“Let me laugh, poet I am,
Skilled to sing, blessed I am.” Sugathakumari (SKS 422).
“Whenever I do not create
I feel like a beast.” Walker (CP 430).

The refurbished political potential of ecofeminism honed by its commitment to identity politics and the readiness to foster a democratic discussion of environmental issues, has also endowed it with a critical faculty to discern how literary expressions of woman-nature connections promote the ecofeminist objectives. A major project of ecofeminism as asserted by Karen J. Warren in “Introduction to Ecofeminism” is “to make visible ‘woman-nature connections’ and where harmful to women and nature, to dismantle them” (256). How to develop a gender-sensitive language, theory and practice that do not augment the exploitative character of the patriarchal and androcentric culture is one of the pressing concerns of ecofeminist writings. Ecofeminists have shown their displeasure in the use of, in Warren’s words, the, “sexist and naturist language, i.e., language that inferiorizes woman and non human nature by
naturalizing women and feminizing nature” (257). They argue that the twin domination of woman and nature are in fact culturally analogous, a pertinent aspect which fails to be recognized by those who prefer this language. Warren firmly pronounces one major goal of ecofeminism as, “the development of theory and praxis in feminism and environmental philosophy that does not perpetuate such sexist-naturist language and the power over systems of domination they reinforce” (258).

Whether nature has an ontic identity free from human interpretations and whether humans can comprehend fully the complexities of nature and also whether human language can give expression to all the nuances of what ‘nature’ connotes, are the queries posited by the recent theorizations in ecofeminism. Acknowledging the human limit in understanding nature and representing it, ecofeminists are committed to formulating a fresh language that can transcend the limits of representation, because as Sandilands observes:

The perpetual failure of human language to produce an accurate, symbolized nature does not absolve ecofeminist politics from the responsibility of producing alternative conversations about human and nonhuman nature-specifically, democratic discourses in which a variety of different relations to nature are validated and sustained, even if none of them is the whole truth. (188)

Expression in ecofeminist writing becomes supple enough to accommodate the representation of nature and all existing organisms on earth, once it is charged by the democratic sense and interconnectedness upheld by the movement. Just as there has been in the feminist movement
a demand for an *écriture féminine* to represent women who are unrepresentable in the language of the father, there arises in ecofeminism the need for an *écriture naturelle* which undermines its own ability to represent in a self reflexive way and points to the spaces of otherness that lie within it. This language tries to constitute the ecological ‘Real’ through a proliferation of representations. While elucidating on the ecofeminist relation to the ‘Real’ that stands for the unsymbolizable kernel of both human and non-human life, Sandilands observes, “Ecofeminists have spoken of nature as an accessible feminine one and also as an unfamiliar Other, its enigmatic activity, thus suggesting a politics that implicitly involves the development of an ethical relation to the Otherness of the Other, to nature, to the Real” (181). The ethics of the ‘Real’ simultaneously fosters two movements: one movement traces new metaphoric relations in which nature appears differently, while the other tries an explicit investigation of how some metaphoric representations leave open spaces for encounters with the ‘Real’ and how these encounters shape future representations.

The divine inspiration that triggers Walker’s poetic diction is acknowledged by her in the preface to her *Collected Poems*, “I have climbed back into life over and over on a ladder made of words, but knitted, truly, by the unknowable. . . . In keeping faith with Poetry’s honest help to me, I have not deleted or changed—beyond a word or two—anything I have written, though greatly tempted at times to do so” (xv-xvi). Walker’s deliberate decision to retain the spontaneous diction of poems concurs with the U.S. theosophist Sampson Reed postulation on language: A language should be a language not of words but of things. He urges, “Let [us] respect the smallest blade which grows and permit it to
speak for itself. Then may there be poetry which may not be written perhaps, but which may be felt as part of our being” (qtd. in Cameron 266-67). Walker’s poems express such an experience of ‘her being’. The first section of her first collection of poems *Once* was titled “African Images, Glimpses from a Tiger’s Back”. When one of her friends commented that she could not give this title to the first section because “There are no tigers in Africa!” Walker responded, “There are no tigers in Africa! You say. Frowning. Yes. I say. Smiling. But they are very beautiful.” (*CP* 4). Walker acknowledges the limits of human language and resorts to suggestiveness to represent what nature indicates. She effortlessly gives a very sensuous expression of her touring Africa by employing images that capture the colour contrasts, light, movement and sight as in:

The rain forest  
Red orchids—glorious!  
and near one’s eyes  
the spinning cobra. (17)

and gives ear to the slight ruffles of wind or feathers as in “Listen! / the soft wings of cranes / sifting the salt sea air” (52). Calling her record of glimpses in Africa ‘a journal’, where she thought she could capture everything, she reinstates the power of poetic narration. “Janie Crawford” portrays the former husbands of Janie:

the one who wanted  
to change her into a mule  
and the other who tried to interest her  
in being a queen. (264)
Walker asserts that though a woman may suffer like a mule or walk like a queen, “unless she submits is neither a mule / nor a queen” (264). The comparison of a mule and a queen to the wife opens up spaces for encounters with the Real, by the metaphorical allusion to the curtailed freedom and individuality of both woman and animal in a patriarchal society. “A Woman Is Not a Potted Plant” is a very powerful title and a subtle metaphor that declares woman’s emancipation. Walker affirms that a woman is “wilderness unbounded” (455) and not “creeper vine or tree” (455). These metaphors evince the extending vistas of woman’s freedom. The sprawling, beautiful wilderness untamed and uncontrollable is what a woman is; she cannot permit herself to be a potted plant, and does not need some support like a creeper vine, or wish to root herself to one place like a tree. The comparison of stripping the bark of a tree and slowly killing it to the silencing of a woman by the male-centred society in “On Stripping Bark from Myself” is another bold reference that alludes to the suffocating confines of women enforced by androcentric culture.

In the epigram like poems in A Poem Travelled down My Arm the spaces and silences between the lines and words are as much expressive as the lines themselves. This book which Carmen Gillespie qualifies as a “slim volume” (16) employs an experimental form, with which Walker expresses brief observations about human relationships and experiences. Gillespie observes: “The book’s content varies between simple language and basic drawings that convey Walker’s belief in the power of human connections to generate creativity and positivity” (16). Hinting at the long years of violent oppression of the African natives, Walker asks suggestively what history does the Africans know and hesitate to divulge to the world, hinting at the helplessness of the poor and naive natives of
that continent. The omnipotent continent is labelled ‘mother Africa’ (74) and Walker presents the impoverishment of the country due to the bloody invasions and oppressions as this mother left with “blood on her head & / on her shoe. // She knows” (74). The poet’s idea of freedom and emancipation is revealed in the lines:

Do not
be
like
cows
grazing
watching
the
butcher. (144)

The pause between each word and the space between each line capture the long history of oppression endured by the innocent natives. Alluding to the recurring reference to her mother’s garden as a metaphor for artistic creativity in her writings, Houston A. Baker comments that Walker discovers through the garden image how the world is made anew. He states, “By phenomenologically recovering her mother’s vernacular ‘garden’ and presenting it as literate poetic image, Walker opens the field of Afro-American women’s consciousness in its founding radiance and claims for herself an enduring spiritual legacy” (52). Walker’s portrayal of the garden rich in the infinite variety of fruits in “At First I Thought there Were only Peaches and Grapes” and the rejuvenating presence of flowers, especially Petunia in “The Nature of this Flower Is to Bloom” reveal the family legacy she had inherited from her mother. The images
symbolize beauty and endurance, which her ancestors stood for. Walker favours animism, about which she explains in an interview: “If there is one thing African-Americans have retained of their African heritage, it is probably animism: a belief that makes it possible to view all creation as living, as being inhabited by spirit” (O’Brien Alice Walker 332). Maria Lauret remarks on Walker’s depiction of animism: “[It] enables Walker not only to connect her family history with African and Native American thinking, it also unites her womanist interest in ancient goddess worship with the theory of creativity, gender and childhood trauma” (84). This perspective imparts further connotations to the symbols she chooses to portray the earth mother as an abode of compassion and consolation. The reverence for ‘the immense green lap’, ‘the eternal brown embrace’ and ‘blue body’ (CP 460) of the bountiful earth mother described in “We Have a Beautiful Mother” asserts Walker’s pride for her roots, since she has repeatedly referred to her ancestors, as those who led a life in close communion with nature.

In “Nisagandhi” (Night Queen) Sugathakumari openly declares the constraint of human language, “In our limited human language / How shall I praise thee, oh tenderness, whiteness?” (274). At times the poet gets dejected at the dissipation of her creative faculty. In “Kadalirambunnu” (The Sea Is Roaring) she relates how her heart reflects the discontented roar of the black sea which eventually makes her feel her losing hold of poetry which jumps into a whirlpool of the sea and gets drowned. This imagery provides a vast space to convey the emotional turmoil within her. But the poet who laments about the waning of creativity gets replenished amidst the serene scenic beauty of the breeze, twilight and flowers on the hill top as portrayed in “Malamukalirikke”
(On the Hill Top). The poet feels nature rekindling her imagination and nurturing her creative faculty, along with the realization of the lack human beings feel while rendering experience into expressions.

The recurring images in Sugathakumari’s poems that depict nature-human relationship are birds, animals, forests, trees, flowers, rain, moonlight, sea, sunshine and night. The poet instinctively attributes femininity to these symbols, which in turn opens up the diverse characteristics of a woman: creation, nurturance, endurance and consolation. There occurs a proliferation of Goddess metaphors in “Veliyettathil” where tide is addressed as her favourite deity and in “Mazhakkalathinu Nandi” (Thanks to the Rainy Season) in which the replenishing rain cloud is portrayed as a goddess. The lamenting mother-bird in “Ningalen Lokathe Enthu Cheythu?” (What Did You Do to My World?) and the broken winged wild bird singing her songs in “Oru Pattu Pinneyum” (Again a Song) symbolize the angst at the destruction of nature and the abandonment of family to the extent of becoming very melodramatic. The metaphor of the desert as a tolerant optimistic mother in “Marubhoomiyude Vasanatham” (The Spring of the Desert) intensifies the thirst of the earth for spring and fragrance, breeze and honey. Such an angst can again be seen in “Thulavarshappacha” (The North East Monsoon Greenery) where the desert is portrayed as ‘the yesterday’s beggar woman with a lean flat bare breast lying in the hot Sun’ (616) who has been transformed today into a bride wearing green silk adorned with a bunch of sugarcane flowers, once her lover dark cloud has rained down into the throbbing desert. “Rathrimazha” (Night Rain) which symbolizes rain as a young mad woman, a sad daughter of the night and a dear
companion presents a consonance of sufferings, tolerance and camaraderie which are deemed peculiarly feminine.

“Thaivekkal” (Planting Trees) portrays the planting of trees as a strong metaphor that radiates a sense of optimism in all those who love nature and work against pollution. “Kadalinodu” (To the Sea) symbolizes sea as a woman who consoles man in distress, emphasizing the healing power of nature as a woman. The feminine symbols of solace and motherliness embedded in the tree with white flowers, the sea, the moonlight, the forest and the earth mother in various poems communicate the tender, cool and comforting touch of nature. This is made more powerful in the representation of ‘the conscience of malanadu’ in “Silent Valleyil Veendum” (Again at Silent Valley). The portrayal of a black lass who consoles the trees and the rivers of the forest, and stays in vigil, raising her horns, sniffing and staying like a deer on guard evokes the primordial feminine instinct for preservation. Nature personified in the feminine gender in these poems serves to spread an environmental awareness in the readers. The metaphors do not close upon themselves and confine themselves to the signification of the social and political contexts, instead they generate open spaces for greater introspection of life in general. These multifaceted representations become an ecofeminist way to interrogate the limits of human language to comprehend and capture nature in literature. An encounter with the ‘Real’ is made possible in the aporias generated by the symbols and metaphors and the resultant multiple subject positions offer a true democratic vision of nature. The poetic process of personification and the organic identification between the animate and inanimate act as instruments to produce a cartography of these diverse subjectivities.
The *écriture naturelle* endorsed by ecofeminism also intend to direct the readers’ attention to the liminal facets embedded in the portrayal of nature, humans and the non-humans, that reveal their complex identities. Nature appears as a complex phenomenon for ecofeminists and Gary Snyder points out they perceive nature as, “artless, free, spontaneous, unconditioned. Expressive, physical, openly sexual, ecstatic” (10). Sandilands perceives this untamed, physical, ecstatic nature as embodying the Lacanian idea of jouissance, as the unspeakable. She notes that, “it calls our attention to the limits of human speech itself; it is a barre through language, signalling the impossibility of language to come to full representation” (185). If at all nature is to be represented, a radical democratic project which acknowledges politically and aesthetically the limits of language and democracy to represent nature should come into being, which Sandilands calls as “the development of an ethical relation to the Real” (190). The transgressive nature of the *écriture naturelle* disrupts the dominant structures of human and non-human life constructed by the humanist, liberal tradition. Ecofeminists try to foster new linguistic formulations with the realization that humans encounter a limit in understanding what nature communicates.

Postmodern ecological ethics demands a revision of all existing human-centric representations of nature and allows for a more complex and non-essentialist one. Reflecting upon the need to review the representation of nature, Daniel B. Botkin explains:

We have clouded our perception of nature with false images, and as long as we continue to do that we will cloud our perception of ourselves, cripple our ability to manage natural
resources, and choose the wrong approaches to dealing with global environmental concerns. The way to achieve a harmony with nature is first to break free of old metaphors and embrace new ones so that we can lift the veils that prevent us from accepting what we observe, and then to make use of technology to study life and life-supporting systems as they are. (189)

The ecofeminist approach to nature corroborates this proposition. Ecofeminist literature presents nature as a unique character, multidimensional and unpredictable. The images and metaphors used to represent nature in the poems of Walker and Sugathakumari attest to these perceptions.

Nature is characterized as an individual presence with its own identity in many of Walker’s poems, especially “African Images”. The beauty and majesty of different features add to the might of Nature, at times referred to as ‘earth mother.’ Phrases like ‘an ocean of grass’ (19), ‘a sea of sunshine’ (19) and Mt. Kenya’s bluish peaks referred to as ‘a book of poems’ (CP 9) articulate the latent ambivalence and mysterious facets of the African landscape.

A tactile presence of nature pervades Sugathakumari’s poems. “Mazha Vilichappol” (When the Rain Beckoned), “Marathinu Sthuthi” (Salute to the Tree), “Silent Valley” and “Kadalinodu” (To the Sea) have developed forest and sea, rain and tree as full blown characters. A longing for the rural landscape, the serene hilltop and unknown fragrances of flowers are strewn throughout the poems, “Malamukalirikke” (On the Hilltop), and “Akale Ninnoru Sugandham” (Fragrance from Afar). The murmur of the trees and their dark raw smell along with the warm
hospitality of the trees in the California forests are recorded in “Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California). In “Silent Valley” the dark silent forest of the Silent Valley is termed as one who is as cool as a dark cloud and swaying like the black sea with the glow of the morning star. The dark green and dark blue sea with a spread of foam like white flowers splashing and roaring is introduced in “Kadalinodu” (To the Sea). This imagery imparts to the readers an inimitable sensory experience even as they bestow upon nature, a unique will and vigour.

The poets who speak for nature seek to heal the fundamental alienation between the human beings and the natural environment. For ecofeminists the speech of human beings as part of nature is a strategy to reconnect the nature or the ‘other’ and our own ‘natural’ instincts which have been suppressed for long due to anthropocentric segregation. The qualities they attribute to nature are not the product of anthropocentric notions based on human subjugation of the non-humans, but based on a partnership ethic that perceives human beings as part of nature, one among the many organisms that live in it. This reintegration creates “new ways of living in, on, and as parts of the earth” (Sandilands 81). The admiration for the diverse and resplendent nature evoked by the images underlines how the portrayal of nature’s enigmatic and unique presence guards the ecofeminist discourse from essentialism and anthropocentrism.

The inability to fully comprehend the different modes of nature is experienced as a treasured quality by ecofeminists. This feeling of strangeness of the earth is a moment of “the human linguistic unknowability of nature” (Sandilands 185) which must be preserved and fostered. Sandilands observes, “Not only is it a moment to valorize human
incompleteness, a limitation of the social, a place where the so-called rational mind has not completely colonized the impulse, the spirit, or the body any more than it has completely domesticated the nonhuman animal” (185). The ecofeminists would emphasize the limits of language that in turn disclose the limits of human democracy itself to drive in the significance of an ecological democratic ethics of the Real. Sandilands devices two simultaneous trajectories in this ecological ethics of the Real:

one is to articulate liberatory discourses around nature with struggles for social justice as a way of continuing and deepening a democratic and emancipatory project; the other necessary accompaniment to the first is to show the limits of that discourse project as a way of fostering forms of experience that are not readily absorbable by an anthropocentric reliance on speech. (193)

Nature as a speaking identity emerged in human epistemology as a subject conditioned by the human notions of repressive democracy, articulated by man-created social movements and nurtured on ideologies established by the dominant cultures. Therefore the new sense of democracy involves “the creation of new codes and meanings, new modes of speech, from these repressed identities to represent and construct alternative, liberatory ways of being in the world for that oppressed group” (Sandilands 87). The democratic ethic envisioned by Walker is very much vivid in “What Will Save Us?” in which Walker answers this title question with the remedy, of restoring tenderness to man, will to woman, and sacredness to the child with an equal insistence on ‘the restoration to the cow of her dignity and the pig of his intelligence’
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(ATGE 92). The egalitarian sense of parity is restated in “When You Look” as:

That we are all
Equal to God
If we keep
Our eyes
(And our hearts)
Open. (ATGE 128)

It is the philanthropic zeal of a person extending beyond the mere human that attributes him/her with a real sense of equality.

The similitude of human and natural entities recurs in Sugathakumari’s poems too. The sense of equality is reiterated when a non-human is given the status of a human in “Meghasandesam” (The Cloud’s Message) wherein the speaker is sure of a one to one conversation between the separated couple and the rain cloud messenger. The male speaker begs a rain cloud to convey his regards to his sweetheart suffering from the pangs of separation, thus creating an imaginary relationship between the man and the rain cloud that opens up fresh vistas of communication between nature and human beings. With the simple image of a breeze, the poet conveys the way nature encompasses everything in “Kaatu” (The Wind). A little breeze is depicted as playing hide and seek in the rain, touching the branches of the mango tree, the waves in the puddle, the wet leaves of the jasmine bush, the petals of a shoe flower, the swaying green leaves of the coconut trees, and the curls of the lonely dear one waiting at the window, giving everyone the eternal fragrance of the spring. The active breeze caresses
everyone and reminds the readers about the all encompassing attitude of nature. Nature is depicted as the epitome of a truly democratic vision, an awareness that should enhance the spirit of fraternity and equality among human beings too.

Ecofeminism, as an “embodied materialism” (Salleh 178) opens up an alternative ontology to political discourse by formulating new possibilities for dialogue between classes and social movements. Ecofeminist writers recognize it by positing fresh avenues in the liberatory discourses portrayed by them, where figurative language becomes sharper and unconventional. Suggestion attains added vigour in the articulation of liberatory discourse around nature in Walker’s “South: the Name of Home” as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the earth is red} \\
\text{here –} \\
\text{the trees bent, weeping} \\
\text{what secrets will not} \\
\text{the ravished land} \\
\text{reveal} \\
\text{of its abuse? (CP 101)}
\end{align*}
\]

The picture of the ‘ravished’ land signifies it as a victim of rape, and the portrayal of the exploited land as one that has turned red from the bloodshed due to racist riots points to how nature partakes in the agony of the inhabitants. For Walker, the flower Petunia symbolizes revolutionary zeal, as well as, endurance. “The Nature of this Flower Is to Bloom” signifies ‘revolutionary Petunia’ as, “Rebellious, Living. / Against the Elemental Crush. / A Song of Color” (CP 235). The flower extends
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beyond the bounds of the poem as a symbol for extreme endurance. In “A Native Person Looks Up from the Plate” Walker writes about her people as:

People
Who create
Who labor
Who live
In beauty
And walk
So lightly
On the earth. (*ATGE* 54)

Walker has always admired the natives for their intimacy with the natural environment in which they live, their closeness helping them to maintain an equanimous temperament free from the stress of oppression. Ecofeminists deem this as an advanced perception that negates the Eurocentric conception of treating those who are closer to nature as inferior.

Sugathakumari’s “Ningalee Indiaye Ippozhum Snehikunuvo?” (Do You Still Love This India?) reveals the speaker’s reluctance to sell the old house symbolizing India, though it is almost dilapidated. Anxious about the possible ‘foreign invasions’ if the house is sold, the speaker expresses her preference for the snakes, spirits and bats, the present inhabitants, since they are less poisonous. The poet’s keenness to retain the house reveals her obeisance to her heritage as well as her nostalgia for the motherland. Sugathakumari exhibits a deep rooted belief in the innate goodness and potential of human beings. “Oru Puravritham” (*A Legend*)
presents an optimistic reliance in man’s capability to alleviate the misery of the earth mother. This hope is materialised in the poet’s fight for the ever-green forest, Silent Valley. In “Silent Valley” she presents herself as a devotee and daughter of the forest-mother. “Thaivekkal” (Planting Trees) presents a mother and a little boy, on a river bank, planting a sapling. Though in the background there is the polluted black river, the smoky city, the dark sky and the erupting volcano, the hopeful mother boldly expresses her wish that, this sapling shall grow into a tree and in future the son shall be provided with shade, flowers, fruits and wind, rain and greenery. The poet’s dream of a future generation who would love nature and would work to transform the present polluted environment into a green and healthy atmosphere is made explicit here. “Vanarodanam” (The Forest’s Wail) portrays how the forests turn pale at the smell of death which creeps up and how the bird, the poet and their echo try hard to prevent the axes from felling trees and, with their tears and songs, how they try to put out the fire. Sugathakumari’s poems thus render instances of freedom craved for, fought for and sometimes won—by the human individuals, the forest, flowers, birds and animals.

Walker vehemently voices the clamour for social justice in her poems. The destruction of peace and the depletion of natural resources are portrayed in “No One Can Watch the Wasichu”. Wasichu, which in Sioux means “he who takes the fat”, symbolizes any colonizing and exploiting power that penetrates into the privacy of people, threatening them with weapons. Wasichu has “filled / Our every window / with his face” (385) so much so that his presence becomes intolerable and the speaker exclaims, “No one can watch / the Wasichu / anymore” (CP 385). The
expanse of this exploitation that does not excuse even the earth, is intensely narrated in the poem as:

He is scalping
the earth
till she runs
into the ocean. \((CP \ 385)\)

The poem “Who?” asks who has not been invaded by the Wasichu and the people, the trees, the waters, the rocks and the air alike answer “Not I” (378). The speaker wishes at least the Moon is safe from the invading Wasichu. The wider dimensions taken by the oppressors horrify the speaker who finds nothing on earth is free from the oppressive powers of the exploiters and that colonization is not confined to human culture alone. Walker’s experience in the ecofeminist campaigns against nuclear weapons and war fuels her tone of denigration, evident in poems like “We Have a Map of the World” where she reacts against the nuclear tests conducted in native lands and speaks about the trauma of “making love / under a cloud / of radioactive dust” (439). She calls those who conduct nuclear tests as ‘old men who hate us, themselves and the earth’ (440), and exhorts ‘the poets, singers and the children of the world’ \((CP \ 439)\) to unite against them. Justice includes the right to existence of the indigenous people with no hindrance to their original living style and culture. Salleh comments on this exploitation thus, “Indigenous feet tread the soft earth in awe and respect. But the colonized arrives with bald visual metaphors such as ‘regard’ or ‘view point’; technology gives way to microscope and laser; and politics becomes spectator sport” (138).
The erosion of the cherished national values is strongly portrayed in Sugathakumari’s poems. “Dharmam Enna Pashu” (Integrity, the Cow) symbolizing dharma as a cow with three legs cut, and “Bhraanthamaam Swapnam” (An Insane Dream) depicting the crying goddess of justice and the fire ordeal of motherland, reveal the reprehensible condition of the nation. “Vidhi Dinathil” (On the Doom’s Day) pen pictures the dropping of the atom bomb and its impact on the victims as “the black sky-roof gradually crumbles in pieces” and “the shocked Sun and Moon get extinguished”. “Adivaasi Sakharatha” (Literacy for the Aborigines) appears as a powerful demand for social justice, by illustrating the exploitation of the aborigines, nature and the indigenous culture by the city-bred ‘civilized’ people. The deceived people ask the intruders how long it would take to erase their own words and their own life, after what they had done to their forests. “Attappadiye Swapnam Kandu Njaninnum” (Today too, I dreamed of Attappadi) which also refers to the plunder of forests and its consequences which the poor aborigines have to suffer visualizes a nightmare which shows the remnants of the sad hills of Attappadi, the felled tree trunks, the spirits of ‘the killed forests’, the curse of ‘the blinded brooks’ and the hungry stomachs of poor women. The poet and her friends had been successful in raising ‘Krishnavanam’ in Attappadi, but she feels guilty for not having been able to sustain the action with follow-up programmes. The powerful poem which questions the injustices involved in the greedy resource extraction “Ningalen Lokathe Enthu Cheithu?” (What Did You Do to My World?) ends with poignant questions, “What is the cost of the death of a forest? / What is the cost of the death of a tree? / What is the cost of the cry of a bird?” (542). The imagery in all these poems is that of the suffering land, forest
and birds, the aborigines and the poor. Their sharp interrogations of the callous exploitation among humans, and of the non-humans by the humans resound throughout the poems. The poet’s social commitment, ecological vision and concern for conservation are complemented by the expressive images, diction and style of presentation.

Both the poets free nature from the conventional modes of representation by giving voice to the democratic and liberatory discourses. That nature demands justice is also made clear by mercilessly attacking the human predilection for colonization and exploitation using a remodelled language.

Acknowledging the limits of the democratic discourse and adopting an ecocentric vision in order to depict forms of experience that cannot be readily represented with an anthropocentric perspective are some of the strategies adopted by eco feminists to realise the ecological ethics. They posit variant forms of language by recreating nature as capable of speech, thus representing animals and nature as models that present a different sense of the world. Jyotirmaya Tripathy relates, “There is a desire, in ecology, for the restoration of nature as a subject, as a thou. Literature can be less dominative when the ‘other’ emerges as a ‘thou’. This can work both for the author and the reader” (105). In her opinion, the subjecthood of non-human nature is possible when we relativize the human langue and bracket our anthropocentric assumptions (106). If the mission of ecological sustainability is not integrated into the political struggles for liberation, they shall be solely guided by an anthropocentric world view that pays no attention either to the health of the planet or to the well being of all the species on it. Any truly critical ecopedagogy must
accept the philosophical principles that are at home with ambiguity, dissonance, difference, and heterogeneity. This paradigm shift is attempted by ecofeminist writers by transgressing the boundaries of anthropocentric notions.

Walker experiments with form in all the genres she deals with and in poetry she has been influenced by the Japanese Haiku poetry and Zen epigrams. In *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* she reflects on the epigrammatic nature of the Japanese Haiku:

I was delighted to learn that in three or four lines a poet can express mystery, evoke beauty and pleasure, paint a picture—and not dissect or analyze in any way. The insects, the fish, the birds and the apple blossoms in haiku are still whole. They have not been turned into something else. They are allowed their own majesty, instead of being used to emphasize the majesty of people; usually the majesty of writing. (252)

By deftly using the concise, free verse style and transgressing the conventions of rhyme and metre, Walker gets over human-centredness in poetic language and form.

When the speaker looked upon the spider ‘without fear’ in order to admire “her many legs / & her beauty only” (*ATGE* 49) in “The Moment I Saw Her”, she realized the entire history of basket making. Her ancestral women who made baskets out of reeds began it imitating the method of the spider weaving its web. The spider being attributed the status of a teacher reveals Walker’s deliberate distancing from the anthropocentric attitude. “The Tree” in which Jose, the Shaman dreams of a singing tree
that stops singing later when pestilence and deforestation begin affecting the environment, is another instance of the conscious disavowal of the human-centric discourse. The speaker of the poem tells Jose how in a dream the tree appeared to him/her and how he/she felt the large tree was:

Looking
For shelter
Even in
My
Small space. (ATGE 133)

Jane Goodall, who lived with wild chimpanzees, is portrayed as an epitome of the earth woman untouched by the artificialities of advertiser’s perfume or surgeon’s shears, so fresh as one who smells like:

Earth
air, water
ancient forest
&
like no man
was ever
there. (ATGE 218)

This representation in “You Too Can Look, Smell, Dress, Act This Way” unveils Walker’s admiration for Goodall who “would smell / just like / her name” (218). Maria Sabina, the shaman who leads a life one with nature is worshipped as a goddess, a healer by the poet in “Bring Me the Heart of Maria Sabina”. These instances where the ecofeminist writer in Walker crosses the confines of anthropocentrism to express experiences
marginalised by it, also reveal Walker’s recognition of the limits of the human discourse as such.

Instead of presenting an objective analysis of nature, Sugathakumari lets the readers experience it as a sensual, visual and auditory experience through her poems. R. Sreelatha Varma observes that, “For Sugathakumari, the possibilities of communication are powerful and fine when she comprehends and responds to the language and emotions of flowers and trees” (277). They offer perceptions of nature from different angles; sometimes they become first person narratives of experience as in “Muthuchippi” (The Oyster) and “Irulchirakukal” (The Dark Wings). In most of the poems she presents a distressed speaker, consoled by an empathising environment that cleanses him/her of all worries as in “Veliyettathil” (In the High Tide), “Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California), “Mazha Vilichappol” (When Rain Beckoned) and “Kadalinodu” (To the Sea). In some poems the speaker sympathises with the plight of nature and non-humans like in “Silent Valley”, “Ningalen Lokathe Enthu Cheythu?” (What Did You Do to My World?) and “Murivetta Simham” (The Wounded Lion). The speaker identifies with nature for a better realization of nature and her own self, which can be found in poems like, “Rathrimazha” (Night Rain), “Kanikonna” (The Golden Shower) and “Varshamayooram” (The Peacock Rain). The thrust of all these poems is to break free from the anthropocentric fixations that bring restrictions to poetic aspirations, and which fails to absorb the perspectives and the experiences of nature and the non-humans the poet tries to capture.
The poems with their fresh and profound perspectives and insights on nature contribute to the emerging ecocentric view of the earth. An ecofeminist stance demands the discarding of anthropocentric, anthropomorphic assumptions and the embracing of heterarchical and dialogic dimensions. The Eurocentric dualistic epistemology has submerged or lobotomized several aspects of natural human experiences. Ecofeminists recognize that this process of alienation of humanity from its own natural aspects has resulted in the human domination of non-human nature. The ecofeminist writing therefore undertakes to unlock alternate ways of thematic and poetic expressions.

The democratic discourse of nature that acknowledges the limits of human speech should also transgress those limits “as a way of avoiding an ideological relation to non human nature” (Sandilands 193). In order to reconceive nature and non-humans as subjects, ecocritics must posit different definitions of language and subjectivity that presumably extend beyond human expression. Jyotirmaya Tripathy warns us not to privilege human speech over other forms of expression and adds, “Listening to silence means listening to everything nonhuman. It is to acknowledge the limits of human speech and realizing that silence can harmonize. Thus, nature emerges as a subject” (107). By acknowledging the limits of human speech and also aware of the dangers of an ideological relation to non-human nature, ecofeminists open diverse ways to depict the interaction with nature, forging representations that go beyond mere human sympathy with nature and the non-humans.

Among Walker’s poems, the non-humans become subjects in “African Images”, where the birds and animals live in their natural
habitat. The poet retains the curiosity of a tourist looking for the aesthetics of the African jungles. The subtitle of the poem “Glimpses from a Tiger’s Back” itself is a deliberate negation of human logic since there are no tigers in Africa. It takes the non-logical liberty to hang away so as to get closer to the forests and the natives in an unconventional fashion. The pageant of animals become impressive with the attribution of derivative adjectives: the ‘shy’ gazelle (CP 10), the elephant who ‘knows his rights’ (11), the ‘yawning fat’ crocodile (16), the ‘spinning’ cobra (17), a giraffe ‘munching his dinner’ (20), ‘prudent’ giraffe (34) and the ‘redheaded’ Marabou Storks (39). In “The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom”, Walker calls Petunia the ‘Revolutionary Petunia’, symbol of courage and endurance, preserving a unique subjectivity for itself:

A Song of Color
Blooming
For Deserving Eyes.
Blooming Gloriously
For its Self. (235)

Walker confers a different identity and subjectivity to the non-humans without distorting them by building up antagonistic relation with them. Even when she attributes the human characteristics to the non-humans she cautiously distances herself from the anthropocentric attitude by acknowledging the limits of human speech and by offering respect to the natural identities, thus nurturing the ecofeminist sense of the human coexistence with other species.

Sugathakumari’s sensibility is inclined to capture the soul of nature and she is equally conversant with its sounds and silences. She
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considers human life as a phase in the birth cycle of nature as portrayed in “Janmandarangaliloode” (Along the Cycles of Birth). The poem narrates how the couple had been together as fish, flowers and deer in their earlier lives to which the present human life is but an extension. In “Pakshisasthram” (Fortune Telling with Bird) the speaker feels the bird in the cage looking at him/her, “As if we hold some secrets / Between us, very mysterious” (66). The bird’s accusing look prompts the unwilling speaker to try his/her luck with the tarot cards and the speaker begs forgiveness from the bird for not caring about its pains. In “Oru Paattu Pinneyum” (A Song, Again), a wild bird with broken wings sings her songs again though her mate and grown up kids have deserted her. The poet acknowledges the human limitation to comprehend nature in its totality: “Oh, fathomless universe, my eyes / Get weak, counting your waves” (95). Nature as a shy lady is portrayed in “Athramel Snehikkayal” (As I love so much): “At the touch of the twilight with the tip / of its finger, the dusk blushes wholly” (162). Dusk is portrayed as a woman walking in haste with some flowers and buds in her hands in “Veluthapoovukal” (White Flowers):

Wearing a streak of moonlight sandal
On her forehead and with a few
Buds and petals in her hands
Along the road comes dusk in a little haste. (187)

In “Thiruvonapulariyil” (At the Dawn of Thiruvonam) dawn is pictured as a lass in skirts, running fast along the barren field and across the rails, to reach the village courtyard. “Oru Pulari Koodi” (One more Dawn) presents dawn as an old maid servant slowly arriving to spread brightness
The poet listens to the silences in nature, extols them and represents the evolution of nature as a variegated subject. She admires the silent forest in “Silent Valley”: “Oh, dark and silent forest, with eyes filled with tears of joy, / Let me caress you with folded hands, / Let me keep watching you until I am satisfied” (531). She pictures the cries of the forest in “Vanarodanam” (The Forest’s Wail), where the anxiety and fear of the forest which suffers the imminent threats of destruction are
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poignantly presented. The tranquillity at the hilltop in “Malamukalirikke” (On the Hilltop) triggers the poetic imagination of the speaker who takes a short snatch of rest from the bustle of the cities. The speaker feels the forest gazing at him/her in silence like a mother in “Ethu Poovin Manamanithu?” (Which Flower’s Fragrance Is This?). She listens intently to the silences of nature, free of all human-centred prejudices, triggering a bio-centric communion with nature.

When some ecofeminist discourses are carried away by identitarian fantasy, some others acknowledge the human limit and represent an experience of nature as “traumatic encounter with the ineffable” (Sandilands 194). Walker and Sugathakumari have proved how they go beyond a mere woman-nature identification platform in order to assert an ecofeminist standpoint of dialogue and mutual respect. Martin Buber’s creative theorisation of I and Thou provides a new framework of relational interdependence which asserts the intrinsic reciprocal aspects embedded within all relationships and unveils a new way of conceptualizing one’s identity in relation to others. Calling this I-Tou mode of engaging the world as an encounter—where we enter into a relationship with the object encountered, we participate in something with that object and both the I and the You are transformed by the relation between them—he affirms that we can enter into encounter with any of the objects that we experience; with inanimate objects, with animals, and with man. By referring to this dialogical theory which perceives both the terms in I-thou relationship as spiritual presences that have a reality of their own to communicate, which must be respected and attended to, Josephine Donovan observes that this concept provides an important base for the development of an alternative non-dominative ecofeminist
discursive practice (85). The representation of this dialogical relationship with nature in the poems exemplifies the non-dominative epistemology promulgated by ecofeminism.

Language which is continuously constructed through practice, using fresh images, reinvented words and figures of speech helps the poets to build up a constructive relationship with nature on a linguistic level. Discussing what literature can teach about extending the ecofeminist theory and the ecofeminist movement in his article “The Women Are Speaking: Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique” Patrick D. Murphy comments that, “just as spirituality is realized in ritual, theory needs to be realized in symbol and image” (45). Avoiding clichéd images and by employing multiple ways of representation in the poems, Walker and Sugathakumari use language to produce a poetic platform of a democratic ecological ethics. Employing the rhetorical figure of prosopopoiea, the attribution of voice to inanimate objects, the poets “convey the intuitive sense that all of nature is animated” (McKusick 179).

The attribution of gender to nature has been considered as the politics of patriarchal domination to establish man’s rights to plunder the resources of nature. By assuming woman-nature equation as an ideological fabrication, ecofeminists do not deny the infinite generative capacity of women, nor do they deny men’s connection with nature. But they attempt to examine “how a stereotypical gender dualism is imposed over everyday happenings, only to become a highly repressive social apparatus” (Salleh 36). This realization forces nature to be treated as a realm free of genderization. Whatever identifications are drawn about
woman and nature, they should only be resorted to represent the subject position with a better understanding of the multiplicities inherent in them. A radical democratic openness that questions the political strategy behind gendering proposes an enigmatic presence of nature in politics, inviting fresh dialogues on the ecological awareness.

Nature appears in full-fledged form in “African Images”, where Walker captures the individual beauty and majesty of the forests of Africa. While suggesting the mysterious and wonderful appearance of Mt. Kenya’s bluish peaks as a book of poems, the poet attributes to Mt. Kenya, an enigmatic beauty. In “Beast”, the poet urges the Earth:

   to reclaim
   creation
   as a rolling over
   of the soul. (CP 430)

She implores the earth mother to rise again and “Shake the concrete / of your back” (431). In a few words the poet sketches the might of the earth and the vulnerability of the human constructions on it. The ecofeminist writer not only eulogizes the power of the earth but cautions against the consequences of man’s unethical development and greed signified by the word ‘concrete’ and shows how human constructions endanger the balance of ecosystems. In “We Have a Beautiful Mother” nature is portrayed as the unconquerable mother, the embodiment of strength and splendour, with the plentiful hair of summer grass, an immense green lap and an eternal brown embrace.
Versatile in the poetic delineation of the various constituents of nature like mountains, sea, forests, flowers, rain, sunshine and moonlight, Sugathakumari admires their boundless strength and endurance. The enigmatic presence of nature is portrayed in “Ethu Poovin Manamaanithu?” (Which Flower’s Fragrance Is This?) wherein the speaker is unable to recognize the source of the fragrance that gave comfort in the forest, while taking rest after a weary travel. The fearless fragrance, the sweet bird call, the wild breeze, the cold dusk and loneliness are a green edge for the speaker to hold on to and cross the sea of sorrow. An aura of mystery and majesty of the dark forest pervades the poem. The poem “Niagra” which depicts the Niagra waterfalls presents a speaker admitting the inability to express in human words, the falls which shake the sky and earth with its laughter. According to the poet the human language is incapable of describing the water deity, “Oh! Water deity, I shiver / The human speech lacks, to describe you” (822). The little human beings stand aghast unable to hold in their eyes the waterfalls that solemnly arrive like the spill of moonlight. In “Mazhakkaalathinu Nandi” (Thanks to the Rainy Season) the rain cloud is compared to the goddess who solemnly arrives and visits everyone with a fresh boon of life. The poet says, “Lush green around, compassion, even in heart of stone, / White umbrella crowd formed by rain mushrooms!” (950). The endless universe and the indomitable nature stand as ungendered Real, outside the ideological frameworks of human beings, to challenge the anthropocentric structures of language and epistemology that had confined it.

The reworked gender equations in ecofeminist literature shows its resistance to the superficial and generalized structures of subordination
and exploitation. Woman-nature equation in terms of motherhood is seen as a reinforcement of the individuality of both the agents in Sugathakumari’s poems. In “Marubhoomiyude Vasantham” (The Spring of the Desert) the poet depicts how a desert transforms itself into fertile land on receiving rain. The poet details how the ‘benumbed breasts’ and ‘sorrowful sighs’ of the desert vanishes, and how her breasts become the stage for the song of thousand flowers and emerging greenery. In “Irulchirakukal” (Dark Wings), the little bird calls itself ‘daughter of the night.’ It addresses the night as ‘the giver of great comfort’ and ‘the great embodiment of peace’ and declares, “Upon your breast my boundless wings / settle softly, like a closing flower / Myself, your dear . . .” (246).

The warm hospitality of the forest which welcomes the speaker with breeze, snow flowers and shady leaf bed, makes her feel it is a return to the mother’s abode in “Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California). The giggle of the forest at the call of the speaker and its reply, “We are old friends of yours”, it stretching its hands to welcome her, introducing the little birds as her children, telling the wild brook, “We have guests” make the trees in the California forests a full-fledged agent.

“Ninne Vittengu Pokan?” (Where to Go Leaving You?) depicts Bharatmata as ‘the mother who bears gems within her’. Desperate due to the corruption, violence and injustice prevalent in this land, the speaker wishes to fly away like a migratory bird. But his/her ambivalence expressed in the lines, “Still, mother, where shall I go, leaving you? / Throbbing with pain, my mind caresses your feet” (475) unveils the unseen but powerful bond between the motherland and its people. In “Oru Marunaadan Kinavu” (A Dream from an Alien Land) the speaker living in the scorching summer of Delhi, longs for the greenery and the beautiful
scenery of her native place, Kerala. She dreams that her motherland is anxious about this lonely and lost daughter. She wakes up and utters, “My land, I shall worship thee, the world of eternal spring” (206). Standing on an alien land she extends her hands towards her own land whose unique beauty she recognizes for the first time. Her intense craving is revealed in the lines, “For the first time, I thirst / For your breast milk” (206). In “Vidhi” (The Judgement) by presenting the petitioner as the earth-mother herself, the poet intensifies the environmental impact of man’s ruthless exploitation of the earth and other living species. These poems, which depict nature and nation as ‘mother personified’ highlight the decisive part played by both nature and nation in matters of creation, consolation and governance.

Ecofeminists are wary of the use of language that equates woman and nature, in a way that helps a patriarchal conceptualization of these agents. Ecofeminist critics are against the language that ‘inferiorizes’ woman and non-human nature by naturalizing woman and feminizing nature. Sugathakumari connects this sexist and naturist language to fix the agent within the concentric field of nature as independent of yet dependent on nature. Seasons are termed the ‘virgin lasses of time’ and ‘earth’s goddesses of luck’ in “Varshamayooram” (The Peacock Rain). The feminized expressions of seasons like ‘Spring lass’ and ‘fire goddess’ only add vivacity to their creative and destructive faculty. The speaker of the poem cherishes a special love for the reigning ‘rain goddess’ and blends with the water droplets that kindle life everywhere. “Ekathara” (The Lone Star) depicts the singer who wanders about having seen and felt ‘the pain of a sea,’ ‘the silence of a mountain,’ ‘the heat of a flame,’ ‘the majesty of a night,’ ‘the kiss of a wind,’ ‘the murmur of a flower’ and
‘the fingers shivering with the shy fondling of a little wave.’ The personifications reveal the oneness realized by the human being with nature and is not an instance of anthropocentrism. It is this ability that instils confidence in the speaker to decode the voice of the garrulous bird in the poem “Vaayadi Kili” (The Garrulous Bird) who complains about the daily chores and the irresponsibility of her mate. In “Rathriyil, Gangothriyil” (In Gangothri, at Night), the poet pictures the earth and the sun on a dawn after night rain as, “Having bathed, adorned in green silk stands the earth / With smiles, the sun kisses her forehead!” (949). “Dawns bathed in moonlight pool dressed wet,” “Young dusks with vermillion worn on the forehead” and “The sighing Pandanus having birthed the cool moon” are the feminine personifications which intensify the speaker’s pining for the native land, while living a dry life in the scorching Delhi in “Oru Marunaadan Kinavu” (A Dream from an Alien Land). In “Thulavarshappachcha” (The North East Monsoon Greenery), the Attappadi hills embrace the dear rain with kisses and engage her in endearing chat. Like the joy of youth the rain poured down and filled the earth with love and beauty. The hills appeared now adorned in green silk as a new bride, dark and shy. She was a beggar woman with wilted breasts who dozed in the sun light, as an unwanted, mad orphan the previous day. Now she is transformed by the magic touch of the lover the dark cloud. The speaker calls the hills her companion and elaborates on the mood of the hills, as if she knows everything about it. In “Kadalinodu” (To the Sea) the speaker and the sea are portrayed as a man and his old love. The affection in the eyes of the sea while beholding her old lover, the satirical folds on her face, her fingers caressing the weak legs of her lover and also the ferocious power of the sea’s intoxicating
love are described, where the feminine analogy serves to highlight the strength of the sea. “Marathinu Sthuti” (Salute to the Tree) narrates how a tree instils life in the soil and holds the soil firmly together preventing the earth-mother getting eroded by the strong currents of water from the mountains, and fills and preserves the rain from the sky in the mother’s heart, thus conserving the earth-mother. In these instances the act of attributing femininity to nature in no way makes inferior the subjectivity of either nature or woman. Instead it unveils the latent beauty and meanings which the non-humans might have wished to express, through an ecofeminist language which gives voice to the mute.

When the feminine qualities attributed to nature convey human beings’ greater intimacy with natural aspects, the natural and non-human qualities bestowed on woman infuse great strength to the character and the situation. In “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman), while the comparison of the woman’s song with the spread of moonlight lends beauty to the poem, her flight from the riot torn Bengal seen as the flight of a fearful doe intensifies the agony of the situation. “Jeevitham” (Life) portrays the speaker as withdrawn to a corner as a withered plant peacefully bearing a single bunch of flowers. “Edenil Ninnu” (From Eden) depicts how Eve walks behind Adam as a wilted flower. “Ivalku Maathramay” (For Her Alone) describes woman as one who has drunk a sea of tears, who smiles like the August sunlight (Chingaveyiloli), who is dark and cold as the earth which holds flames of fire within, each image reflecting her complex identity. The woman-nature comparisons in all these poems serves to highlight the multiple subjectivity of a woman and are not meant to portray woman as a vulnerable being, easy to be subdued, defeated and destroyed.
Ecofeminists are cautious about the threats posed by environmental destruction, nuclear weapons and pollution and when they are presented in the context of woman-nature identification, the anxiety becomes all the more dire. In “Vidhi Dinathil” (On the Judgement Day) Sugathakumari depicts during a nuclear war, brothers look at each other with hatred. Even the breast of the sky, which is sucked by little babes, tastes of poison. “Marubhoomiyude Vasantham” (The Spring of the Desert) abounds in resurgent feminine imagery. The frozen breast of the desert, the claws of the sand winds, the sorrowful sighs of the desert, the little breeze embracing her with cool beautiful hands and the Sun God looking at her with angry blazing eyes enliven the desert’s thirst for life.

Walker’s poetry is replete with spontaneous and unorthodox diction. For her, poetry chooses when it will be expressed, the way it will be expressed, and the circumstances of its expression and is not “written” by the poet. Poetry’s “requirements for existence remain mysterious. In its spontaneous, bare truthfulness, it bears a close relation to song and to prayer” (ATGE xii). Her poems do not present a premeditated diction that is employed to serve a particular purpose; it is rather an evolution of a spontaneous language.

In “African Images”, the speaker-traveller feels the huts under the luminous moon as, “Brown breasts stuck / out to taunt / the sullen wind” (CP 47). The feminization stresses the resistance put on by the huts against the dark unpleasant wind. In “We Have a Beautiful Mother” the poet speaks about the earth-mother whose ‘hills are buffaloes’ and ‘oceans are wombs.’ The description of the physical features brings out the might of the earth while the sublimal sensuality of the phrases like
‘green lap immense,’ ‘brown embrace eternal’ and ‘blue body’ makes the earth a physical presence in the poem. In *A Poem Travelled down My Arm* an optimistic note appears about the earth-mother who is powerful enough to rectify her mistakes and issue perfect creations, without the help of human beings. In “South: the Name of Home” the expression ‘what secrets will not the ravished land reveal of its abuse?’ (101) furnishes the land as feminine, ravished and abused. Though ecofeminists wish to abstain from using such terms in relation to nature, Walker has chosen them to posit the shocking impact left by centuries’ long racism in the South. In “The Love of Bodies” the cutting of a tree is depicted as ‘the tree losing its body,’ ‘her returning to her source’ and the speaker prays for it, “May she know peace / Eternal” (*ATGE* 5).

A straight woman-nature comparison appears in the poem “A Woman Is Not a Potted Plant”, where the wilderness metaphor for the woman provides a bold declaration of woman’s freedom, which is enhanced when the poet refuses the portrayal of a woman as a potted plant, a tree or a creeper-vine. Walker’s adoration for woman is clear in her dedication of the collection, *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* to ‘the blessed Feminine in us all.’ In “Poem for Aneta Chapman on Her 33rd Birthday”, Aneta Chapman’s presence in the world is compared to ‘the sun warming us’ and ‘the blossoming trees feeding us’ (*ATGE* 12), revealing the rejuvenation provided by Chapman to the speaker and his/her friends. In “Thanks for the Garlic”, the speaker compares the fresh and white garlic bulbs to Susan who had sent them, only to praise the boldness, the inner flame, the serenity and coolness of Susan, her friend.
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Walker’s poems feminize nature and naturalizes woman and like Sugathakumari, Walker too adheres to this conjunction in order to intensify the emotional and physical impact made by the subject. Just as in the *écriture féminine* where woman identifies her body as a resource for creativity, in the *écriture naturelle*, the woman-nature identification is reworked to represent the multiple subjectivities of woman and nature. Through the strength they gain through this bonding, women offer resistance to the patriarchal exploitations and take the initial step to problematize a gender-based language that consciously erases the exploitative acts of the past and the present.

Communitarian approaches to international relations, according to D. Chandler, contend that local and national diversity should be celebrated, and that cosmopolitan universalism is likely to lead to the dominance of the powerful states over the weaker ones. There are no universal values per se, because norms and ideals can only exist within particular localities and cultures (35). Ecofeminists have begun resisting the endangering consequences of globalization like the erasure of the indigenous traditions and the homogenization of tastes to suit the global market, in order to work towards a sustainable life on the planet. The anti-globalization movements aim at questioning privatization, commodification and rationalization of the planet, and at promoting local autonomy and subsistence of local communities. In accordance with this move, ecofeminist literature celebrates the local culture by engraving permanent records of the local cultural artefacts in their writing. Cultural homogenization is taking on a faster pace in the contemporary globalised world and the ecofeminist attempt is a significant counter to it, to preserve the rich cultural diversity on earth.
Sugathakumari’s poems reflect the culture of Kerala from different perspectives. She employs the indigenous symbols, sometimes to praise them but more often to refer to the current erosion of values. In “Sree Padmanabhadasanodu” (To the Servant of Lord Sree Padmanabha) the speaker praises the magnanimity of the local Venad King who held the title ‘Sree Padmanabhadasan’ and protected the land from invasions. The poet also refers to the famous Temple entry proclamation after which Travancore became an epitome of revolutionary social changes that put an end to untouchability and other evil customs that prevailed in Kerala. The indigenous flowers like the blue kurinji which blooms once in twelve years, the kanikonna, an essential flower for the festival of Vishu, kaakka poovu, nishagandhi (night queen) and pandanus are honoured with representations in different poems. The prosperity of Kerala blessed with natural beauty is unravelled in the poem “Enthine Cholli?” (Upon What?). The never drying rivers, the greenery, the guardian Western Ghats, the hundred percent literate people of Kerala and the glorious coexistence of diverse religions are elaborated in the poem, presenting the dynamic identity of the ‘Malanadu’ (Kerala). These glories of the past are contrasted with the contemporary issues the State faces like the depletion of resources, corruption and erosion of cultural values. The picturesque description of old temple architecture and the big banyan tree, moss filled pond, stone lamps, the poor priest, and also the old luxurious temple festival with people, lamps and elephants appear in “Ambalamani” (The Temple Bell). “Thunjante Thatha” (The Parrot of Thunjan) pays obeisance to Thunjathezhuthachan, acclaimed father of Malayalam language and his “Kilippattu Movement,” a school in poetic style which invokes the bird to tell the stories of Krishna in the Gokul and The
Mahabharata and The Ramayana. The native people had been fed these glorious stories and were thrilled, but in today’s busy world people have no time for these pursuits.

The metaphors related to Onam are in plenty in Sugathakumari’s poems. Nostalgia for the simple and honest celebration of Onam of earlier days with all the members of the family together and the sorrow at the deceitful luxury and hollow splendour of this celebration today can be found in many of her poems. In “Poovili Kettappol” (When the Ritual Call of Onam Was Heard) she refers to the emotional impact of the ‘onapookkal’ like the thumba, the arali, the jasmine, the kannanthali, the ilanji, the thechi, and other abundant local flowers that are used to deck the courtyards during onam, had on the minds of the natives. The tradition of singing ‘poove poli’ after setting the flower bed, the ‘onapookkalam’ is also hinted at. “Pazhayonam” (Old Onam) gives detailed descriptions of the way each kind of flower has to be arrayed in the ritual floral arrangement in the courtyard during Onam and how the special dish ‘poovada’ is made. The poet compares the excitement of the children of the past with the disinterestedness of the children of the present generation, who have no time or taste for any of these.

The imprint of indigenous cultural symbols transforms the poems into rich reservoirs of localized features. “Moodaswapanam” (The Foolish Dream) portrays the characteristic features of the ‘Idavappaathimazha,’ one of the two monsoons in Kerala, with details of the accompanying thunder and lightning. “Thulavarshappachcha” (The North East Monsoon Greenery) presents the distinct character of the north east monsoon in Kerala and the magical changes it brings to the Attappadi hills. The
ceremonial procession of the idol of goddess visiting houses, receiving offerings and giving blessings is presented as an analogy for the intrepid rain cloud in “Mazhakalathinu Nandi” (Thanks to the Rainy Season). The dried up river Nila and the dead river of Attappadi hills get reborn at the arrival of the rain after a prolonged summer. “Silent Valleyil Veendum” (Again at Silent Valley) imprints the kinship and unique features of the local rivers the Bhavani, the Kunti and the Meenkanni. Since both the Bhavani and the Kunti originate from the Silent Valley hills, the poet calls them sisters. The river Kunti is portrayed as a mischievous forest lass coming out giggling from the ravines. All these poems abound with indigenous symbols reflecting the unique physical features of Kerala.

Customs and beliefs accompanying the local tradition also get imprinted in the poems. In “Paala Poothithu Paazhay” (The Futile Flowering of Paala Tree) the ‘Ezhilam Paala’, an indigenous tree about which there exists the superstitious belief that the enticing fragrance of its flowers invites spirits to live on it, appears as a full-fledged character. “Devadaasi” (The Temple Dancer) portrays the custom of offering little girls to the temple, who grow up as artists who sing and dance to entertain the devotees. Their life as beggars in their old age with no one to take care of them, is a burning social issue in India. “Ithu Mahabharatam” (This, the Mahabharat) is a compendium of allusions from the classics The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. The poet highlights the man-animal relations portrayed in these works like the squirrel getting three strokes on its back, believed to be from the caress of Lord Sri Rama, the monkeys who are relatives of Sri Rama, the eagle bearing the name of Lord Vishnu, the worm carrying oil for God to bathe and the plants bearing divine qualities. The poem mentions the human achievements in
science and technology, along with the freedom struggle and partition of India, martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, the testing of atom bomb titled ‘Buddha smiles’ and the polluted Yamuna river as the localized experiences of India. Sugathakumari has engraved in her poetry the myths, beliefs, and social, political and cultural dimensions of India, especially Kerala.

Walker who has wholeheartedly supported efforts to preserve the African, Native American and Afro American culture utilizes her writings to do push forth the same. In “Ancestors to Alice”, she writes what the ancestors ask her to do:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Your true work} \\
\text{Is to} \\
\text{Remember us} \\
\text{To sing our names} \\
\text{Recount} \\
\text{Or even record} \\
\text{Our deeds. (ATGE 146)}
\end{align*}
\]

Paying homage to the ancestors, she has strewn a plethora of images of Africa, America and Native Indians in her writings.

In “African Images” Walker paints the scene of an African girl proudly presenting her a pineapple, the national flower of her country. The speaker wonders if she should kneel at her bare feet. This poem which has sharp images of Africa, presents the beauty of “Mt. Kenya away / over pineappled hills / Kikuyuland” (CP 8). Enchanted by the beauty of the mountain, the tourist speaker adopts the new name
‘Wangari’, which is a Kikuyu clan name indicating honorary acceptance into the Leopard clan. There are references to the Mississippi cotton fields and slum in North Philly in “Hymn” in which the speaker remembers:

a time when
‘Amazing Grace’ was
All the rage
In the South. (103)

Part iii “Women” of “In These Dissenting Times” is a song of praise for her mother’s generation who with husky voice and stout steps laboured hard for their children. The poet expresses her dread of the Wasichus who killed the animals for fat, hide, bones and tongues in “Family of” and “No One Can Watch the Wasichu”. The ferocity with which the Wasichu does his job is a fearful thought for the speaker. In the preface to *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth*, Walker speaks about the indigenous practices of Native Indians like drinking ‘ayuascha’ known as ‘the vine of the soul’ which has been used for thousands of years as a healing medicine by the indigenous people of that hemisphere. They also gathered together to eat mushrooms, “called by the people who use them for healing ‘flesh of the gods’” *(ATGE* xiii). Walker also mentions the native peoples’ “connection to the infinite for thousands of years centred around the eating of mushrooms and particularly of peyote” (xiii). She makes a detailed portrayal of Maria Sabina, who was “Shaman, healer, priestess of the mushrooms, she was a legend in Mexico even while alive” (xiv). The poem “Bring Me the Heart of Maria Sabina” invokes goddesses and great persons like the native Indian goddess Virgen de Guadalupe and great men like Martin Luther King, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi,
Gautama Buddha, and Che Guvera to endow the speaker with their respective abilities like fearlessness, resignation, equanimity, devotion, resignation and serenity. The poem pays homage to all these great human beings who laboured for the emancipation of the suffering humanity.

Both the poets comprehend the value of the ancient indigenous culture and attempt to preserve in their poems the local cultural artefacts with a tinge of nostalgia. These rich local expressions make their poetry a platform to conserve, for future, the rapidly dissolving cultural inheritance of their respective societies. Ray Kiely is of the view that many anti-globalisation activists realize the presence of “a cultural revolution slowly emerging, the politics of which involves commitment to the principles of democracy, diversity and even open-endedness” (177). Ecofeminist literature joins hands with this movement by inculcating these principles in their works. This is done with the awareness of what Pat Mora the North American poet and essayist articulates:

Pride in cultural identity, in the set of learned and shared language, symbols, and meanings, needs to be fostered not because of nostalgia or romanticism, but because it is essential to our survival. The oppressive homogenization of humanity in our era of international technological and economic interdependence endangers us all. (36)

Écriture Naturelle does not simply embed local engravings in literature; rather it transforms isolated local interests into a systematically contextualised local platform. This strategy resolves the global/local binary, and situates the local within the global and gives ample space for
the representation of all multiplicities in the global spectrum. The local images and metaphors also signify the transformations that have come in the structures of cultural expression in the local with the passage of time.

Sugathakumari, as a writer with social commitment is deeply concerned about the unhealthy trends in culture and society in India and in Kerala. She uses powerful images to uncover the inner corruption within the glitter of modern life. “Mahabaliyude Mumbil” (In Front of Mahabali) depicts the myth of the annual arrival of King Mahabali to meet his subjects on the day of Onam. The poet talks about the disguised poisonous but sweet fruits, the *pookkalams* (floral arrangement) adorned with paper flowers, and other artificial decorations arranged by people to welcome the King. The symbol of King Mahabali is a pointer to the idyllic times of his rule, a contrast to the present world which is full of hypocrisy and selfishness. “Ha Rama!” connects this unholy situation with the final exclamation of Mahatma Gandhi. The poem has various references to the Indian Classic *The Mahabharata*. The first lines of the poem refer to the question Dhritharashtra asks Sanjaya, the commentator about his children at the Kurukshetra war field. But the place is named as Raj Ghat, the tomb of Mahatma Gandhi. The poet uses the instances in the Classics where curses fall as doom upon people and also points to modern India where people through their actions create hell of their own lives. In “Marakkathirikkatte” (Let not be Forgotten) the speaker thinks of the midnight when India first enjoyed freedom after long years of slavery, and also of Gandhiji, who instead of taking part in the celebrations, was trying to alleviate the miseries of the poor in the riot torn village of Navakhali. Gandhiji’s sacrificial life for the freedom of the nation and his martyrdom are remembered with reverence in Sugathakumari’s poems.
She contextualizes the local and national issues in the background of the indigenous festivals, the classics and the history of India’s struggle for freedom and the political pressures thereafter.

“The Abduction of Saints” by Walker equates the negro martyrs, Malcolm and King with Christ in such traits as their attractive smile and words, and comments, “They gave us rebellion as pure love / a beginning of the new man” (CP 288). By comparing them with Christ, the poet gives a generic twist to a local character. Martin Luther King Jr., the U.S. black civil rights leader and Malcolm X, the black militant leader of the black separatist movement who were assassinated are referred to as the saints in the poem. Referring to the September 11 incident of terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in the U.S., the poet visualizes in “Falling Bodies” how the pilot and the hijacker might have held their hands while leaping from the flaming windows. She was told, some of the people were holding hands while leaping from the flaming windows, and she extends her hands to hold them. The symbol of holding hands tells them that ‘they owned.’ The poet feels that love and sense of belonging become anointment to the world’s ailments, hatred and war. She declares:

We are
Each other’s
Own
Near and far
Far and wide. (ATGE 120)

Walker, the black activist, through her poems, highlights the struggles her people put up against apartheid and also reveals the womanist vision of embracing the whole world with the feeling of love and sisterhood.
In *Ecofeminism*, while discussing the implicit threats underlying the emerging globalism, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva warn against the recent trends of cultural relativism, the new emphasis on the local, and suggest that the difference will become valuable only through interconnectedness. For them, “To find a way out of cultural relativism, it is necessary to look not only for differences but for diversities and interconnectedness among women, among men and women, among human beings and other life forms, worldwide” (12). They make a strong case that local knowledges and resistances are globally interwoven; the connections are the product of a shared set of transnational experiences that transcends local conditions even as they are articulated along with them. Sandilands views this agenda as constructed for an altogether different global vision, “it calls for a universality based on the recognition of diversity, the political centrality of democracy, and the need to take local needs and struggles into account. . . . Its will is ‘towards’ a version of planetary health that can only be produced democratically; it thus represents a future universal that creates the call for global citizenship” (149).

In Sugathakumari’s poem “Kaathun ilpu” (The Wait) the speaker reminds the human beings of the burden of poverty and suffering in the world that has to be erased before they attempt to reach outer space and land on Mars. The sight of a crying poor boy, staring at the shop window of a hotel makes the poet think of the poverty all over the world, and her vision becomes profound with the understanding that all across the world this scene shall be repeated. “Pravahabindu” (A Gushing Drop) refers to the mad poet and eternal lover sitting lonely at an inn. He feels the whole universe as an ‘*onapookkalam.*’ The comparison of the universe to the
floral bed made in the courtyard during Onam is an instance of the poet’s extending the contours of a local symbol to connect it with the universal. She also calls the earth as a ‘sreekovil’ (the sanctum sanctorum) suggesting that the earth is a holy place. In “Rajalakshmiyodu”, referring to the Malayalam writer Rajalakshmi, the poet points to the angst that writers face in our society and universally faced by the woman writers of the world, which made Rajalakshmi commit suicide, unable to bear the rancour of her relatives and society at large. “Thames Nadiyodu” (To The Thames) praises the resurrection of the river Thames after the intense effort of a team of people, removing all the waste accumulated in it by industrialization and urbanization. The Thames was almost dead out of pollution, the fish died, the birds left and no green grew on its shores. The news of this rebirth instils optimism in those in India who worry about the dying rivers here, the holy Ganga, the Yamuna and the Nila. London’s local problem and its solution are woven into a greater canvas to make it to a global audience.

Walker’s poem “Winnie Mandela We Love You” is an appreciation of the life of Winnie Mandela, the wife of the African leader Nelson Mandela. Equating her with ‘Lucy’ the earliest fossilized skeleton of a human being found, a woman who lived on the African continent some three million years ago, the speaker of the poem calls Winnie ‘sister’ and says:

We love you
for helping us recognize
the eternity
you’ve been with us before. (CP 458)
She adds “Yours is the contemporary face / of the mother / of the human race” (458). Winnie Mandela’s political passion, her vigilance, her impatience with the killers and charlatans and her hatred of despair are admired by the poet as much as her beauty, style and smile, and her loyalty to Nelson and her attention to her children, and her face is fixed as the contemporary face of the mother of the human race.

Maria Mies in *Ecofeminism* recommends, “Only a society based on a subsistence perspective can afford to live in peace with nature, and uphold peace between nations, generations and men and women, because it does not base its concept of a good life on the exploitation and domination of nature and other people” (322). In the contemporary globalized world the ecofeminists recommend this subsistence perspective which brings to the centre all native and indigenous groups and their knowledge so as to utilize them to enrich the life of every single species, including man, on earth. The emerging *écriture naturelle* which promotes non-dominative democratic treatment of the subjects, nature, humans and non-humans, in a language which gives representation to all the marginalized identities, is a vital discursive element in the new ecofeminist outlook.

*Écriture naturelle* resorts to a proliferation of real democratic discourses to overcome the limits of human language and democratic set up. By triggering a non-conforming and liberatory discourse with nature, the ecofeminist writers shape symbols, metaphors and inter-relations in a new representational matrix to promote a democratic and ecological ethic. The exposure of patriarchal exploitative structures, the overcoming of anthropocentric attitudes, the embedding of local images and myths in the
universal and the empowerment of the marginalized local are ensured by the emerging ‘natural language.’ Prosopopoiea and personification provide spaces to assert, the complexities of nature and the non-humans through the non-ideological treatment of their multiple subject positions. The ecofeminist language, formed on the principles of social constructivism and anti-essentialism, adopted by the two writers has a decisive effect on the ecofeminist political platform.