A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe’, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thought and feeling, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in this beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation of inner security.

Albert Einstein (qtd. in Rucker)

The saga of the surprising pace with which human beings have achieved the superlatives in various fields has begun losing its sheen nowadays. The hazardous technological advancements that thrive in the name of development have begun upsetting the equilibrium of nature, effecting drastic distortions in weather patterns, wiping out species and
whole sets of organisms and disintegrating vulnerable ecosystems. With the threat to human life and life in general becoming imminent, human beings have started devising projects and protective measures to ensure their ticket on this blue planet for a few more centuries, with the result that increased attention is given to ecological movements and environmental issues. In the battle for survival, if human beings are to ensure a successful survival for long, they have to reassess their theories, reform their philosophies and reshape their life style. As an initial step, the dualistic and exclusive binary of human beings/ nature has to be problematized in order to secure a holistic outlook and epistemology. As an engagement and passion of the heart, literature reflects these anxieties and tries to solidify an awareness of the dire consequences of the anthropocentric and androcentric approaches and foregrounds the need to redefine them. Ecocriticism, as a critical approach, has contributed commendably, to precipitate the shift of paradigms.

The significant transformation undergone in our ways of relating to the planet is pointed out by Carolyn Merchant, “The Enlightenment ethic of the domination of nature fostered by mechanistic science’s reduction of the world to dead atoms moved by external forces is being replaced by a postmodern, ecological world view based on interconnectedness, process, and open systems” (Key Concepts 17). The postmodern ecological world view is based on the impossibility of predicting the behaviour of the natural world with hundred percent accuracy. New postmodern ecology stresses that, “nature undisturbed is not constant in form, structure, or proportion, but changes at every scale of time and space” (Botkin 62). The unpredictability and contingency posited by the postmodern ecological world view demands that ecocriticism should think of a
transgressive alternative to the nature-culture binary. An acceptance of the world as it is demands a cosmopolitan outlook about both human beings and non-human nature and ecocriticism aims at preserving and promoting the existing diversity and fostering interconnectedness within it. This shall add more substance to the very being of human species and develop a respectable level of sustainability in every ecosystem and promote a healthy relationship between all components of the planet earth.

In the opinion of Fritjof Capra being ‘ecologically literate’ or ‘ecoliterate’ means understanding the principles of organization of ecological communities or ecosystems and employing these principles to build up sustainable human communities. Mankind can learn significant lessons from the planet’s ecosystems that “have organized themselves in subtle and complex ways so as to maximize sustainability” (*The Web of Life* 290). Capra puts forth the warning that in the new millennium, survival depends on ecological literacy and the human will to shape their lives in accordance with the principles of ecology. The basic principles of ecology, according to him are “interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility and diversity all of which help to promote sustainability” (295). These principles take into consideration the vision of nature as expressed by Murray Bookchin, the “image of unity in diversity, spontaneity and complementary relationships free of all hierarchy and domination” (*Ecology of Freedom* 352). Capra in “Systems Theory and the New Paradigm” defines the emerging new social paradigm as a holistic or an ecological world view, which promotes an ecological awareness that “recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the embeddedness of individuals and societies in the cyclical processes of nature” (335). The Systems approach identifies five criteria of systems
which hold for all the sciences — a shift from the part to the whole, from structure to process, from objective to epistemic science, from building knowledge to network of knowledge and from truth to approximations. With its central concept of self-organization, the essentials of this systems approach entail a new ethic that is life-affirming rather than life-destroying, even as it recognizes the interconnectedness of all things in the universe and the place of human beings within the network.

Gaia hypothesis proposed by James Lovelock embodies the philosophy and science of an ecological world view. When the earth is called the earth goddess, the simple implication is that the seemingly inert earth made of rocks and water is alive. Life on earth constantly maintains atmospheric and hydrological conditions comfortable for its own continuation and it does so through feedback processes and making the environment an integral part of every living thing. The Gaia hypothesis states that the system as a whole is powerful enough to withstand climatic disasters and human deprivations. Lovelock gives the warning that:

Gaia has withstood devastations far beyond our powers at least thirty times during the three and a half billion years of her life-span. Nothing that we can do threatens her. But, of course, if we transgress in our pollutions and our forest clearance, Gaia can move to a new stable state, and one that’s no longer comfortable for us. So living with Gaia is not so different from a human relationship. It is an affair of the heart as well as the head; and if we are to do it lovingly, it is something that must be renewed on a daily basis if it is to succeed. (359)
The human survival depends totally on how the species sustains its love-relationship with Gaia. This situation only enhances the significance of the postmodern ecological world view. Greg Garrard explains:

Postmodern ecology neither returns us to the ancient myth of the Earth Mother, whose loss some ecocritics lament, nor supplies us with evidence that ‘nature knows best’. The irony is that a future Earth oriented system of values and tropes will have to acknowledge contingency and indeterminacy at a fundamental level, but this only increases the scope and extent of our liability and responsibility as the most powerful species on the planet. (178)

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, he demands that “Ecocriticism of the future shall be attuned to environmental justice, informed by artistic as well as scientific ecological insight and will be committed to the preservation of the biological diversity of the planet for all its inhabitants” (182). Then only shall this discipline be liberated from the clichés of essentialism and reductionism that swerves it from an egalitarian perspective.

Ecocriticism, which earlier dealt with how natural environment shaped in the imagination of a community at a specific historical moment, has now turned pro-active to the extent that some ecocritics understand their intellectual exercises as a direct intervention in the current social, political and economic debates surrounding environmental pollution and preservation. There are ecocritics like Andrew Ross who emphasize that environmental degradation is based on economic, social and cultural inequalities that need to be addressed before anything like ‘sustainable
development’ can be put into effect. The discipline of ecocriticism thus in due course has diverged into many complex branches with specific philosophies and attitudes with regard to nature.

Deep ecology propounded by the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess tries to overcome the narrow anthropocentrism dominant in Western culture by searching for alternatives within the Western tradition, Eastern philosophy, and the insights of indigenous peoples. Bill Devall sums up the fundamental concerns of deep ecology: “According to Deep Ecology a new cosmic/ecological metaphysics which stresses the identity (I/thou) of humans with nonhuman nature is a necessary condition for a viable approach to building an eco-philosophy” (133). Deep ecology demands an objective approach to nature and a new holistic perception which rejects subject/object, man/nature dualisms and embraces a pervasive awareness of the intermingling of all living beings on the planet earth. It prefers local autonomy and decentralization of power over centralized political control through bureaucracies. For deep ecology, the function of science is to enhance the understanding of self and creation, and technology is an appropriate tool for human welfare. It demands a rapid movement toward “soft energy paths and appropriate technology” (134) and toward life-styles which will result in an increasingly low and steady per capita energy consumption around the world. Advocating biospheric egalitarianism, this philosophy lays stress on the spiritual development of homosapiens and the unalienable right of other species to pursue their own evolutionary destinies. It believes that diversity is inherently desirable both culturally and as a principle of health and stability of ecosystems. As a liberating ecological consciousness with the motto ‘live and let live’, deep ecology thus seeks transformation of
current values and social organization. Garrard opines that, “The shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology, bringing it into opposition with almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion” (21). A note of caution against deep ecology is expressed by Carolyn Merchant: “Deep Ecology’s focus on anthropocentrism also masks the role of capitalism and political economy in the domination of nature and human beings” (Key Concepts 8). Another major criticism of deep ecology is that its ecocentrism is misanthropic.

An alternative to deep ecology which accuses anthropocentrism as the cause for ecological crisis is social ecology shaped by the social philosopher Murray Bookchin. In “Thinking Ecologically: A Dialectical Approach” he declares the basic assumption of social ecology as, “The very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (188-89). In the early tribal societies, the increasing prestige of male elders created social hierarchies and inequalities that led to a power hierarchy of male humans over the female of the species and it was extended to a human dominion over nature. The growth of ancient city-states, towns and state capitalism was nurtured by the increasingly entrenched hierarchies of elders over other tribal members, men over women, and elites over labourers and slaves. This social domination led to the domination of people over nature. The goal of social ecology is to wipe away all thriving hierarchies and all kinds of domination and attain a certain wholeness. In conceiving the ‘ecosystems’ holistically, that is, in terms of their mutual interdependence Bookchin in “The Concept of Social Ecology” states, “social ecology seeks to unravel the forms and patterns of interrelationships that give intelligibility to a
community, be it natural or social” (156). He maintains that social ecology attains significance because it offers no case whatsoever for hierarchy in nature and society; instead “it decisively challenges the very function of hierarchy as a stabilizing or “ordering” principle in both realms” (160). Garrard comments on the criticism of deep ecology by social ecologists, “They claim the ecocentric monism enjoined by deep ecologists is disingenuous because, although humans are supposed to be ‘part of nature’, many of the things humans do are still portrayed as ‘unnatural’, thereby reintroducing the dualism they were trying to overcome” (28-29). Neither monists nor dualists, social ecologists promote a decentralized society of non-hierarchical affiliations avowedly derived from an anarchistic political tradition. They oppose the power relations and hierarchy, which they see as afflicting all kinds of societies, be it capitalist or centrally planned socialist. Garrard identifies that, “In place of a workers’ revolution, social ecologists promote exemplary lifestyles and communities that prefigure a more general social transformation and give people practice in sustainable living and participatory democracy” (30). John P. Clark portrays a detailed picture of a society envisioned by social ecologists with due recognition to all aspects. The fundamental unit of the society will be a commune which is a small community based on love, friendship, shared values, and commitment to a common life. For production, distribution, education, child care, cultural creation, reflection and spiritual renewal, cooperative associations will be formed. He stresses that, “Organization will be based not on the demands of power, but rather on the self-realization of persons as free social beings” (9). Merchant terms Murray Bookchin’s concept as ecological anarchism which envisions an ecological society to be
achieved through “reliance on the resources and energy of the local bioregion, face-to-face grass-roots democracy within libertarian municipalities linked together in a confederation, and the dissolution of the state as a source of authority and control” (Key Concepts 9).

In contrast with the concept of social ecology which is grounded in the rejection of all kinds of dominations, the Marxist economist James O’Connor conceptualized socialist ecology in terms of political economy. He notes that since the causes, consequences and solutions to most ecological problems are national and international, socialism and ecology presuppose one another. For him, socialism needs ecology because, “the latter stresses site specificity and reciprocity, as well as the central importance of the material interchanges within nature and between society and nature. Ecology needs socialism because the latter stresses democratic planning, and the key role of the social interchanges between human beings” (168). He makes clear that this does not mean to define a new category which integrates the elements of both socialism and ecology. But there comes a question of what constitutes the best stance to tackle the present problems. O’Connor observes that we need socialism “at least to make the social relations of production transparent, to end the rule of the market and commodity fetishism, to end the exploitation of human beings by other human beings; we need “ecology” at least to make the social productive forces transparent, to end the degradation and destruction of the earth” (171). Merchant makes a pertinent observation by comparing socialist ecology with other ecocritical movements:

Socialist ecology looks toward new forms of ecosocialism brought about by green social movements with commitments to
democracy, internationalism, and ways to overcome the dualism of local versus state control and administration. But like deep and social ecology, it recognizes the autonomy of nonhuman nature, ecological diversity, and the science of ecology as the basic science of survival for the twenty-first century. (9)

Analysing the inherent disparities among these philosophies, we can observe that deep ecology finds fault with social and socialist ecologies which tell about domination and exploitation of humans by other humans, and accuses that by focusing on these intraspecies relationships, they perpetuate the anthropocentrism that ought to be the target of any earth-centred critique. In return, the social and socialist ecologists lament the individualism and pervasive mysticism of deep ecologists which represent a retreat from rational thought and real political engagement.

The extreme opposing positions held by ‘social ecology’ which generally insists that it is ultimately human needs and societal well-being which must determine our approach to nature and ‘deep ecology’ which considers that nature has value in and of itself independent of its functions for human society, have to be weighed equally and critically examined by ecocriticism. Any movement to peg ecocriticism to any one of these definitions would result in a situation like the proverbial blind men’s description of the elephant.

The word ‘ecocriticism’ first appeared in 1978 in the essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in which the writer William Rueckert intended the term to focus on the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. In these few
decades, the definition of ‘ecocriticism’ has become composite with diverse perspectives. Michael P. Branch explains that, “Ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move toward a more bio-centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human’s conception of global community to include non human life forms and the physical environment” (xii). The expansive perspectives demanded by these criteria make it difficult for anyone to formulate a compact theorizing of ecocriticism. But it must be conceded that the greater concern is not whether ecocriticism is a theory or a focus or a politics but whether it can engender the transformations in the attitudes of human beings equipping them to sustain themselves in the volatile future they are about to face. Even scientists have begun to insist that human beings must give up the dream of totally dominating and controlling nature and should develop a partnership ethic in which a human community is in a sustainable ecological relationship with its surrounding natural community.

According to the ecopedagogist, Richard V. Kahn, in order to attain this goal, we require political principles of engagement for the construction of a critical ecopedagogy and ecoliteracy that is founded on economic redistribution, cultural and linguistic democracy, indigenous sovereignty, universal human rights and a fundamental respect for all life. Within the context of an ecologically grounded epistemology, the gain lies in the realization that, as he posits, “our organic relationship with the earth is also intimately tied to our struggles for cultural self-determination, environmental sustainability, social and material justice and global peace” (xii).
As the largest consumer of nature’s resources and its most resourceful species, it is the obligation of mankind to voluntarily adopt a way of living that ensures the balance of the ecosystem. The reformed environmental move shall aim at rediscovering human ties with nature, reinventing critical and conceptual tools, reconnecting with the indigenous roots by embarking on an intensive grasp of tribal and folk culture and starting an extensive study of environmental movements all around the world, thus effecting a cultural, social, political and economic change rooted in a democratic policy.

The avowed goals of ecocriticism are held with great regard by ecofeminism which proclaims the domination of both nature and women by men, and androcentrism as the root causes of the modern crisis. A close reading reveals how the objectives of ecocriticism are emphasized in the propositions of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism or ecological feminism, a term coined in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne, is a social and political movement which attempts to unite environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminists argue that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature that stems from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society and attempt to explore the intersection of sexism, man’s domination of nature, racism, speciesism and other symptoms of hegemony.

Eaubonne indicates that the two most immediate threats of today are overpopulation and the destruction of natural resources. It was the patriarchal system created five thousand years ago, not capitalism or socialism, that gave men the power to sow both the earth (fertility) and women (fecundity). Patriarchal power produced agricultural
overexploitation and industrial overexpansion. Eaubonne elucidates, “Until that time, women alone possessed a monopoly on agriculture, and the men believed women were impregnated by the gods. Upon discovering the two possibilities at once — agricultural and procreational—man launched what Lederer has called “the great upheaval” for his own benefit” (178). When man seized control of the soil and woman’s womb, thus of fertility and fecundity, the overexploitation of one became menacing to the other, thus creating a double peril which appeared parallel: overpopulation and environmental destruction. Eaubonne comments that all the problems like the class struggle, demography and ecology became affairs of men due to the great defeat of the feminine sex which took place throughout the planet in 3000 B.C. She sketches the creation of patriarchy in the historical setting thus:

After the demise of the Amazons and agriculture, the guarantor of power, shared for a certain time between the sexes in the Hittite, Cretan and Egyptian civilizations, little by little the wealth of the earth became masculine at the time when woman, tied to the family, no longer had recourse to vanished Amazonian ways. Patriarchal and masculine power peaked in the Bronze Age, with the discovery of what would later become industry. Women were then put under strict surveillance by the victorious sex, which still suffered from fear and distrust of them; they were exiled from all sectors other than the family ghetto; not only from power and from work outside the home, but even from areas in which man seemed to have no fear of competition: physical sports (ancient Greece, except
Lacedaemonia), theater (feudal England, Japan), art and culture, higher education. (188)

With the culmination of Athenian philosophy in Aristotle, an anthropocentric system of philosophy and science was set in place and it was to play a major role in shaping Western thought until the seventeenth century. Aristotle rejected the pre-Socratic ideas of an infinite universe, cosmological and biological evolution, and heliocentrism, and proposed instead an earth-centred finite universe wherein humans were differentiated from, and seen as superior to, animals and plants by virtue of their rationality. In the ensuing system of patriarchal society men used both woman and nature to defy death and attain immortality.

Women’s resistance to this male oppression began with their subsequent realization of the fetters created for them. The various movements that took place in different parts of the world increased in momentum in the twentieth century. Ariel Salleh traces the history of the twentieth century women’s movement which has passed through several stages thus:

Beginning with a rather uncritical adulation of the 1/0 domain, First Wave feminists, broadly equality or liberal feminists, set out to secure constitutional basics for women such as the vote and right to property ownership. Feminism’s Second Wave deepened the agenda, grappling with injustices such as illiteracy, domestic violence, reproductive rights, and equal pay. Eighty years after the birth of liberal feminism, these struggles still go on. Second Wave activists used two kinds of theory: radical or cultural feminism which saw the psychology
of patriarchal masculinity as the root problem, and socialist feminism which stressed economic exploitation. Ecofeminism is a third and international wave which draws on all three approaches. Women now shed the victim role, going on the offensive against the entire capitalist patriarchal assault to life on earth. While ecofeminism builds on existing feminist theories, these in turn are challenged by the need to make sense of ecological crisis and biocolonisation. (103-104)

Ecofeminism’s origin grounds are alluded to by Catriona Sandilands as, “Ellen Swallow’s home ecology, Lois Gibb’s struggles at Love Canal, feminist and maternalist pacifism and antimilitarism in North America and Europe, and the obvious gender gaps in environmental philosophy” (5). She contends that, “ecofeminist theory has taken its specifically identitarian formulation of the relations between feminism and ecology from the radical and cultural feminist debates on nature of the 1970s and 1980s” (5). Radical feminism roots the oppression of woman in her biological difference from men, who ‘use’ women to secure their own immortality through childbearing. Nature’s oppression is rooted in its biological otherness from men who secure immortality as rational creators of human culture. Men seek to enlist both women and nature in the service of male projects designed to protect them from the terrible nature and mortality. The notion of women being closer to nature is essential to such projects. Hence radical feminism sees patriarchy, the archetypal form of human oppression as the cause of all kinds of oppression and exploitation. Radical cultural feminists such as Mary Daly in Gyn/Ecology (1978) and Susan Griffin in Woman and Nature (1978) link the domination of women and nature under patriarchy, and promote the
celebration of woman-nature identification. Radical feminism staunchly believes in the fact that if patriarchy is the archetypal form of human oppression, then getting rid of it will also cause other forms of oppression to crumble.

Ynestra King in “Feminism and the Revolt of Nature” states that “many radical feminists deplore the development of connections between ecology and feminism and see it as a regression which is bound to reinforce sex-role stereotyping” (198). Patriarchy, in creating its essential notions for survival has nailed in, to a woman’s head, the idea that being the abode of love and kindness, it is her duty to preserve and protect the environment around. But in fact, this is an issue which has universal implications and should be the concern of every individual, male or female. King cites Ellen Willis, a radical feminist who proclaims that, “If feminism means anything, it’s that women are capable of the full range of human emotions and behaviour; politics based on received definitions of women’s nature and role are oppressive, whether promoted by men or by my alleged sisters” (199). King observes that rationalist radical feminists and radical cultural feminists arrive at opposite conclusions regarding the connection between feminism and ecology. The essential difference between the two types of radical feminists is their difference of view on the question whether the woman/nature connection is potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continued subordination of women. Both these views don’t assimilate the fact that gender identity is neither fully natural nor fully cultural, and that it depends upon other historical factors and attitudes. The politicization of the theory of ecofeminism is built on the contention as opined by Ariel Salleh that, “the basic premise of ecofeminist political analysis is that ecological crisis is the inevitable
effect of a Eurocentric capitalist patriarchal culture built on the domination of nature, and domination of woman ‘as nature’” (12-13).

According to Michael Zimmerman, “of the three branches of radical ecology — social ecology, deep ecology and ecofeminism, ecofeminism is the most complex, and has grown more sophisticated and self- critical” (233). Expatiating on the greater dimensions of ecofeminist theory and action, Carlassare in “Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse” points out:

Much of ecofeminist direct action seeks to resist and subvert political institutions, economic structures, and daily activities that are against the interests of life on earth. Much of theoretical and academic ecofeminism seeks to identify, critique, and overthrow ideological frameworks and ways of thinking, such as value-hierarchical dualistic thinking, that sanction ecological degradation and the oppression of women. Beyond this, ecofeminism seeks to bring forth different, nondominating forms of social organisation and human-nature interaction. (220)

This complexity prevents ecofeminism from the threats of easy generalization. It constitutes a diversity of positions which make many ecofeminist theorists like Carolyn D’Cruz to consider ecofeminism as a discourse than as a unified, coherent epistemology. Carlassare notes that, “Ecofeminism derives its cohesion not from a unified epistemological standpoint, but more from the shared desire of its proponents to foster resistance to formations of domination for the sake of human liberation and planetary survival” (221). The different platforms of ecofeminism
based on their difference in priorities are liberal ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism and socialist ecofeminism.

Founded on the ideology of liberal feminism, liberal ecofeminism extended from the inception of feminist theories in the seventeenth century to the 1960s. It has as its basic tenet liberalism which views humans as rational individuals who tend to maximize their own interests, and that an ideal society would result from each member maximizing his or her own potential. The argument of liberal feminists is that, women are in no way different from or inferior to men as rational individuals; it is only the lack of economic and educational opportunities which have prevented them from realizing their true potential in all spheres of life. In the twentieth century the liberal feminist movement was greatly motivated by the epoch making book by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Liberal ecofeminism was triggered by Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), which with its poignant documentation of the detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment facilitated the ban of DDT in the U.S in 1972. While explaining what ecofeminism denotes, Kasturi Basu remarks that for the liberal ecofeminists, “environmental hazards are a consequence of the over hasty development of natural resources to suit human needs and the failure to regulate pesticides and other pollutants. They contend that better scientific know-how rather than technologies, conservation and laws are the proper means to resolve the problem of resources” (12). Providing equal opportunities for women in the political, economic and social spheres and thus enabling them to contribute towards the betterment of the environment has been the agenda of liberal ecofeminism. Chhaya Datar opines, “Given an opportunity, women can
transcend the social stigma of their biology and join men in the cultural project of environmental conservation” (11).

Emerging as a movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, cultural ecofeminism was fuelled by the second wave of feminism and responds to the perception that women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in Western culture. Inspired by Sherry Ortner’s landmark essay, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” cultural ecofeminism demands the breaking of stereotypes through direct political intervention. The essay contends that historically and across cultures, women have been perceived as closer to nature because of their physiology, social roles and psychology, than men. As regards physiology, women are the givers of life undergoing the pleasures and pains of pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation. In the social sphere, childrearing and domestic chores have sought to keep the women confined to their homes. Psychologically, women have been assigned greater emotional capacities with greater ties to the particular, the personal and the present. The cultural feminists believe that human nature is grounded in human biology. Datar notices that, “The perceived connection between women and biological reproduction is cited as a source of women’s empowerment and ecological activism” (11). Cultural ecofeminists view mechanization as a deeply masculinist method of control akin to the forceful subjugation of the female entity and employ spiritual or associative, poetic modes to explore oppression on a personal as well as on a larger social level. They believe that changes in human consciousness and spirituality are inseparable from the changes in societal institutions and it is the prerequisite for the liberation of women and nature. This branch of ecofeminism is dismissed by many because of its essentializing
tendencies which may sometimes work against the goal of women’s liberation by homogenizing the diversity of women’s experiences. Critics also allege that there is a void left by cultural ecofeminists regarding questions of poverty, racism or power constructs and the possibility of nature being regarded as a social construct. However, radical cultural feminists like Mary Daly and Susan Griffin through their works bring out the nuances underlying the woman-nature identification, infusing credibility to cultural ecofeminism. Elizabeth Carlassare in “Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse” remarks:

Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* is concerned with uncovering the ways in which patriarchal Western religion, myth and language have constructed an essential notion of woman that has been used to legitimate the subordination and oppression of women, as well as with seizing and reconstructing the gender category “woman” for the sake of empowering women. (225)

Ynestra King observes in “Feminism and the Revolt of Nature” that Griffin’s *Woman and Nature* “illuminates the extent to which women’s essence has been historically constructed by patriarchal scientific discourse as inferior to that of men to perpetuate masculine privilege. It suggests a powerful potential for a movement linking feminism and ecology” (199). Cultural feminism’s concern with ecology thus takes womanhood which has been a bludgeon of oppression and transforms it into a positive factor.

Socialist ecofeminism advocated particularly by the environmental historian and ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant, shares with social ecofeminism a constructionist position and the belief that revolutionary
social change and overthrow of capitalist patriarchy are required for human liberation and planetary survival. Socialist ecofeminists assume that nature is an active subject and that humans must develop sustainable relations with it. This goes beyond cultural feminism in offering a critique of capitalist patriarchy which focuses on the dialectical relationships between production and ecology. This movement demands production to be subordinated to reproduction and ecology. Carlassare explains in “Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse” that “in socialist ecofeminism, changes in the spheres of social reproduction, biological reproduction, and production are required to restructure gender relationships and human-nature interactions in order to achieve an egalitarian and ecological transformation of society” (222). Whereas capitalism lays stress on production and competition, socialist ecofeminism emphasizes all that capitalism has marginalized in the course of pursuing its goals: reproduction, cooperation and ecology. These ecofeminists try to forge a definable identity for themselves as the basis for their political representation. They envision that a sustainable ecological ethic shall be developed by promoting the awareness that human beings and non-human beings are equal partners in survival.

Carlassare discusses social ecofeminism as a movement developed, primarily by Chaia Heller at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont, with the emphasis that:

the association of women with nature in Western capitalist patriarchy is largely a social (historical and cultural) construction and that the liberation of nature will only come about through revolutionary social change in which systems
that feed on human oppression, most notably capitalist patriarchy, are replaced by non-hierarchical non dominating forms of social organization. (221-222)

In “Problems in Ecofeminism” Janet Biehl, a former social ecofeminist argues that ecofeminist images of women are patriarchal stereotypes which “freeze women as merely caring and nurturant beings, instead of expanding the full range of women’s human potentialities and abilities” (59). She completely rejects the ecofeminist’s ‘oikos’ and dogmatically insists on direct democracy as a rational form of political participation. Critical of both cultural and socialist ecofeminisms, Karen J. Warren, in “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections” advocates the need for a transformative feminism that respects and preserves diversity, acknowledging that there may be more than one woman’s voice and more than one feminist theory (6). Social ecofeminism acknowledges the differences between the male and the female but rejects the consolidation of any gender hierarchies based on the biological difference. It criticizes cultural ecofeminism on the ground that it rejects rationality by worshipping Mother Goddesses and tries to biologize and essentialize the caretaking and nurturing traits assigned by patriarchy to women. Sandilands observes that social ecofeminism integrates “into itself the “good” parts of other ecofeminisms, taking an emphasis on equality from liberal or socialist feminism and an insistence on difference from cultural ecofeminism and combining them into an agenda that cannot be other than paradoxical” (65). This form of ecofeminism gained greater popularity with the theorists like Ynestra King, Ariel Salleh and Val Plumwood as the issue of colour and its correlation with social hierarchies entered the ongoing dialogue.
Both the materialist position of socialist ecofeminism and the idealist position of cultural ecofeminism have limitations which can be overcome only by a feminist approach that operates at both the structural and cultural levels. In “Feminism and the Revolt of Nature” Ynestra King claims that women naturalized culture in a culture defined against nature. She demands feminism to have an ecological perspective which asserts the interdependence of all living things. According to her the liberation of women is to be found neither in severing all connections that root them in nature nor in believing themselves to be more natural than men. Both of these positions are unwittingly complicit with nature/culture dualism. She affirms that, “Women’s oppression is neither strictly historical nor strictly biological. It is both. . . . If nature/culture antagonism is the primary contradiction of our time, it is also what weds feminism and ecology and makes woman the historic subject” (203-204). She expatiates on ecofeminism thus:

Ecological feminism is about reconciliation and conscious mediation, about recognition of the underside of history and all the invisible voiceless activities of women over millennia. . . . It is the return of the repressed — all that has been denigrated and denied to build this hierarchal civilization with its multiple systems of dominance. It is the potential voice of the denied, the ugly, and the speechless — all those things called “feminine”. So it is no wonder that the feminist movement rose again in the same decade as the ecological crisis. (205)

Ariel Salleh, while establishing ecofeminism as a political construct warns that “until the problem of gender blindness in contemporary
politics is overcome, however, women need to be on constant guard against premature closure in any new theoretical totalisation” (97).

Ecofeminism believes that patriarchal society is built on four interlocking pillars; sexism, racism, class exploitation and environmental destruction. Ecofeminist analysis reveals that it is not only women who are portrayed as being closer to nature, but oppressed races and social classes have also been closely associated with nature. In defying patriarchy, women show their loyalty to future generations and to life and the planet itself. Relating the latent potential of ecofeminism, Merchant opines:

Ecofeminism, with its emphasis on relations, has the potential to see connections among various forms of oppression, such as those affecting women, minorities, the colonized, animals, and nature. Recognition of the web like character of various forms of domination suggests a cooperative strategy of web repair. The ecofeminist approach focuses on relations and interconnections among the various ecology movements and leads to the possibility of a liberatory theory and practice. (Key Concepts 12)

Ecofeminism advocates the propagation of peaceful coexistence of all life forms cherishing mutual respect for all unique cultures. In Ecofeminism, Maria Mies explains:

An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by

24
means of cooperation and mutual care and love. Only in this way can we be enabled to respect and preserve the diversity of all life forms including their cultural expression, as true sources of our well-being and happiness. (6)

Recognising the implicit political element as the greatest promise of ecofeminism, Sandilands observes, “the democratic politicization of gender and nature suggests a process of challenging hegemonic identifications, of opening up new spaces of social and political (and ecological) life to scrutiny and debate, and of tackling the discursive relations in which problematic gendered and ecological relations are embedded” (xviii).

The main challenge ecofeminism has to address is its tendency to forge a “destructively essentialist mode of analysis and politics” (Sandilands 66). Essentialism assumes that a subject is constituted by presocial, innate and unchanging qualities. Carlassare in “Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse” explains, “Essentialist arguments posit that men and women are endowed with innate qualities or essences that are not historically or culturally contingent, but eternal and unchanging, an outcome of their biology, which is understood as fixed” (221). She notes that constructionism, on the other hand, usually refers to the assumption that a subject is constituted by social, historical and cultural contexts that are complex and variable. The use of essentialism in cultural ecofeminism appears to be at odds with the shared constructionist position of social and socialist ecofeminism. This tension between the two strands of ecofeminism as they try to forge a specifically woman-based culture and spirituality echoes a similar tension within feminism itself. In the
allegedly essentialist works like Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Fcology* and Susan Griffin’s *Women and Nature* along with the assertion of women’s essentialized gender characteristics, the acknowledgement of the construction of woman’s essence within a particular social, cultural and historic context can be perceived.

Social and socialist ecofeminists combine ecological degradation with the personal concerns of women by exposing the ways in which women’s bodies and minds are ‘poisoned’ along with nature by capitalist patriarchy. They also make women’s role in the biological and the social reproduction as central in the construction of any theoretical or ideological patterns. This particular interest in women’s bodies as the site of power struggle is a point at which essentialism steps into its constructivist position. The overlapping of positions in the different branches of ecofeminism serves to prove the vivacity of ecofeminist discourse. However feminists of colour like Audre Lorde cautions that in celebrating the commonalities of women and asserting a unified essentialized gender category ‘woman’, the diversity of women’s lives and histories across the boundaries of race, class, nationality, age, and sexuality tend to be ignored. While addressing the charges of essentialism levelled against ecofeminism in “Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse”, Carlassare states that “the category ‘women’ must be understood as a politically strategic invocation that is used variably within different ecofeminist productions of its source and meaning” (232). Sandilands reads that Carlassare’s political desire is a radical democratic one and clarifies that her demand for diversity and respect for a variety of different modes of political appearance implicitly forms “a version of coalition based on a politically produced affinity, a shared orientation to resisting a
patriarchal master narrative rather than producing a new matriarchal one” (115).

Lee Quinby suggests that an interrogative form of resistance is already present within ecofeminist politics:

Ecofeminism as a politics of resistance forces us to question the categories of experience that order the world and the truths we have come to know, even the truths of our radical politics, by confronting us with the truths of other women and men, differently acculturated, fighting against specific threats to their particular lands and bodies. This questioning must also extend to the anthropocentric assumption that only human beings have truths to tell about their and our experiences. The cries of factory farm animals, the suffocation of fish in poisoned waters, the sounds of flood waters rushing over deforested land – these are also voices we need to heed. (45)

Ecofeminism strikes a relation between the oppressed humans and oppressed nature in a democratic way, thus recognizing human being as one animal in the ecosphere. It is centred on a theoretical construction in which women and nature are constructed as related identities through a process of historical association, psychological development and marginalization by the androcentric culture. Sandilands suggests that, “In order to rescue democratic desire from the limitations of identity politics it is necessary to look to other ways of theorizing the formulation of democratic subjectivity” (81-82).
Since ecofeminism is concerned with an interface of woman and nature, the identity of both these subjects should be exhaustively considered before synthesizing them within the idea of democracy. This undertaking is all the more crucial with the spread of globalizing ontologies in all walks of life today. A re-examination of the Enlightenment concepts and Euro-centric thoughts by postmodernism which according to Lyotard, “refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (510), offers a check to the blatant generalizations and the resultant marginalizations, subversions and erasures by the grand narratives. As a prelude to this interface, the thesis attempts to sketch the individual evolution of the two subjects in question: woman and nature and to problematize the philosophical, epistemological and cultural perspectives that have given shape to the linked subjectivities.

History records the masculinist versions of ‘woman’ as described in scriptures and classical philosophy. All religious definitions declare women’s bodies to be inherently inferior and sinful, and fit to be controlled by men. Men are granted the power to define, interpret, judge and represent the world on their own terms, while women are to be defined, interpreted, judged and represented by men. The ancient Greeks, even though they worshipped Gods and Goddesses, considered man as perfect and women fundamentally imperfect. Aristotelian philosophy believed women to be inferior to men. One argument Aristotle used to support this claim was the idea that during reproduction, "woman is passive and receptive, while man is active and productive" (Gaarder 116). With this reasoning, Aristotle believed that the child inherits only the male characteristics, and the woman is only needed to be the soil, while
the male is the sower, receiving and bringing forth the seed. Therefore in Aristotle's view, "the man provides the 'form' and the woman contributes the 'substance'" (116). Though Buddhism preached equality for women in a patriarchal society of that time, V. Geetha contends that “several Jataka tales depict woman as unstable, cruel, wrathful and slanderous and their nature demands that they be controlled and disciplined by men” (13). As for Christianity, woman created from man’s rib is a secondary and dependent being. Thomas Aquinas notes, “As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active power of the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of a woman comes from defect in the active power...." (par. 1). Islam too believes that men were created to rule over and manage the lives and affairs of women. Qur'an (2:228) - "and the men are a degree above them [women]" (par. 3). Ariel Salleh draws a vivid distinction between the two genders:

In too many cultures, girls come to adulthood with assumptions about themselves as essentially Other: as instinct-driven, irrational creatures, as temptress, earth mother, dark, evil, damp, passive, moon goddess, and so on. Masculinity, by contrast, elicits associations of rationality, sun, activity, goodness, light and order. Man evokes law, regularity and permanence, while woman implies chaos and unpredictability. (36)

Renaissance humanist philosophers benevolently proposed enlightened views of women and their education, but strictly made the caveat that educated women should confine their learning to the private, domestic
Geetha observes that Medical science from the time of the Greeks onwards assumed that the naturally perfect human body was the male body. The Greek physician Galen (of the second century CE) believed that female sex organs represented an imperfect and retarded state of human development. That is, women were imperfect and flawed versions of men. Geetha also points out:

The Eighteenth century physicians argued that male-female differences were not merely genital, but in fact extended to every fibre of their being. Thus each body possessed and nurtured its own distinctive destiny: intellectual and physical strength for men, and motherhood for women. In nineteenth century England, woman’s nature as explained and established by science became a reason to refuse them modern education. It was argued that too much intellectual work would actually shrivel up a woman’s ovaries and render her both unfeminine and irrelevant. (16)

This specific form of male dominance, patriarchy, had a plethora of motifs that made women subservient in the diverse spheres of life. Patriarchy was seen as a system which existed alongside systems of economic exploitation, organizing male control over female sexuality and the sphere of reproduction. The exchange of women, abduction and rape were viewed as salient aspects of patriarchy, as the many means through which female sexuality was sought to be controlled. This control was exercised in the interests of male power and gradually institutionalized at several levels, work, culture, religion and education. Gerda Lerner narrates the slow dissipation of women’s status in the society thus:
We have seen how men appropriated and then transformed the major symbols of female power: the power of the Mother-Goddess and the fertility goddesses. We have seen how men constructed theologies based on the counterfactual metaphor of male procreativity and redefined female existence in a narrow and sexually dependent way. We have seen, finally, how the very metaphors for gender have expressed the male as norm and the female as deviant; the male as whole and powerful, the female as unfinished, mutilated, and lacking in autonomy. On the basis of such symbolic constructs, embedded in Greek philosophy, the Judeo-Christian theologies, and the legal tradition on which Western civilization is built, men have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the center of discourse. By making the term "man" subsume "woman" and arrogate to itself the representation of all humanity, men have built a conceptual error of vast proportion into all of their thought. (220)

In feminist activity, women were made to come together to provide mutual support in their rebellion against ‘patriarchal oppression.’ This coming together fostered a common identity for woman as a class, which later became a bone of contention for the later theorists. The process of providing a unified subjectivity to women also encountered the problem of representational politics. Recalling the Foucauldian theorisation of the representation of a subject, Judith Butler argues that subjects regulated by juridical systems of power structures are, “by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the
requirements of those structures” (3). Therefore the feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought. According to Helene Cixous:

Men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity. One can no more speak of ‘woman’ than of ‘man’ without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform, constantly change everyone’s Imaginary and invalidate in advance any conceptualization. (580)

Thus the complexity of the ‘subject’ and the politics involved in representation makes the notion of a common identity for women questionable. Identity is constructed through the individual’s intersection with the corresponding racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities. Gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently. Assuming a universal status for the ‘oppression of women,’ ‘hegemonic structure of patriarchy’ and ‘women’s common subjugated experience’ presumes a universalisation and a mechanically enforced unity of the subject. But this as Butler notes, “is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions” (6). For instance she shows how “the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category” (6). By upholding the universality of female identity based on a shared epistemological stand
point, essentialism refuses the multiplicity of the cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed. B.L. Marshall contends:

There is an inherent tension between the term ‘woman’ as a theoretical construct which implies gender as universally constitutive of the subject, and the realities of really existing ‘women’ who may or may not share a unified ‘gender identity’ . . . it is precisely the conflict and tensions between the centred and decentred conceptions of the subject in feminist theory that contains the potential for theorizing resistive agency, on the part of both collective and individual subjects. (12)

This demands a postmodern perspective which offers space to accommodate and assimilate the tensions. Bell Hooks proposes that, “postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency” (29). The anti-essentialist standpoint provided a counter to the view that there is some natural, given essence of feminine that is universal and unchangeable and offers fluid identities in place of generalisations.

The social theorist, Chantal Mouffe comments that what characterizes the struggle of the new social movements is precisely the multiplicity of subject positions which constitute a single agent. At any given moment our subjectivity is criss-crossed by a number of intersecting subject positions inscribed through gender, race, sexual preference, professional status and familial position. The renewal of
radical democratic politics, therefore, requires us to reject the notion of
the individual as a self-contained unified entity existing independently of
society and to conceive it as “a site constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject
positions’, inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations, the member of
many communities and participant in a plurality of collective forms of
identification” (Hegemony and Socialist Strategy 77).

Ann Brooks expounds that the modernist foundations of feminism
were challenged by the second wave feminism’s interventions by
identifying a number of “sites of struggle” and “sites of resistance” (210)
for feminist discourses. However, second wave feminism was limited by
its own modernist inclinations and skewed political agenda. Feminism
had also to respond to the various theoretical challenges posited by the
marginal groups and the subalterns, which made it more responsive to the
demands of the political and ethical challenges. By initiating a radical
rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity and by formulating
a new level of feminist politics which takes up the variable construction
of identity as both a non-methodological and non-normative prerequisite,
feminist literary criticism asserts its own vitality. In this connection A.
Yeatman asserts, “feminist theory has matured to the point where it is
able to subject its own premises to an ironical skeptical and critical mode
of analysis” (49). The newly opened up ‘postfeminist’ period advocates a
feminism that would deconstruct the binary between equality-based
liberal feminism and difference-based radical feminism. This theorizing is
more meaningful as it has the potential to champion the possibility of the
unfettered individual choice for women outside conventional political
categories and to make sense of the diverse needs of women in the
integrated circuit of global capitalism by looking beyond binary
reductionisms and by encouraging the celebration of diversities. The paradigm shift from feminism to postfeminism can be perceived in a number of different directions: in the challenges posed by postfeminism to feminism’s epistemological foundationalism, in postfeminism’s shift away from specific disciplinary boundaries and in postfeminism’s refusal to be limited by representational constraints.

Theoretical postfeminism with its emphasis on multiple, denaturalized subjectivities and fluid, non-linear political strategies, is characterized by a sustained interest in reassessing feminism through the critical lens of poststructuralist and postmodern thinking. It views sex and gender as political rather than biological categories that exist as a multiplicity of spaces along a line of continuum rather than bound by a single binary. In the hands of feminists of colour like Bell Hooks, Barbara Christian and Gloria Anzaldua, postfeminism becomes a crucial means with which one can articulate the multiplicity of subject positions that modern women experience and the multiple ways that they theorize this experience for themselves and others. This aspect makes postfeminism all the more crucial and relevant as the early feminist theoretical practices seem to be incapable of addressing the complexities of women’s lives in the technology intensive era of global capitalism.

Explaining the differences among people vis-à-vis race, age and sex, Audre Lorde comments that “it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation” (631). She adds that within women’s movement today,
“there is a pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist . . . Refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women” (633). She envisions that the future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop “new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across differences” (636). These perceptions of multiplicities encompassed in the subject ‘woman’ enhance the contemporaneity and polyphony of the postfeminist perspective.

The postfeminists ask others to imagine a new kind of progressive politics that is pulsational, equivocal and flirtational rather than unified and universal. Rosi Braidotti observes that the Feminist Mimesis, which sees women as sites of differences, highlights the continually becoming individual experiences and invites a complex and shifting relationship with representation and its limits. According to her, becoming is a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what is lost in the past for tracing paths of transformation in the present. She makes clear that, “‘Feminist becoming’ is a term to describe the complex process of women’s diverse lived experience as women live it and as women structure it” (68). ‘Becoming’ can be politically empowering on the condition of being sustained by a critical consciousness that aims at engendering transformations and changes.

Modern scientific and technological developments have broadened the bounds of societies, and human beings live on this globe as world citizens. The mushrooming consumer market based societies tend to build up a homogenized society of singular taste and culture, which threatens the existence of the indigenous and the aboriginal. Damian White points
out that “Contemporary societies are characterized by . . . stark inequality, commodification and reflexivity, possibilities for post-scarcity affluence and for alienation” (191). The mammoth wheels of globalization crush and erase the multitude of indigenous elements across the earth. To check this callous move we should cultivate an attitude of respect for and coexistence with all kinds of original, native imprints. Dianne Rocheleau and Robin Roth warn that “Overcoming the limits of globalizing ontologies requires sustained attention to the intimate and divergent relations between bodies, objects, orders and spaces” (425). Sites become “emergent property of its interacting human and non-human inhabitants . . . That is, we can talk about the existence of a given site only in so far as we can follow the interactive practices through their localized connections” (425). In emphasizing the localizations within the global what should be promoted is an assertion of the ‘glocal’ization (an integration of global and local) within the universalization of any aspect, be it nature or culture, man or woman.

Postfeminism articulates the multiplicities and complexities inherent in the term ‘woman’, thereby identifying the localizations within the global or the universal. It foregrounds the ‘glocalization’ giving room for all voices that represent the subject ‘woman’. This postfeminist position can be regarded as a cautionary check to the ecofeminist movement to prevent the diffusion of diversities within the agencies of woman and nature, in its pursuit of global democratic aspirations.

Charlotte Bunch muses that a global perspective requires, “seeing beyond the domestic versus international split and moving beyond nation-state boundaries as the defining parameters of our lives . . . A global perspective on feminist ethics requires a global vision of feminism — a
feminism that is inclusive and seeks to reflect a wide diversity of women’s experiences and views” (177-78). There must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves. The global approach views feminism as a political perspective which begins with any woman’s experiences that have been denied, and moves from there to a broader view of diverse women’s experiences. In the global scenario, differences and diversities should be viewed as rich sources of life, to be respected and preserved with a positive outlook. Bunch points out, “in order for diversity to function fully as a creative source of richness and possibility, it must be de-coupled from economic, political and social power and privileges” (181). She defines this global feminist ethic:

It builds an exchange based on respect that grows out of acknowledging the richness of our differences while also struggling against the ways in which these divide us through an imbalance of power and privilege. . . . This ethic of responsibility for our actions and solidarity and reciprocity in our interactions with each other can lay the ground work for this exchange to become a truly global, feminist movement. (185)

Nature has always been an elusive term refusing to be defined in a singularity. Kerry H. Whiteside sketches the different definitions of nature:

For some writers, ‘nature’ refers to the conditions for the physical and psychological health of human beings. . . . For pastoralists, it is not the city but the relative calm of rural life —
its seasonal regularity and its proximity to organic realities of life and death — that constitutes a ‘natural’ setting for human flourishing. For other writers real nature is wilderness. It is a world untrammelled by man, mysterious, sometimes threatening, exhilarating in its beauty and awe-inspiring in its spontaneous, life-perpetuating complexity. From the point of view of scientific systems ecologists, ‘nature’ is a vast, evolving, nested set of mutually supporting homeostatic systems. (7)

Etymology refers the derivation of the word ‘nature’ to the Latin word ‘natus’ which means ‘birth’. According to Holmes Rolston III nature is the “source, the well spring, of life, and life is, after all, an entirely gratuitous gift, owed to no one. . . . When nature slays, she takes only the life she gave . . . and she gathers even that life back to herself by reproduction and re enfolding organic resources and genetic materials, and produces new life out of it” (28-29).

The four major views of nature that emerged in Hellenistic thought are labelled by Loren Wilkinson and Aileen Van Beilan as the Platonic, the Aristotelian, the Epicurean and the Stoic. According to Plato the ceaseless mutability of the sensible world is due to imperfection and hence he abhors it. On discovering some order and stability in the changing cosmos, the Platonists explain that, “the orderliness in nature results from its participation in the forms of a transcendent, perfect world, one not apprehended by the senses at all” (106). For Aristotle nature is intricately and intrinsically ordered and hence there is no need for human interference. The Stoic belief is that there is in the universe a dynamic
ordering principle which is the source, pattern and goal of all things, including humans. This ordering principle is named by the stoics as God, Zeus, creative fire, ether, the law of nature, providence, soul of the world, wood and so forth. According to Stoicism, the good person is one who is in complete harmony with the rest of the universe, since he or she is guided by the same life-giving word which assimilates all the universe, humanity and nature. Modern scientific conception of nature is inlaid in the Epicurean idea of a universe as explicable only in physical terms, with no value other than what is available to the senses. Though these four views are diverse, they converge on one singular focus, man as the centre of the universe. The Medieval European attitude toward nature had been one of harmony. Medieval nature had been characterized by “an unchanging order, with everything in its place, and since people found their place within that order they had no impetus to rearrange nature” (118).

Christianity, the most anthropocentric of all religions, according to the historian Lynne White Jr., “not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (1205). Whiteside points out that Rene Descartes’ proposition “We make ourselves masters and possessors of nature” (40) subjected our material environment first to rational analysis and then to technological control, and elucidates how Fritjof Capra speaks for many ecologists in *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* when he charges that the Cartesian view of the universe “provided a ‘scientific’ sanction for the manipulation and exploitation of nature that has become typical of Western culture” (61).
There have been different definitions given to ‘nature’ right from the ancient times which paved way to the development of a philosophy of nature. Damian White points out that Bookchin felt that the most promising source for a reworked philosophy of nature is to be found in the western organismic tradition. The pre-Socratic speculations were that the universe has in some sense a moral character irrespective of human purposes. The Aristotelian notion of nature as purposive was trodden over by the later philosophical biology of Hans Jonas and Lewis Mumford’s claim that nature reveals complicated interdependencies, manifold cooperations and immanent purpose, evolving towards higher levels of differentiation and integration. This Western organismic tradition goes along with the biology of self-organisation envisaged by modern science and arrives at the conclusion that reason exists in nature.

The projection of a singular definable identity for nature or environment is an idea vehemently challenged by postmodernism. The Newtonian mechanistic science fosters the enlightenment ethic of the domination of nature by man, the ‘external’ power, and the reductive view of the world as comprising of dead atoms potentiated by external forces. Contrary to this, the postmodern ecological world view is built on the acknowledgement that it is impossible to predict the behaviour of the natural world completely. The Systems Theory of Fritjof Capra and the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock discussed earlier make explicit how and why the long cherished notions of nature’s inherent harmony are challenged by postmodern ecology. Botkin’s *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty First Century* exemplifies the significance of postmodern ecology by presenting a series of scientific case studies that demand a fundamental reassessment of ecology, arguing that the
prevalent view of a very strict concept of a highly structured, ordered, and regulated, steady-state ecological system is now known to be ‘wrong.’ He relates that, “in terms of climate, the cycling of chemical elements, the distribution of species and ecological communities, and the rate of extinction of species, we must reject the possibility of constancy in the biosphere. If the biosphere has not been in a precise steady-state, then life has not been a precise stabilizing device for the biosphere” (150). Chaos Theory explains how most environmental and biological systems, such as weather, noise, population and ecological patterns are governed by non-linear chaotic relationships and unpredictable solutions by which order emerges out of chaos. Ilya Prigogine suggests that “the unpredictability of systems holds implications for the domination of nature and leads to alternative strategies for human interactions with natural systems” (369). Nature offers unpredictability and indeterminacy at a fundamental level which Sandilands substantiates by quoting Donna Haraway’s definition of nature as, “an active, unpredictable, and ungendered trickster she terms coyote whose agency allows it to defy the totalization of human representation. Although nature is active, it is also artifactual: made, constructed, changing and not “Out there” as Other to human culture” (118). She perceives that this re-creation of nature away from reductionist and determinist understandings is intentionally transgressive.

Natural science now reinforces new materialist ontologies regarding notions of change, causality, agency, time and space, with which new materialists conceive matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organisation, and directedness, and thus is no longer simply passive or inert. According to neo-materialism the human species is “being relocated within a natural environment whose material forces
themselves manifest certain agentic capacities and in which the domain of unintended or unanticipated effects is considerably broadened” (Coole and Frost 12). By challenging the exceptionalism attributed to human agency and by subverting “the conventional sense that agents are exclusively human who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality and freedom to make autonomous decisions”(19-20), there should happen a conceptual expansion of agentic boundaries, which as Serpil Oppermann affirms, “opens new feminist pathways to build anti-phallogocentric discourses, because the new materialist concept of agency signifies liberation from objectification process whereby nature and materiality get reduced to being mere objects of knowledge and exploitation” (12). She adds that “the conceptualization of agency in terms of creativity, generative power, action, and effectivity, rather than in terms of its human attributes of intentionality, purposive behaviour, rationality and moral will, opens up an understanding of freedom consonant with feminist ecocriticism’s vision” (12). This vision of freedom is delivered vividly in Elizabeth Grosz’s words as, “always and only enacted within and through the materiality that life and the nonliving shares” (142). This broad definition of earth and its beings forms the preoccupation of ecofeminist literary criticism. An unpredictable nature with manifold dimensions barring out all reductionist essentialism and the amorphous and complex subject ‘woman’ which constitutes a multitude of identities come into an interface in this thesis.

In early civilizations, woman was equated with nature as ‘life force’ and as a fertility symbol. Religions like Judaism initially respected feminine creativity; the kabbala term Sophia for wisdom equates intellectual production with the feminine. But the discovery of biological
paternity sowed the seeds of misogyny resulting in the conquest of the Mother by the new strictures, with women increasingly treated as chattels. Salleh comments how “by the time of the Psalms, femininity was truly subordinate, though hostility to nature was not yet evident — lending weight to the ecofeminist argument that psychosexual domination is prior to the abuse of nature” (55). She identifies four distinct ways in which women’s relation to nature, labour and capital differs from men’s nature relationship:

The first such difference involves experiences mediated by female body organs in the hard but sensuous interplay of birthing and suckling labours. The second set of differences [sic] are historically assigned caring and maintenance chores which serve to ‘bridge’ men and nature. A third involves women’s manual work in making goods as farmers, weavers, herbalists, potters. A fourth set of experiences involves creating symbolic representations of ‘feminine’ relations to ‘nature’ — in poetry, painting, philosophy and everyday talk. (161)

The activities in which women partake are all life-affirming ones through which they develop gender-specific knowledges. Salleh notes, “The result is that women across cultures have begun to express insights that are quite removed from most men’s approaches to global crisis—whether these be corporate greenwash, ecological ethics or socialism” (161). As regards women-nature connection Sandilands reiterates:

Ecofeminist object relations suggest that women are naturally more able to connect to nature because they have never been forced to separate from it and because their labor creates
greater sensitivity to the needs of others . . . while men experience the world in terms of dualism and division (the source of the problem), women experience it in terms of continuity (the source of the solution). (24)

The ecofeminist category ‘woman’ became problematic because of its Western, White, middle class and heterosexual bias and the overtones of biological determinism. Vandana Shiva’s *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* offers a paradigmatic analysis of the plight of Third World women everywhere. The erosion of traditional land-use rights by the introduction of cash cropping strips these women of control of their means of production. For centuries, women engaged hands-on with the habitat to provide food and shelter. But technologically transferred development ruptures this re/productive nature-woman-labour connect, leaving starvation and ecological destruction in its place. Shiva accuses, “Eurocentric science and economics in their arrogance pit a linear, reductionist, managerial logic against nature’s cyclical flows—a pseudo science quite inappropriate to its task. The Green Revolution was a case in point and desertification its result” (45). With Greta Gaard’s publication of the 1993 anthology, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, a new ecofeminist understanding that women were an inherently diverse category and any common experience of women as women was the result of social construction, not biology, became dominant. This paved way to what Sandilands specifies as “the recognition of the need to investigate the category ‘women’ and to analyze ways of making connections between feminism and ecology that respected both the internal multiplicity and the socially produced character of femininity” (111). Gaard asserts in “Living Interconnections with Animals and
Chapter 1

Nature” that “one task of ecofeminists has been to expose . . . dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth” (5). Acknowledging the variant voices Sandilands suggests that:

Ecology must include radical democratic articulation among a diverse range of subject positions in order to challenge dominant notions of the environment as an object and in order to transcend the version of environmental politics offered to us by states and corporations that unproblematically link a shallow “green” agenda with a continued project of economic growth and exploitation. (86)

She problematizes the situation by pointing out that the notion of the “Lacanian subject” in ecology “highlights the impossibility of arriving at a democratic environmental subject position fitting in an alliance of identities” (88). Chantal Mouffe articulates a possible solution in the essay “Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?”: “What we need is a hegemony of democratic values, and this requires a multiplication of democratic practices, institutionalizing them into ever more diverse social relations, so that a multiplicity of subject positions can be formed through a democratic matrix” (41).

To counter the existing societal norms dominated by control and oppression, ecofeminism emphasizes the interdependence of all life, humanity’s role as one element in the earth’s eco-system, and introduces a non-hierarchical system in which all parts are interconnected. Stacy Alaimo writes, “the articulation of woman-native-animal-other is so
deeply entrenched that any attempt to rearticulate those terms into a feminist conversation seems extremely difficult” (149). She acknowledges that “abandoning a female connection with nature leaves the whole discursive field untouched” (149) and also argues that any affinity must be grounded in a political understanding of the separate recognition of women and nature as active agents. In her allusion to the gap between the agency of women and nature as real actors and the symbolic representations in and against which they struggle, she does not acknowledge the parodic possibilities of a performative woman/nature affinity as well. Sandilands argues that this gap “is not only about creating new ideas of women and nature . . . but about active engagement with the old ones to disrupt the notions of gender solidity, natural necessity and reified identity in order to reveal their impossibility” (120). Exploring the performative affinity between women and nature that allows for the possibility of each to disrupt the other Sandilands explains:

From Carlassare, we can take the suggestion that “women’ is a category embedded in complex and changing historical relations; we can also produce a refusal to take it up in any way that is not aware of its essentializing potential. From Alaimo, we can take the critical rejection of a stable and passive nature to the task of interrogating its effects on the production of human life as part of nature, including human subjectivity; we can also produce a political stance that destabilizes the ability of nature to produce anything approximating genuine coherence. From the convergences of these two arguments, I assert that ecofeminism’s productions of affinity between women and nature can be read as potentially destabilizing both
through the performance of one impossible representation against the other. (121)

This representational dilemma demands a postfeminist perspective to ecofeminist operational tools. To encompass the multiplicities of representations in a non-hierarchical manner highlighting all localizations and indigenous aspects of woman as well as nature and their identifications, postfeminism acts as a platform of conglomerations. Within its inclusivity, the universal and the particular get equal importance and the divergent individualities regain their identity and vigour.

Cultural critic Meaghan Morris lends clarity to this ecofeminist position with her contrast between “an essentialist cultural politics dependent on inherited traditions of identity and community . . . and a “differential” or “diasporic” identity politics understood as an historical, as well as cultural, production carried out in the midst of, precisely, flux and change” (267). Sandilands specifies that, “the call for political universality coexists with a desire for the epistemic privilege of particularity; it is in the tension between them that democratic values emerge in recognition of the space between reality and representation” (126).

While upholding a global perspective of democracy, the relationship between the local and the global has to be comprehended cautiously. The Earth Summit of 1992 triggered a global awareness about environmental crisis and called for a new global regulatory order with the moral imperative to address the dire threats to human survival and biospheric integrity. In the ensuing critique of this new regulatory order there arose a
discussion of the difference between globalization from above and globalization from below. Contextually, Sandilands makes a pertinent observation:

In this distinction, the locally devastating regulatory globalism of state negotiation and the profoundly exploitative international division of labour associated with the expansion of multinational capital are carefully divorced from a vision of a global network of empowered, sustainable communities, locally based and culturally specific but internationally connected. (128)

Ariel Salleh warns that “globalization is a colonizing force that literally drives the contradictions of late capitalist patriarchal relations right down to our body cells” (x). Instead of becoming the prey of globalization by moving towards a homogenous state or market-dominated world system, we should choose a locally based democratic politics articulated through a shared resistance. Sandilands declares that “in many ecological discourses, the local is seen not only as the most democratic site but as the most ecologically sound level of production, consumption and deliberation” (132). Vandana Shiva, the critic of globalization identifies the alienation of the rights of local communities to actively participate in environmental decisions as the cause of ecological crisis at the institutional level (Global Ecology 155).

Consequently there arises the need for a global politics oriented towards the empowerment of local communities to define and defend their particular interests. This empowerment strengthens the rights and obligations of the local communities, improves the status of the local
practices of nature and marks cultural diversity as equivalent to biological diversity. Thus ultimately the globalized local or ‘glocal’ becomes the eco-democratic rhetoric that defends diversity. According to Ernesto Laclau, the discursive process by which the meaning of each element in a chain of equivalences alters and is altered by the presence of the others lies at the heart of a hegemonic radical democratic politics. Sandilands relates that “The democratic-hegemonic project lies . . . in the constitution of the universal as a horizon” (133). The local struggle instead of limiting itself to the pursuit of local self-interest comes to embody the universal by constructing a variety of local struggles into a global chain of equivalences, thereby effecting the democratisation of the global. Laclau makes a pertinent observation that, “If democracy is possible, it is because the universal does not have any necessary body, any necessary content. Instead, different groups compete to give their particular aims a temporary function of universal representation” (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 89). The universal and the particular are thus contingent moments in an ongoing democratic process. Sandilands integrates the arguments posed thus:

In the terms of Shiva’s analysis, the status-quo of eco-managerialism poses itself as global where it is, in fact, a globalized local; in place of global management, the localized global seeks to challenge the legitimacy of the relations in which the part stands for the whole, offering up for the future a more genuine construction of universal, interests in which the local becomes the primary and truer global term. (134)
Ecofeminism attempts to become a genuinely global politics by attempting to come to terms with some of its Western centric limitations and theorizing more explicitly the role of global capital in both the domination of woman and the exploitation of nature. It expands its scope by including the specific struggles and needs of women from the South and by calling for a diversity of ecofeminist perspectives. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that ecofeminism must reject a capitalist version of the ‘good life’ based on high technology, mass consumerism, and unrestrained economic growth in favour of locally based, life-affirming, culturally diverse, and self-reliant productive and reproductive communities. (318). In “Feminism and Ecofeminism: Beyond the Dualistic Assumptions of Women, Men and Nature” the social ecofeminist Val Plumwood questions dualistic categories and insists that “women must be treated as fully human and as fully part of culture as men, but that both sexes must challenge this dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognizes ‘human’ identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature” (12). The democratic culture envisioned by these ecofeminists is to be built up on a global scale for which a redefinition of the universal seems indispensable. According to Sandilands, ecofeminism maintains “a commitment to the redefinition of the universal by accepting an abstract notion of universality to redefine male/female and human/nature relations” (141). She explains that this new universal is the existing truth born out of different women’s unique experience of nature and not their equality. Janet Biehl is critical of ecofeminism’s tendency to think of the world as an ‘oikos’ to be organized with ‘women’s values’ and also of its inclination to spirituality by valourizing the irrational and atavistic. For
her, “the democratic political realm—as opposed to the statist public realm—is the only realm we have that has the potential to contest both the private interests that are destroying the biosphere and the public hierarchies that attempt to degrade and instrumentalize human beings” (Finding Our Way 151).

Democracy has a perpetual emptiness at its centre and any content can fill it only for a short while. The preservation of emptiness is paramount for a non-ideological democratic discourse. Explaining the place of Real in democratic politics, Yannis Stavrakakis argues that a non-ideological democratic discourse is centrally concerned with developing “an ethically satisfactory (though not necessarily ‘satisfying’) position . . . encircling the [R]eal, the lack” (17). Sandilands makes clear, “While, as is the case with all discourse (language being the realm of the Symbolic), the Real remains veiled and untouched in the non-ideological position, the strategy of encircling it rather than bypassing it involves enacting discursive forms that will attempt to come to terms with . . . the Ethics of the Real” (188). The existence of this lack or Real at the centre often creates limits and the democratic ecological ethics must encircle these limits. Brian Tokar observes that by building up an ecological democratic ethics encircling the Real or the lack, “ecofeminism has matured largely as a personal sensibility and a philosophical perspective, rather than as a distinct social movement” (xiii). He finds grassroots ecological activism as a way of reclaiming public space to reinvigorate particular traditions of civic life and discussion. Democratic ecological politics opens up a proliferation of discourses around nature offering multiple interpretations to nature and in the process, democratizes it. This
kind of democratic ecological politics is what Karen J. Warren meant when she wrote:

Ecofeminist analysis of the sources and solutions to the twin dominations of women and non-human nature are structurally multicultural—reflecting the perspectives of local, native, indigenous peoples of both the Northern and the Southern hemisphere—and “pluralistic”—rejecting universalizing, essentializing, “one right answer” approaches to human social and ecological problems. (*Ecological Feminism* 2)

With a vision of how the democratic politics of ecofeminism might create the possibility of the experience of wildness by preserving and enriching ecosystems, by recognizing the limits of the social and taking up a less arrogantly exploitative stance, Sandilands intensely argues for the liberation from the politics of identity. She asserts:

What should replace identity is the democratic openness that comes with a recognition of the impossibility of identity. Such an openness is better for woman, as gender can then be subjected to question as part of a political strategy; it is better for nature, as its enigmatic presence can then be shown to appear in politics without the essentializing and anthropocentric tendencies of identification; it is better for democracy, as it requires not only that we converse but invite new conversations. (209)
Salleh unfolds the expanse that ecofeminism accommodates by stating that this movement carries forward four revolutions in one. She delineates ecofeminist politics:

It is a feminism in as much as it offers an uncompromising critique of capitalist patriarchal culture from a womanist perspective; it is a socialism because it honours the wretched of the earth; it is an ecology because it reintegrates humanity with nature; it is a postcolonial discourse because it focuses on deconstructing Eurocentric domination. (192)

In questioning the faultlines of essentialism and generalizations, to prevent the unique, indigenous local knowledges and practices from dissolving into a monolithic globalized ecofeminism, and to promote the democratic ecological ethics in ecofeminism, the postfeminist position can act as a positive force. The sweeping threats of globalization can be fended off by adopting a glocal perspective which balances the binary, the global and the local. By integrating these strategies what the study puts forth is a ‘postfeminist-ecoefeminist glocal outlook’ which has the calibre to confront universalism, essentialism and the homogenizing tendencies of globalization. The thesis is set to demonstrate how the rereading of the poems of Walker and Sugathakumari in the postfeminist light will bring out the indigenous engravings in them and demonstrate how they work out a counter to the generalizing and essentializing tendencies. The following chapters will also examine in detail the theoretical and political dimensions of ecofeminism in general so as to draw its discursive platform.