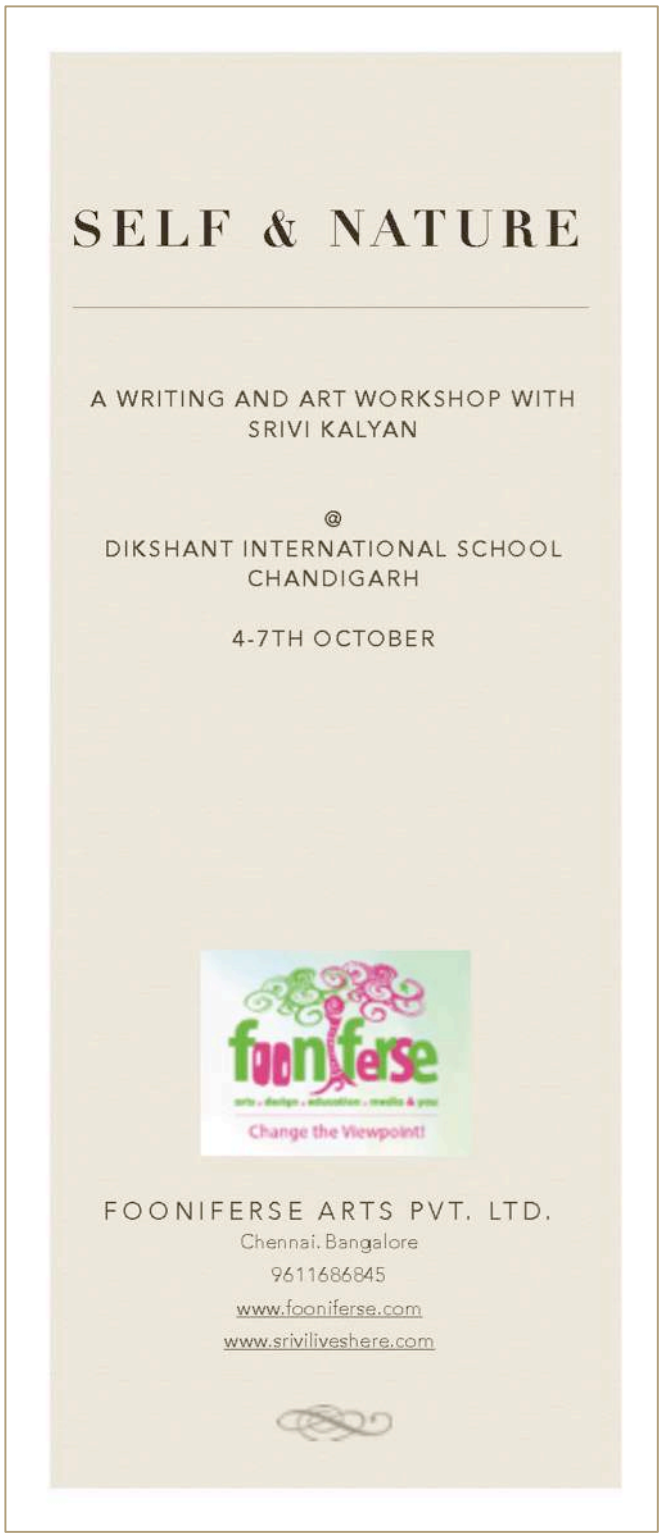
Bird and Line – Chapter 11, which looks at both analysis and application has been further developed into a choreographic idea for performance drawing from the root source of Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music but with more open interpretations for movement and body work drawing on specific experiences with birds in the natural world.

Bird and Line

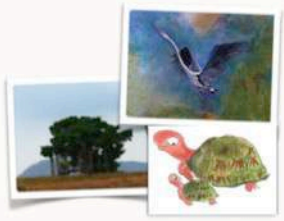
Dance Choreography
from The Porous Self Collections

Srivi Kalyan





A series of Workshop designs that I have put together in the various sessions that I did outside work. This set that has been designed showcases exercises evolved for and with children over a eight year period.



Which sense are you using? What are you feeling? How does your memory get created?

MEMORY ROUTINE

Awareness Prompt

Let's use a memory routine to stretch the limits of our memory and find everything that touched our lives.

I saw. I remember. I felt
I heard. I remember. I felt
I smelt. I remember. I felt
I touched. I remember. I felt/
Something touched me. I remember. I felt
I tasted. I remember. I felt

FEELINGS & EXPERIENCES

Oftentimes we don't watch our own feelings, emotions and how we respond to diverse experiences in nature. We often use only our visual sense and our feelings become stereotyped over time. Mapping using senses and feeling, journaling and writing can help us reconnect with nature and be more creative in our work.

NATURE JOURNAL AND MAPPING

Experience Prompt

Nature journaling is a fun way to look more closely at the world around you. Get a small notebook in which you can sketch, use watercolours and some other media that you like. Walk around everyday, sketching the world that you see. Small beetles and bugs, plants, flowers, birds, trees, terrains, sea, other natural landscapes that you might visit - sketch everything. You will find a world of wonder and magic all around you. Often you don't have to go farther than 5 feet to find a whole new world.

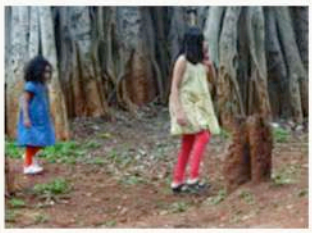
Observe sand, and soil, observe leaf and vine... Observe all the things you have never seen before.

Map the worlds that you see. Map one square foot to discover how many beings inhabit/ use a space. Create a mapping exercise for yourself that allows you to see more and more.

Use the maps that you create as your creative writing space and write your thoughts in the map itself.



Egret watches and plans out his flight



Children discover a banyan tree

SAMPLE WRITING

I tasted the smell of the jasmine
and I heard the patterns on the leaves
I saw the smell of the rushes
I touched the flight of the kingfisher
Eyes. Ears. Nose. Tongue. Skin -
What maps will you draw in my inner worlds?
They seem just like the reticulate patterns that flow in and out of a leaf.

Srivi Kalyan

Can memories change? Why did we make the memory that we did during a certain experience?

MEMORY LANDSCAPES

Connect inner-outer prompt

Our internal world is full of landscapes and terrains like the external world. Once we know this, we can **wander, observe, engage and change** the inner landscapes



WRITING PROMPT & TOOLS

List Experiences
Detail Observations
Use Feeling Words
Construct sensorial descriptions

Write an essay
Write a poem
Write a story
Paint a memory

Observe inner world
Reflect
Map memories in space, time, senses & feeling
Take your readers on a journey

SAMPLE WRITING

Walking through the forested path in Sukhna lake, I saw an old heron. He was resting on a tree. I would never have spotted him if it wasn't for the kingfisher who flew through the dense foliage flashing the signature blue colour. Everything around me was quiet and the old heron was so still, standing on one leg that I was surprised. Could one be as still as a heron, I wondered.

It seemed like the heron was resting, but alert. Behind the heron lay the rolling hills of the Shivalik. Grasses and rushes covered either side of the lake.

It has been a long time since I saw the old heron. But today, it was such a mad rush at work and I was tired of running around. Suddenly I remembered the heron and the memory made me contemplate on stillness. I suddenly felt all my tension disappear. I became calm and contented. I could hear the stillness of the heron resonating in my ears. It was just a memory, but a very vivid one.

Srivi Kalyan

WORD SUPPORT

dewdrop
convergence
signatures of nature
evocative
aging bark
texture
dynamic
disappear
flower clad
rolling hills
contemplate
discover
reticulate
pinnate leaves
seasons
foliage
petiole(leafstalk)
compound (multiple leaves on a stalk)
grasses, sedges, rushes (monocots)
jasmine, bougainvillea, rose, hibiscus
ravaged
exhilarated

wildlife sanctuary
botanical garden, community garden
kingfisher
stillness
heron
inspired
overwhelmed
rush of emotion
reflection
observe
curious
imagine
proud
joy
disgusted
complex
conflict
worried
laugh
broken
residue
history
plan
forget



THANK YOU

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