“What is the point
Of being artists
If we cannot save our life?” Walker (CP 345).
“How many hours more?
Though I do not know,
Let me fill them all
With fragrant honey.” Sugathakumari (SKS 356).

In *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* James Lovelock analyses the cause of climate change and loss of biodiversity which affects the working of the Earth’s operating system and diagnoses that, “Individuals occasionally suffer a disease called polycythaemia, an overpopulation of red blood cells. By analogy, Gaia’s illness could be called polyanthroponemia where humans overpopulate until they do more harm than good” (151).

The democratic ecological ethics promoted by the ecofeminist discourse promises an ecologically sustainable world that can combat the
present environmental problems. An ecofeminist dialogical approach shall facilitate one to “engage critically with and consider alternatives to those aspects of our society that undermine egalitarian relations not only between humans but also between humans and nonhumans and among the various other forms of life on the planet” (Tassoni 205). The relevance of ecofeminist discourse as an integrating politics is underlined by Ariel Salleh, when she shows that, “socialism, ecology, feminism and postcolonial struggle can be grounded, unified and empowered by an ecofeminist dialectic of internal relations” (ix). The reassessment of capitalist, patriarchal relations and the recognition of globalization as a colonizing force have refurbished the ecofeminist movement. It now aims at the building up of a bio-centric, non-dualistic, and cooperative platform, by reinventing the inherent interrelationships and the diversity of any balanced ecosystem.

Ecofeminist literature should be on guard against an unproblematised theorisation of women’s connection with nature, for, by constructing yet another dualism, it serves only to reinforce the master ideologies of essentialism and hierarchy which ecofeminists are attempting to shake off. If women are perceived to be in unproblematic unity with nature, it would in turn strengthen the alienation of male-associated culture from the female-associated nature. Conversely, if an unbalanced emphasis is given to differences in species, race, gender or other facets of identity, it can deny “the complexity of human and natural identities and lead to the hierarchical ranking of oppressions on the basis of importance or causality” (Armbruster 98). Therefore ecofeminist literary critics must offer “a perspective that complicates cultural conceptions of human identity and of human relationships with nonhuman
nature instead of relying on unproblematized visions of continuity or difference”(99). For Greta Gaard the fundamental realization of ecofeminism is that our cultural, economic, and ecological crises stem from the conceptualization of the self as separate from the ‘other’. In “Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature” she aspires that:

Insofar as an ecofeminist approach to literary criticism can illuminate our understanding of these crises, their sources, and their present functioning, perhaps it can also be used to uncover and to generate the means for healing this fundamental alienation. If so, an ecofeminist perspective has the potential for bringing literary criticism into dialogue with the most important issues of our time. (245)

These diverse perspectives with emphasis on aspects varying from identity to cultural and ecological crises, underscore the decisive responsibilities engaged by the democratic stance of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminist politics encompasses a broad spectrum of multifaceted objectives. Ariel Salleh expresses the complexity of ecopolitics as, “the push for population control is authoritarian; nature preservation is both conservative and radical; celebration of diversity is liberal; calls for equality are socialist; and the preference for decentralized solutions is anarchist”(187). Ecofeminist writings underlined by a wide range of political engagement nevertheless address the burning issues that endanger the survival of life on earth. How ecofeminist literature fosters the objectives of ecofeminism is explored in this chapter by analyzing how it takes on the concepts of identity, diversity and continuity, and how it highlights multiplicity, democracy and interconnectedness.
Ecofeminism puts forward a complex model of human identity and the relationships humans have with the non-human nature. Ecofeminists respect the otherness and the distinct individuality of all beings, as the family members of the variegated but singular community of nature and instead of succumbing to the temptation of merging with them, seek in its place a differentiated oneness with it. Karla Armbruster warns against the formulation of essentialistic identities of woman or nature that lacks an attention to difference and explains, “for the differences between women and the rest of nature mean that women can participate in cultural attitudes and practices that are environmentally destructive, and the differences between women mean that some participate more fully and consciously in these attitudes and practices than others” (103). The ecofeminists who want to avoid reinforcing the dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy are compelled to take up the challenge of working toward a more complex theory of human and natural subjectivity that goes beyond the static concepts of identity that are found in both the “Ocean of Continuity” and the “Desert of Difference” (104). Poststructuralist feminism complements the ideas most commonly associated with ecofeminism by providing an approach to identity that encourages neither the erasure of difference by representing women and nature as homogeneous continuous elements nor its overemphasis, which can lead to the alienation and the resultant domination of humans and nature. The key to a poststructuralist feminist theory of identity that allows for the ability of the subject to participate subversively in the construction of her/his own and others’ subjectivities through discourse is the insight that the subject is constantly changing as it is exposed to
shifting ideological forces and different discursive structures. Armbruster remarks:

It is the contradictions and conflicts among discursive systems and among axes of difference, and thus within the individual subject, that allows for the possibility of multiple meanings, or in other words, for interpretation. And it is through the act of interpreting the discursive and ideological forces acting on her that the individual subject can participate in the construction of those forces in return. (111)

This perspective destabilizes the conventional assumptions of human subjectivity and the identity of nature and refuses a definite, static divide between traditionally constructed binaries like nature/culture and myth/reality. Based on this non-mechanical, fluid and transformed vision of identity one can assert that, “differences between humans and the rest of nature as well as the differences among humans, including gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, need not be the roots of conflict; instead, they can be the potential source of new and more sustainable relationships both within human culture and between culture and nonhuman nature” (Armbruster 115). By venturing beyond the boundaries of modernist ecofeminist theory, ecofeminist literary criticism broadens its prospects in order to suggest exemplary models of human identity and human and non-human relationships strong enough to challenge dominant ideologies through interpretations and through the political perceptions and actions that texts and interpretations can inspire.

A deconstruction of the concept of identity will provide possibilities for shaping a democratic vision for ecofeminists and will also promote the
goal of an ecological ethic, built on cooperation and interconnectedness. Speaking against the myth of woman’s identity Donna Haraway says, “With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for a belief in “essential” unity. There is nothing about being “female” that naturally binds women” (149). In recognition of this truth, Sandilands claims that ecofeminism should address the “limitations of its static notion of identity, especially its related claim to speak of and as nature, and to reject the notion of Cartesian subjectivity upon which this “speaking identity” is based” (xix).

One solution to the crisis of identity politics is to explore a more flexible, open-ended version of subjectivity, such as the one offered in Lacanian-inspired psychoanalysis, in which a subject is constituted imperfectly in discourse rather than transcendentally prior to discourse. By articulating the diverse subject positions of humans, non-humans and nature fostered by this new vision, ecofeminist literature becomes the platform that challenges the dominant notions of environment, gender and their interrelations.

For ecofeminists, nature is not a static and stagnant entity, but a dynamic living organism, unpredictable and evolving. Postmodern authors William Cronon and N. Katherine Hayles in Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature call into question not only the stability and unified wholeness of nature as both a representation and a physical presence but also the multiple and often contradictory relations between and among humans and non-humans manifested in such representations. (84). They argue that the contemporary and historical human/non human relations cannot be adequately understood as a linear narrative of culture’s domination over a passive and victimized nature. The unpredictable and
aleatory status of nature makes it possible to defy its representational vision as a cultural construct of human origins. Donna Haraway opines that nature is “made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans” (145). Even though Haraway makes this observation in a posthumanist context, her definition of nature as active, unpredictable, ungendered and artifactual is quite relevant to the ecofeminist objectives.

Ecofeminists discern the distinctive aspects of nature and the non-humans in their writings and nature appears as an active, independent entity, often as an ungendered subject, in ecofeminist literature. Both Alice Walker and Sugathakumari have revealed their reverence for the untamed beauty of nature and have also acknowledged the rejuvenating power of nature, without restraint. Walker’s attitude to the natural environment is influenced by the traditional American Indian philosophy of the ‘Sacred Circle of Life’. The anthropologist Stan Steiner explains, “In the Circle of Life, every being is no more, or less, than any other. We are all sisters and brothers. Life is shared with the bird, bear, insects, plants, mountains, clouds, stars, sun” (113). This holistic view lets Walker acknowledge that all of creation is of one substance and therefore deserving of the same respect. Walker especially uses the shamanic dream vision of tree, garden images and scenes of African landscape for the purpose. While illustrating her experience in Africa in “African Images”, she draws pen pictures of the zebra, the Nile, the Karamojongs, the cobra and Mt. Kenya with equal gravity and importance. The passionate courtship with trees that Walker cherished in her life and writings was by respecting the ‘otherness of nature’—the distinct individuality of each tree as pictured in “The Backyard Careyes Autumn 2001” or “The Tree.”
poems like “Marathinu Sthuthi” (Salute to the Tree) and “Thaivekkal” (Planting Trees) Sugathakumari explicates the service a tree does to the earth. Forests, rain, sea and moonlight show up with distinct faces in her poems denoting their diverse but definitive subject positions. The spider in “The Moment I Saw Her” and the petunia in “The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom” emerge as unique characters for Walker.

The recurring images of peacock, elephant and oyster and the singular representations of the wounded lion, the stoned dog, the buffalo or the hunch back ant in the poetic world of Sugathakumari display the subjective agency of the non-human identities. The refugee women depicted in “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman) and “Chudunna Nenjummay” (With a Blazing Heart) are discrete characters; when the Bengali woman is sad but sings hymns, the Gujarati woman is mad, and is in an utterly pathetic condition. “Vanitha Commission” (Women’s Commission) presents female victims belonging to all age groups, each having a unique reason for her plight, from dowry harassment to negligence at old age. The poets have also depicted human beings as exploiting nature for their selfish needs and also as yearning to get consolation from the sea and the flowers. The flexible, open-ended version of the subjectivity of nature, the humans and the non-humans discerned in these poems is in tune with the radical democratic vision envisaged by ecofeminism. By presenting the complexities of these identities the poetic vision of Walker and Sugathakumari transgresses the simple delineation of human and non-human continuity and difference.

The democratic ecological ethic proposed by ecofeminism favours the appreciation of the value of all elements in nature. Ecocentrism,
which stresses on the right of all organisms to exist, was popularized by the ecologist Aldo Leopold who formulated the bio-centric land ethic which expanded the human community to include soils, waters, plants, animals or collectively the land. Greg Garrard observes:

The notion of ecocentrism has proceeded from, and fed back into, related belief systems derived from Eastern religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, from heterodox figures in Christianity such as St Francis of Assisi (1182-1286) and Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), and from modern reconstructions of American Indian, pre-Christian Wiccan, shamanistic and other ‘primal’ religions. (22-23)

The idea of bio-centric equality believes that all species are intrinsically equal and therefore have an equal right to life. The ethical framework of ecofeminism which is built on an ecocentric platform involves the precepts of equity between human and non-human communities, moral consideration for human and non-human nature, respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity, and the inclusion of women, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability.

Environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott claims:

The typical traditional American Indian attitude was to regard all features of the environment as enspirited. These entities possessed a consciousness, reason, and volition, no less intense and complete than a human being’s. The Earth itself, the sky, the winds, rocks, streams, trees, insects, birds and all other
animals therefore had personalities and were thus as fully persons as other human beings. (243)

Poetic expressions of both Walker and Sugathakumari verbalize experiences integrated on a bio-centric frame. The description of desert with its creatures, trees and the moon, leading a harmonious life invests it with a unique value in Walker’s poem “On Sight”. The speaker of the poem feels that the trees raise their arms heavenward and converse with the sky, stars, clouds and the sun. “African Images” attributes equal significance to the animals, the Nile, Mt. Kenya and the humans the speaker meets on an African tour. “What Will Save Us” reveals the poet’s plea for equal treatment of every creature, restoration of dignity to the cow, intelligence to the pig, sacredness to the child, will to woman and tenderness to man. Using the techniques of first person narrative and personification Sugathakumari breathes emotions and thoughts into the non-human characters like the oyster, the garrulous bird, and the futile tree in her poems. Muthuchippi’ (The Oyster) is the monologue of an oyster which travels about the ocean bed to reach the water surface and having got exposed to the sun it receives ‘a tear drop of the sky’ with intense pain and goes back down for an eternal sleep. The oyster feels gratified that, its pain will pave way for an immortal creation, ‘the pearl’ for which the adventurous man shall come in search of her. The poet translates the chemical reaction that happens within an oyster into the animal’s biologic accomplishment. “Vayadikkili” (The Garrulous Bird) presents the angst of a bird about its daily chores, and “Pazhmaram” (The Futile Tree) is a dying tree’s recital of its longing to sustain the beings which it shelters. The tree narrates how at dusk a pair of birds visit her and perch on her shoulders with reverence, how in the early morning
some little birds come to sit on her breast and enjoy the dawn and how a little breeze comes occasionally “and sits on my lap / for a little while / in its flight afar” (355-356). “Aana” (The Elephant), a poem dedicated to all elephants tortured to death, is a stark portrayal of man’s cruelty to the pachyderm. The poem depicts a single day in the life of an elephant who toils from dawn till late hours into the night lifting up felled trees, walking in the blazing sun and then is decked to carry god’s idol in the temple festival at night. The poet narrates how, when the sound of the great rejoicing in the temple festival rises to its crescendo, with hot tears rolling down its cheeks, the elephant waits for the god to come and rescue it from this heartrending life. K. Ramachandran Nair comments that the poet places her soul upon the elephant’s soul while narrating this story. “The elephant, the poet and the reader become partners of one great sorrow. It is not a matter of sympathy, compassion or fellow feeling, but a sharing or unification of the experience” (602).

While using animal images to express the speaker’s own self as in “Eretta Naya” (The Stoned Dog) and “Eruma” (She-Buffalo), and to draw the distinctive qualities of non-humans as in “Muthuchippi” (The Oyster) and “Aana” (The Elephant), or to portray the poet’s adoration for the disposition of animals as in “Murivetta Simham” (The Wounded Lion), Sugathakumari goes into the fine details to bring out the characteristic features of the fauna she deals with. Through these poems she contributes to the ecological ethic of mutual respect and interconnectedness between the humans and the non-humans envisioned by the ecofeminists. Aathmaraman writes:
The knowledge that, close to a human-centred consumerist modern society there exists a wild nature full of plants and animals, and their protection is more of a need for survival rather than a moral responsibility, has been a transient and uncertain fact for many poets. But for Sugathakumari it has been a continuous and determined one with crucial significance. (890)

Night rain, White flowers, Pandanus, Kanikonna and even a Kakka poovu (an ordinary village flower) emerge as effective characters instilling the feelings of majesty, nostalgia, love and solace in the mind of the speaker. By creating these non-human characters, both the poets not only underline their appreciation of the intrinsic value of the elements in nature, but also stress on the right of all organisms to exist. The proliferation of such representations implies the care and respect an ecofeminist mind cherishes for each individual identity in the universe.

Ecofeminist vision of the democratic politicization of gender and nature demands the recognition of diverse social relations and a multiplicity of subject positions in society. Ecofeminism had an essentialist view of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ once, as Sandilands notes, “it seemed politically necessary to show some underlying coherence to the category woman in order to explain the relationship between the degradation of women and the exploitation of nature” (110). But this theorisation was challenged by the differently situated women around the globe for its biological determinism and its preference for those who are white, western, upper middle class and heterosexual. The later ecofeminist comprehension of the diversity of woman and the
assumption that any common experience of woman as woman was the result of social construction, not biology, triggered the recognition of the need to analyse the connections between woman and nature that “respected both the internal multiplicity and the socially produced character of femininity” (111). Postmodern ecology propounds the unpredictable and artificial character of nature which destabilizes the notion of nature as a stable and passive Other, easily accessible to humans for exploitation or representation.

The challenge to representation brought in by the complex subjects, woman and nature, is taken up by ecofeminism by relying on a democratic approach. Referring to the democratic subject Salleh remarks that a multiplicity of subject positions or nodal points and a relative autonomy of the feminist, the ethnic or the ecological struggles are favoured by the postmodern conception of agency. Democracy is involved in the proliferation of points of social conflict and the decentralization of political power to create new definitions of power and new codes of ethics.

Arguing for the formulation of a multiplicity of subject positions through a democratic matrix, Chantal Mouffe in “Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?” declares that this, “project of radical and plural democracy requires the existence of multiplicity, of plurality, and of conflict” (41). Ecofeminists try to break free from the conventional techniques of representation and bring in a proliferation of representations to prevent essentialist attitudes. By portraying the diverse social relations inherent in these representations they envision a democratic politicization
of gender and nature by challenging the hegemonic constructs. It opens up new spaces of social, political and ecological life to scrutiny and debate.

Forest appears in different forms in Sugathakumari’s poems, as a gregarious host in “Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California), as a caring mother in “Silent Valley” and a devastated character in “Ningalen Lokathe Enthu Cheythu?”(What Did You Do to My World?). The Bharatmatha, the earth mother, the sea, the moonlight and the festival of Onam are differently presented in her poems highlighting the various shades and significations. A communion with nature as depicted by the relation between the speaker and the cloud-messenger in “Meghasandesham” (The Cloud’s Message), the portrayal of birth cycle effecting the strong bond between the humans and the non-humans in “Janmandarangaliloode” (Along the Birth Cycle), the little breeze reaching every being in nature with an eternal fragrance of the spring, as pictured in “Kaatu” (Wind) are suggestive of the ecofeminist challenge of the human/non-human hegemonic identifications. Walker’s garden of infinite fruits in “At First It Is True, I Thought There Were Only Peaches and Wild Grapes” and earth mother with immense green lap and brown embrace in “We Have a Beautiful Mother” are examples of unique representations. By inscribing her own geographical space in these poems, she surpasses the bounds and embraces the world illustrating a democratic outlook engaging the tension between the universal and the particular. Sandilands observes:

As one can never stand outside the Symbolic order (for example, the category “women” in its discursive/productive effects) in order to claim a “pure” representation unmarked by
the categorical relations of oppression and domination, one is left with the possibility of an internal categorical parody based on the inevitable disjuncture between subject (Real) and subject position (Symbolic). (105)

The democratic ethics of ecofeminism basically rejects separation and binaries by recognizing the fundamental interconnectedness of all life on earth. With the perception of ecofeminism as a transformative one which integrates connectedness and wholeness into theory and practice, Ynestra King in “Feminism and the Revolt of Nature” points out the experience of multiple otherness, of sex, race and class oppression endured by the Third-World women. She adds, “We are learning how women’s lives are the same and different across these divisions, and we are beginning to engage the complexities of racism in our culture, our movement, and our theory” (204). Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy hope that an ecofeminist perspective will enhance “explorations of connections and differences among “characters” in a text—between humans and animals, between culture and nature, and across human differences of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation—connections and differences that affect our relationships with nature and with each other” (7). Cautious about the attributed connections between woman and nature, ecofeminists try to unravel the politics behind them. In “The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology” King carefully points out that if men feel more alienated from non-human nature than women do, it is a result of culture and history rather than an inherent aspect of men’s identities. And hence ecofeminism should work toward “a dynamic developmental theory of the person—male and female—who emerges out of nonhuman nature, where difference is neither reified or ignored and the dialectical relationship
between human and nonhuman nature is understood” (131). Non-human nature exerts a significant shaping force on human identity, even to the extent of representing aspects of identity such as psyche and sexuality as a kind of inner nature element. The poststructuralist insight, ‘we are part of vast networks, texts written by larger and stronger forces’ can easily be expanded to see non-human nature as one of those forces. Generally ecofeminists favour a relationship of cooperation and connectedness between the humans and the non-humans. By portraying their distinct aspects and their unique relation with each other and emphasizing the connections and differences underling their relationships, the ecofeminist writers contribute to the promotion of the democratic ecological ethics.

The ‘kinswoman spider’, ‘the revolutionary Petunia’ and ‘the beautiful mother earth’ appearing in Walker’s poems symbolize the connections she draws between the humans and the non-humans. Addressing Winnie Mandela, the wife of the African leader Nelson Mandela, Walker declares in “Winnie Mandela We Love You” that hers is the contemporary face of the mother of the human race. These comparisons reveal the poet’s universal vision that accommodates the earth, the non-humans and the human beings. In Sugathakumari’s poems, the speaker’s identifying his/her isolation with that of the caged peacock in “Kavihridayamo Nee Vihagamo?” (Poet’s Heart or the Bird, Art Thou?), and the helpless endurance of restrictions with the trained parrot’s conditioned behaviour in picking a tarot card and returning to the cage, without trying a chance for escape portrayed in “Pakshisasthram” (Fortune Telling with Bird) show the multifaceted relations a human mind has with the non-human world. The fraternity between a cuckoo and a moth against human beings in “Nisasalabham”, where the cuckoo gives a
special warning call to the moth that accidentally perches on the leaves of a book, the grim and majestic tolerance of the wounded lion in “Murivetta Simham”, the unique night queen in “Nishagandhi”, the blue Kurinji flowers which blossom once in twelve years in “Kurinji Pookkal” (The Kurinji Flowers), and the goddess-like Pandanus in “Poongaitha” (Flowering Pandanus) recreate in poetry, a distinct aura of life for the non-human world. For Walker, the sufferings of the negroes, the plight of the Karamojongs and the callousness of the Whites become raw material for depicting the oppressed humans. The exploitation of the aborigines of Attappadi, and the neglect of bureaucracy in alleviating poverty and erosion of national values form themes of Sugathakumari’s portrayal of suffering human beings. In the process, the connections and differences in the relationship among human beings, nature and the non-humans get etched in the poems.

Essentialist arguments have been used as a common ploy to mark woman as incapable of acting as an agent of culture, society, and history. The critics of ecofeminist philosophy insist that ecofeminism is essentialist; that it purports that women have a biological closeness to nature than men. In “The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology” Ynestra King exposes the latent dangers of such postulates of by explaining how the act of separating women and nature from men and culture, “does not necessarily question the nature-culture dualism or recognize that women’s ecological sensitivity and life orientation is a socialized perspective that could be socialized right out of us depending on our day-to-day lives” (23). The cultural ecofeminist Susan Griffin goes beyond narrow, biological connections between women and nature in her Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her and “highlights the
connections between the cultural positions of women and natural entities, suggesting that male-dominated culture has created the bond between women and nature that she seeks to reclaim and use in a liberatory fashion” (Armbruster 100).

For both King and Griffin, it is women and nature’s shared oppression with in male-dominated Western culture rather than biology or essential identity that constructs a special closeness between them. Despite their strong anti-dualistic bent, they too, like all subjects within Western culture, are vulnerable to the pervasive and often subtle influence of dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy. This is a concern for all ecofeminists since it limits the subversive potential of ecofeminist undertakings. The central point of the ecofeminist agenda is the goal of individual, social and ideological change, specifically a change that will improve the cultural standing of women and nature. Essentialism seems antithetical to change as she explains, “An identity based on essential qualities is unchanging, and the way essentialist connections between women and nature support dominant ideologies also limit ecofeminists’ capacity to catalyze social and cultural change” (101). She also makes the pertinent observation that the ecofeminists’ intense focus on the connections between woman and nature can lead them to erase all differences between the two, in such a way that they appropriate for all women nature’s status within contemporary Western society as the exploited victim of human culture. This representation of women’s bond with nature as something all women share and which significantly shapes every woman’s identity resulted in the lack of attention paid to difference between women and non-human nature and also among women. Ariel Salleh comments, “When people take words and labels as representing
fixed identities, essences, they adopt a naive realism whereby mutually transforming processes in nature or society are held artificially still and constant” (158).

The feminists of colour criticize the white for employing an essentialist notion of women which is invariably accompanied by an erasure of difference between women and allows women with race, class, or national privileges to sidestep a critique of power and participation in structures of domination. Essentializing of women further assumes that certain experiences represent the experience of all women and the celebration of commonalities leads to ignore the diversities of woman’s lives based on race, nation, age and sexuality. The universalized notions of women or women’s experience are prone to prefer a section of women and their experiences while marginalizing others. The criticism also points to the persistent problem in feminism and all politics based on common or collective identity, of obscuring difference regardless of whether identity is taken to be essential or constructed.

By inviting attention to the essentialist politics of ecofeminism, Sandilands declares:

Despite the efforts of antiracist, socialist, and social ecofeminists to problematize cultural ecofeminist assumptions about woman in her relationship to nature, all of these variants remain committed to the discovery of a position from which to speak of oppression, an existing and coherent standpoint from which to describe another way of being in the world. (66)
Therefore, as she adheres, it is very significant that race and class are to be considered alongside gender and nature in ecofeminist analyses of oppression and programmes for political change. Sandilands also draws attention to the fact that “not all women were affected in the same ways by ecological degradation and that not all women viewed nature through the same lens” (51).

The language of social constructivism and anti-essentialism has had a strong and positive effect on ecofeminist political theory. Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* demands that both women and men should actively participate in the deconstruction of dualisms by revealing the androcentric interests in which they are located. She declares that women are not nature; men are not culture and adds, “In this alternative, women are not seen as purely part of nature any more than men are; both men and women are both part of nature and culture. Both men and women can stand with nature and work for breaking down the dualistic construction of culture” (36). In her analysis of dualism, she questions the equations of femininity and nature as bad and masculinity which is called humanity as good by pointing out how these hegemonic conceptions are an outcome of a patriarchal world view.

Contemporary ecofeminist writings portray the continuing connection of the humans with the non-humans, the diverse positions of women and the different levels of oppressions associated with gender and nature. Sugathakumari’s poems, which challenge hegemonic identifications, can also be seen negating the dualistic and essentialistic conceptions. In “Janmandarangaliloode” (Along the Cycles of birth) when the speaker remembers his past life and his wives as fish, flowers,
birds, deer, snakes and gypsies it becomes an anti-anthropocentric statement. “Meghasandesham” (The Cloud’s Message) which depicts the possibility of a communication between the separated couple and the raincloud-messenger is another instance which questions received notions. Walker’s holistic vision revolts against the dualisms generated by the conventional society. She feels it to be the duty of all human beings irrespective of gender, to uphold the visions of equality and democracy. The democratic vision in “What Will Save Us?” tries to dismantle the division between the human beings and animals, and “When You Look” affirms that all are equal before God.

Woman-nature interface in creation, preservation, consolation, tolerance, suffering and resistance is depicted by both the poets using elaborate images and diverse implications in their poems. In “Marubhoomiyude Vasantham” (The Spring of the Desert) Sugathakumari pictures the sorrow of the desert pining for rain and the subsequent magical transformation rain brings to the barren land, though a transient one, equating it with the hopeful heart of a woman who yearns for procreation and the tolerant heart of a mother who doesn’t give up in the trials and tribulations of life. The whole strength of a mother-child bond is infused in “Silent Valley” which depicts the poet as a devotee and as a daughter visiting the pristine forest who calls her “Baby!” in response to her addressing the forest as “Mother.” “Irupathionnam Noottandinodu” (To the Twenty First Century) depicts the earth mother as “Griefstricken, fear ridden, with enfolded hands remain s the earth / Save her, and wipe off her tears with your hands” (900). The prayer stems from the belief that it is the obligation of every one of us to protect the earth mother on whom we depend for sustenance. In “August 15, 1981” the poet warns about the
fiery eyes of Mother India that shall at any time let ablaze the yellow glories erected in this land without righteousness. Comparison between the earth and the mother is reiterated in Walker’s poems describing the beauty and vastness of the earth mother in “We Have a Beautiful Mother” and her powerful potential for creation and destruction in *A Poem Travelled down My Arm* wherein she writes how the earth mother has the capacity to absorb the whole life on earth, destroy and then recreate a world of perfect beings, her life being a long one that can “start over and over again without us” (APTDMA 118).

Sugathakumari’s “Penkunju-‘90” (The Girl Child ‘90) which pictures the thoughts of a mother about the fate of her abandoned daughter begins with a horrific reminder of the lurking dangers waiting for girls in our society and ends in the optimistic wish that the daughters of the future shall save the earth and the women. The speaker foresees that the child shall grow into a self reliant woman who gives birth to kids who will support her. She hopes, “Leaning upon her shoulder / the earth shall get consoled” (675). The poet gives the message that, by consoling the stranded and the helpless with a healing touch, both woman and nature can instil love for life among them. “Ambalamani” (The Temple Bell) signifies the rhythm of life held aloft by the feminine under all circumstances, which forever functions as a rejuvenating touch. When the speaker hears the toll of a temple bell from a dilapidated temple, he/she recollects the good old days when the temple was decked with lamps and the idol was worshipped by scores of people. The bell, though broken, continues its duty with which it enlivens the glorious memories of the temple, even when nobody stays to listen to it, thus preserving the holiness of the temple and thereby symbolizing the preservative quality of
nature. Ecofeminists speak of the woman’s role in harnessing the indigenous, traditional knowledges, which are revived to foster an ecologically sustainable way of life. Dr. S. Saradakutty points out:

The ecofeminists intend to let the industrial society learn that nature produces not only wood and money, but also soil and water. Sugathakumari’s poem “Marangal” (Trees) is based on the special relation of woman with nature. The ecofeminist perspective that only by the protection of woman and nature, who share similar experiences of victimization due to pollution and exploitation, can peace and prosperity reign in the society, can be found in the poems and activism of Sugathakumari. (119)

“Marangal” (Trees), which portrays the speaker’s joy at the sight of the numerous trees she had planted and her disgust at the sarcastic attitude of the youth who accuses her of cherishing emotional ties with trees, presents the significance of afforestation as a personal, emotional need that gains a universal dimension with its visionary depth. Walker epitomises Maria Sabina, a legendary shaman and healer who dedicated her life to the health and happiness of all humans, and had a heart that was inexplicable in its loving kindness, generosity and grace. In “Bring Me the Heart of Maria Sabina” the poet wants everyone to accept Sabina’s heart and feel as indigenous to the planet as she had felt. Walker describes her as, “A poor Maztec Indian from the mountains of Oaxaca, she has left a legacy of an amazing freedom, the foundation of which is absolute trust in the goodness of the earth; in its magic, in its love of us humans, in its ever present assistance the moment we give ourselves, unconditionally,
into its wonder” (*ATGE* xiv). In Sugathakumari’s “Veliyettathil” (In the High Tide) the dejected speaker on a beach addresses the tide as a goddess and as “the holy herald of spring” (42) and wishes to be cleansed of all his disappointments by the seascape to which he has come seeking solace. “Kadalinodu” addresses the sea as a woman who brings consolation to her eternal lover, the speaker who feels:

> When I watch the kindness of your fingers that fondle
> Softly my feet, too tired and cracked with long walks,
> When I hear you call again to sink and sleep
> In your cool breasts and to know peace,
> I wake up again, forgetting myself
> In the enchanting intoxication of the strong
> And incessant rain of your tumultous love,
> Deep and fully raging, again as a gale I embrace you! (330)

In “Veluthapoovukal” (The White Flowers) the poet portrays the unexpected sight of a tree full of white flowers as, “With the fine and soft petals fully, white and white, smiling / A thousand flowers caressed us cool, with their compassionate eyes” (188). The tired travellers get replenished at this sight which brings back to them all those soft feelings swept away in the course of their difficult lives. The dark, rotten toothed servant girl who bears the marks of torture upon her, in Walker’s “Remember?” calls herself blessed with dark skin, healing eyes and ears that listens to others’ problems. With a determined, optimistic tone she says:

> I am the woman
> offering two flowers
whose roots
are twin
Justice and Hope
Hope and Justice. (CP 318)

Sugathakumari’s “Venalinu Munpu Oru Mazha” pictures the scorching summer as a fire ordeal through which the earth mother gets purified and the arrival of the last rain before this torment is described as:

Now comes the last rain of showers
The sad and frightened earth bursts into tears.
And with twinkling tears, she receives wholly,
The water which wanders and arrives pure. (195)

The suffering earth is compared to a woman by recalling the different stages of life’s cycle undergone by both. Though they are at the mercy of the master gods, recognizing their own superior faculty for creation they remain humble and silently suffer the pains in order to give birth to ‘the song of life’, an ordeal which brings a sense of sacredness to their sacrifice and suffering. Nature’s victimization gets a heartrending feel when it is portrayed as the futile quest of a mother bird who returns home to see no nest, no tree and no forest left in “Ningalen Lokathe Enthu Cheythu?” (What Did You Do to My World?). Walker acknowledges the absolute creative power of the earth in “Beast” where she exhorts the earth, who tolerates all exploitations, to shake off the human constructions and celebrate her creativity. She does not want the earth to become a beast:

a being
who through horror
and impoverishment

loses its soul. (CP 430)

Instead the earth, she wishes, should reclaim creation “as a rolling over / of the soul” (430) and should express its ultimate self-assurance. In Sugathakumari’s “Vidhi” (The Judgement) the earth mother appears weak and angry, with long uncombed hair, eyes filled with tears and her green dress in tatters in the court of God to complain about the deeds of her dear son man. Dr. S. Saradakutty reflects that this poem strongly portrays how jointly woman and earth prepare to wage war against their fate. She adds, “The visionary poet knows that for all the cruelties done by man for centuries, an unsympathetic fate awaits his coming generations” (117). “Irulchirakukal” (Dark Wings) depicts the comforting motherly presence of the majestic night in which a little bird, the daughter of the night, flies about happily and then goes to sleep peacefully. The innocent little bird does not care about the latent dangers posed by the birds of prey or the traps of fake love, for, the tolerant and majestic mother, the night, is there to watch and guard this little daughter. In “Rathrimazha” (Night Rain) the female speaker identifies herself with the night rain, who arrives with a caress as a friend in need. She first feels the rain as a young, mad woman:

Night rain, simply sobbing, smiling,
Weeping with endless muttering, shaking
The long hair, and sitting and stooping
Like a mad young woman. (320)

It appears to the speaker as a sad daughter of the night, consoling her in her grief. Earlier it had enthralled her and had witnessed her love. The
personification reaches its zenith when the speaker tells the rain how they are alike and how much she understands the rain and addresses the rain:

I get to know your
Melancholic music,
your sympathy and
Suppressed anger,
Arrival at night,
 Alone, to sob,
When dawn comes,
Wiping the face
You smile and hasten
Your pretence I know. (321)

Beneath the surface level of suffering, tolerance and companionship can be perceived; it explores the tolerant nature of both woman and rain as they accept the grief and distress of suffering. The flower Petunia glorified by Walker in her poems is a strong symbol of endurance. About petunia’s quality to grow in any soil, Walker has remarked, “they bloom their heads off-exactly it seemed to me, like black people tend to do” (O’ Brien, Interviews 208). Walker has always been keen to strike the parallel between the petunias and her mother’s generation who had put in a life of struggle and endurance. It might be this sustaining power of plants that made the woman caught for killing her husband’s murderer on her way to punishment in the electric chair tell her children: “Don’t yall forgit to water / my purple petunias” (CP 190), in “Revolutionary Petunias.”

In these poems the diverse characteristics of both woman and nature are unearthed, which saves both the subjects from the critique of
essentialism. These multiple identifications show how an ecofeminist reading provides insights into the human-nature interrelatedness, which is embedded in the consciousness of every being and how its realization is essential for fostering an ecologically sustainable livelihood.

The concept of diversity gains great importance in ecofeminism through the re-evaluation of the notion of identity. The realization that preserving biodiversity is essential for human life, put forth by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, has been a landmark development in ecological movement. Vandana Shiva defines biodiversity as “the degree of nature’s variety, including both the number and frequency of ecosystems, species and genes in a given assemblage” (Ecofeminism 171). The three levels of biodiversity which are to be posited are, “diversity between and within ecosystems and habitats; the diversity of species; and genetic variation within species” (Yearley 121-22). Greg Garrard comments that this increasingly ecological or systems-orientated perspective aims to reframe local conservation issues in the language of global biodiversity. He observes: “The ‘global’ discourse of biodiversity is highly contested because of its complex and politically explosive relations with economic and cultural globalization” (158).

Zealous to preserve biological, cultural and ethnic diversity, ecofeminism takes into consideration differences of race, class, money, gender, culture and nation among human beings, especially women. Reflecting on the issues raised when diversity is addressed, Vandana Shiva observes that though biodiversity conservation is ethically justified on the grounds of the intrinsic value and rights of all species to exist, biotechnology developments, predicated on the assumption that species
have no intrinsic worth, rob the rights of species. She concedes, “Since the ethics based on the democracy of all life makes no distinction between rights of nature and rights of human communities, this new violation of the rights of nature is intimately linked to the violation of rights of farmers, tribals and women as knowers and users of biodiversity” (Ecofeminism 267). While pointing out that the homogenizing project of development creates an intolerance of diversity whereby the persistence of cultural differences sets one community against another, she makes a pertinent observation that, “Difference, rather than being seen as a basis of the richness of diversity, becomes the basis of division and an ideology of separatism” (112). In keeping with the situation, the ecofeminist perspective supports gender, ethnic and biological diversity by exposing “the connection between oppositional thought and sensual repression” (Salleh 38). Julia Kristeva demonstrates this approach when she says in “Oscillation between Power and Denial,” “speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverizes” (165). This facet would ensure space in ecofeminism for voicing the multiple subject positions of all beings.

By discarding all assumptions of a singular core female experience, ecofeminists view “the diversity of women as the center from which we then explore commonness” (Bunch 181-182). This redefinition of difference complements women’s relation with nature and non-human beings and provides a life affirming ethic of the interrelationship of diverse species in ecosystems across the globe. Ecofeminists reiterate the importance of maintaining diversity for the growth of a healthy and balanced ecosystem which includes both human and non-human
inhabitants. They particularly warn against the hidden agenda of biological simplification, by globalised capital market systems which involve the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets, reducing human diversity into faceless workers and the wiping out of whole species. Cautious about how social life and natural life get literally simplified to the inorganic one for the convenience of market society, Ynestra King in “The Ecology of feminism and the Feminism of Ecology” demands, “Therefore, we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. Potentially, ecofeminism is such a movement” (20).

In a patriarchal world, the androcentric view gives preference to hierarchies rather than diversity. Vandana Shiva notes in “Women’s Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation” that this capitalist patriarchal world view which considers natural diversity only valuable for economic exploitation is responsible for the destruction of diversity and the creation of monocultures. According to her, the marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. She asserts, “Loss of diversity is the price paid in the patriarchal model of progress which pushes inexorably towards monocultures, uniformity and homogeneity” (165). The ecofeminist movement insists on resistance to the erosion of diversity for which it critiques globalization, free trade and unethical international development strategies along with capitalist patriarchy. Ecofeminists reclaim the worth of the ecofriendly life of the local traditions and promote a harmonious existence with nature, by acknowledging the distinct individuality and the right to life of all beings on earth.
The poet Sugathakumari is nostalgic about Onam, the festival of Kerala. Though she has portrayed the changing attitude to this festival with the passage of time and the absence of a wholehearted involvement of the entire family in the celebration and the erosion of the cherished values of King Mahabali in poems like “Mahabaliyude Munbil” (Before King Mahabali), “Onam”, “Pazhayonam” (Old Onam), and “Odukkathe Thiruvonam” (The Last Thiruvonam), she has never dreamed of a life without its sweet memories. Images of temple festival, goddesses and the Freedom Struggle in India recur in many poems, giving specific local identities to them. Yet her poetic vision is sweeping enough to imagine the forests of California as her mother’s abode, as revealed in “Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California). She is also ready to accept the lessons from rejuvenating The Thames and try it for the dying rivers of India, as mentioned in “Thames Nadiyodu” (To the River, The Thames). Walker is ardent about the native ways in “Bring Me the Heart of Maria Sabina”, in which she showers admiration on the priestess of mushrooms and healer, as ‘the matron Saint of Mexico.’ In several poems she has shown great respect to the indigenous people for their harmonious life with nature.

In “Songless” the poet ironically asks the song-less rulers of her place to learn from the Nicaraguan government that:

writes
and makes
music
saving its own
and helping the people save
their own lives. (CP 347)
When in her native land decorations are made on empty pots — empty due to the death of animals and ceasure of agriculture signalling poverty — in Nicaragua:

These are not containers
void of food.
These are not decorations
on empty pots. (*CP* 347)

The contribution of art in redeeming oneself can be distinguished in the comparison between the song-less rulers of her country and the Nicaraguan government that promoted music, painting and writing. The readiness of both poets to learn lessons from other nations reveals their global vision and their willingness to welcome better solutions for improving local problems. This perception is in tune with the ecofeminist demand for a decentralized global movement which celebrates diverse cultures and traditions. It is this global vision that lets Walker lament that “in the world / people die of hunger” (*CP* 348). She poignantly adds in “A Few Sirens”:

whole countries of children
starved to death
before the age
of five
each year. (*CP* 348)

The poet writes about the past when food was held sacred and people were deeply moved by death as by hunger, but now she wants to vomit what she eats amidst such hunger. The ecofeminist stance of opposing all
varieties of violence and domination is presented in the international context by her in *A Poem Travelled down My Arm*. She says she would bless the bold, unbending revolutionaries of the past and the small countries that never gave up before the colonizing powers. She believes that “love is the future that I deserve / Peace / the future whose time has come” (*APTDMA* 150-151). Thus both poets reveal a balance between the love for the indigenous and the care for the whole world, possibly the best way to resist the erasure of identities by the waves of globalization.

A notion of hierarchical dualism can be perceived in the early ecofeminist accounts of the origins of interconnected identities and oppressions of women and nature. Val Plumwood points out in “Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments” that “the problem for both women and Nature is their place as part of a set of dualisms which have their origins in classical philosophy and which can be traced through a complex history to the present” (121). In its agenda to dismantle the androcentric and anthropocentric biases of Western civilization, ecofeminist politics attempts the critique of binaries like culture and nature, reason and emotion, human and animal, self and other, man and woman, and white and non-white. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy observe how the dualisms of white Western patriarchal culture “construct white male human identity as separate from and superior to the identities of women, people of color, animals, and the natural world” (9). In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* Plumwood suggests the complexity of this separatism by pointing out that it is not a pure and simple masculine identity, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination. By defining dualism as “the
process by which contrasting concepts are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive” (31), she goes on to explain why dualism is inevitably linked with hierarchy:

In dualism, the more highly valued side (males, humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the ‘lower’, inferiorized side(women, nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities which make possible overlap, kinship, or continuity. The nature of each is constructed in polarized ways by the exclusion of qualities shared with the other; the dominant side is taken as primary, the subordinated side is defined in relation to it . . . The effect of dualism is to naturalize domination. (32)

Ecofeminists warn that the idea of resolving the dualism between culture and its oppressed ‘others’ by returning to some Edenic state where there are no discernible differences between humans, animals, and spirits, is not a feasible one (Armbruster 114). Instead, dualism must be resisted by the conservation of diversities, as ecofeminism does by trying to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life. Ecofeminist writings profess a resistance to dualisms by fixing spaces for the latent individualities of all classes and species and by unveiling the politics involved in the creation of dualisms.

Walker has portrayed Wasichu as a symbol of global hierarchy—a complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination in “Who?” where the poet inquires who has been left uninjured by the Wasichu. The people, the trees, the waters, the rocks and the air alike are victims of his inroads, and the poet
earnestly wishes that at least the Moon is safe from him. The intolerable presence of this master is again portrayed in “No One Can Watch the Wasichu”. The people and the Earth alike are tortured by him, and one becomes helpless under his penetrating and intruding presence. In “We Have a Map of the World” the poet pictures the innocent native victims of nuclear tests. Those in power justify it as a decisive scientific breakthrough in the country’s advancement, but the poor people silently suffer the aftermath of radioactive explosions. Walker exhorts the the poets, musicians and children of the whole world to unite and sing out against the old men who represent the ruling class, exerting their power upon the helpless natives to fulfil their aims, under the guise of development. “The Right to Life: What Can the White Man Say to the Black Woman?” is a testimony of the centuries’ long oppression the white had inflicted on ‘the black woman’s womb’ (CP 442). The poet traces this four hundred years long history, which began in the baracoons of Africa, along the slave shipping coasts of Africa, for more than twenty generations. She makes a list of the white man’s assault on the planet, especially on her race and on her gender and concludes by suggesting what the white man will have to confess before the black women and that he shall be redeemed only if he treats their children with love. The awareness of exploitation also appears in “First They Said”, in which the mask of the brutal whites who asserted that, “What is at fault / is your existence itself” (CP 323), is shorn off. In “These Days”, where Walker remarks that the brutality of the whites was the result of their upbringing with the notion that they were ‘superior to everything else God made,’ she throws light on the social and cultural causes underlying the existing hierarchies and dualisms. Explaining the white master’s track record of
atrocities and plunder, Walker shows how dualism and hierarchy go hand in hand. She acknowledges the greatness of her people who walked lightly on earth and the flowers and the land they cherished in her poems, thereby acceding to the ecofeminist axiom that dualism can be resisted by valuing the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life.

By depicting the helpless aborigines, the victims of exploitation in “Aadivaasi Saksharatha” (Literacy for the Aborigines), the picture of the frightened forest in “Silent Valleyil Veendum” (Again at Silent Valley), and the portrayal of woman’s suffering at different stages of life as presented in “Penkunju-‘90” (Girlchild-‘90), “Vanitha Commission” (Women’s Commission) and “Kollendathengane?” (How to Kill?) Sugathakumari sketches the outline of the master oppressor—the so-called educated, civilized and powerful man at whose behest the laws of the land are shaped. This very same man is accused in the court of God by the Earth for having tortured nature and its non-human dwellers who appear as witnesses, in “Vidhi” (The Judgement). National bureaucracy becomes the culprit in “Ithu Mahabharatham” (This, the Mahabharat) and “Queue Nilkunnu Njangal” (We Are in Queue) which depict the suffering of poor people, denied of their rights due to the corruption and red tapism rampant in the government. The oppressors who are given different forms and shades, come together on the mosaic of hierarchical power structure created by the dominant class. The identification of the oppressor is in fact the first step to defend oneself from becoming the victim. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* Plumwood affirms:

To the extent that women’s lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and
have involved different, and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism. (35)

Since women are placed in the sphere of nature and are excluded from an oppositional culture, their contribution to the process of breaking down dualistic culture becomes especially significant. Their historical positioning and life-choices should compel a discomfort with binary structures and engender a deeper questioning of culture built on them.

The concept of the ‘other’ prevalent in literary studies influenced by psychoanalytic theories and feminist critique can be connected with ecofeminist principles. Since ecology is a study of interrelationship which challenges dichotomies, the concept of ‘other’ must be given a grounding in its physical being beyond the notion of absolute difference and the binary construct of inside and outside. Gaard and Murphy opine that, “Feminism demands male recognition of the ‘other’ as not only different but also of equal ontological status. Such an ontology would indicate the need to view the self/other distinction as one of relative difference on the basis of heterarchy rather than hierarchy” (6). As diversity has been recognized as a necessary dimension for the health of individual species and ecosystemic survival, difference becomes interrelated and relative. Diversity becomes the fundamental trait of ecofeminism with, as Gaard and Murphy observe, “the recognition and
positive identification of otherness—not just among people but also among people and other natural entities—as non-alien” (6).

In “Remember?” Walker portrays the dark-skinned girl, the servant of a white family, the woman with ‘the blessed dark skin’ and ‘the healing eye’ who “would give / to the human race / only hope” (CP 318). The black woman, even when she suffers torture at the work place remains confident about her potential. By showing a positive identification of this otherness among people, the poet strikes an optimistic note about the future of the world. Walker’s identification with the African natives is found at several instances in “African Images”, as the American speaker’s comment “you are like / my aunt’s cousin / who married so-and- so” and her portrayal of “my African Dad” (CP 28, 43) standing in a long and white kanzu. These are instances of an Afro-American’s instinct for a positive identification with the African natives, which reveal the poet’s quest for her roots. This enthusiasm mounts when she writes about her native South. In “The Climate of the Southern Hemisphere” she says:

We are made
For each other
The Southern
Hemisphere’s climate
& me. (ATGE 134)

In this recognition there is an implicit recognition of the individuality of both identities. The ecofeminist objectives of the positive identification of otherness and recognition of all other identities, and the respect for diversity are expressed in “Projection”. She presents in it the image of
“the world child” (CP 124) which resides at the back of each human eyeball. When this child points out the distinctions among savage Indians, cruel Germans, rotten Arabs, the Chinese and their femicide, Walker comments, “You say: Like the feet of Jesus, the eyelashes of / the Buddha, all the children of the Earth / Are perfect” (ATGE125). The poet considers it “our Life Work / To liberate across the planet / The world child” (124-25). The symbol ‘world child’ signifies the diversity that exists in the world among humans, and the recognition of the value of otherness, while accommodating a net of interconnection.

Sugathakumari has also realized a respect for diversity in her portrayal of the non-humans. In “Mazhavilichappol” (When the Rain Beckoned) the rain, presented as a strong stout man who appears at the door to invite the reluctant lady to come and take a bath, is a powerful characterization. In “Pakhisasthram” (Fortune-Telling with Bird), the speaker identifies his life of restrictions with that of the trained parrot that picks up fortune teller’s card, and when the parrot gives him a rebuking look for having denied the chance offered by the fortune teller, the speaker gives due recognition to the bird’s identity. In “Marathinu Sthuti” (Salute to the Tree), the tree which makes its presence felt to human beings from his cradle to the pyre is addressed as, “a friend who never leaves us / you shower upon us invaluable and kind blessings” (502). The tree stands bearing the axe marks inflicted upon its body by man, yet filling the soil with life and holding it firmly, thus saving the earth mother from eroding. Even when man fells trees and earns money, the trees shower compassion by taming the winds, the Sun and the rain. From its hairy leaves to its deep roots, the tree offers itself completely to the thankless man, who pays back only through fire and axe. The positive
identification of the speaker’s self with that of the laburnum in “Kanikonna” (The Golden Shower), the buffalo in the marsh in “Eruma” (Buffalo) and the stoned dog in “Eretta Naya” (The Stoned Dog) signify the recognition of the connection they have with other selves. The aborigines in “Aadivaasi Saksharatha” (Literacy for the Aborigines) and the suffering womanhood, the child mother worried about her single bangle in “Ottavala” (The Single Bangle), the beggar woman from Bengal in “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman), the abandoned pregnant woman from Gujarat in “Chudunna Nenjumay” (With a Blazing Heart) and the procession of differently tortured women in “Vanitha Commission” (Woman’s Commission) reveal another trait of the non-alien positive identification. These connections allow the poets to bridge the gaps formed by the ‘separation of self from the other’ that has been there for long and thus contribute to the ecofeminist objective of nurturing a healthy diversity.

In order to portray the positive recognition of otherness, the ecofeminist writers depict the diverse relationships in a web through their works. Ecofeminist literature illuminates such relationships among humans across a variety of differences, and also the relationships between humans and the rest of the nature. Charlene Spretnak observes that our relation to other people involves two parts: distinction by gender and by other groups. She adds, “our lives are shaped to a great extent not by the differences between the sexes, but by the cultural response to those differences” (302). The democratic ecological ethics of ecofeminism finds equal merit in the diverse cultures around the world and argues for their protection, thus assuring a world free of hegemonic exploitations.
Walker has voiced the gendered, racial, political and economic discrimination existing among people, especially the Americans by bringing out the exploitative underpinning of these relationships. Giving prominence to the sustainable attitudes and outlooks of the Native Americans, she tells the power-crazy, money-amassing ruling class who are driving the nation and the whole world to destruction to learn from them. In “The Girl Who Died #1” and “The Girl Who Died # 2,” Walker depicts the victimization of a girl by her own brothers, who ‘taught’ morality to her and brutally killed her. “January 10, 1973” expresses the speaker’s enraged mind which waits to seek vengeance upon the judge, who called the blacks chimpanzees, by shooting him and upon the governor by pouring sweet arsenic into his coffee pot. These dark wishes express the intensity of the humiliation endured by the blacks in a white dominated society. The speaker of the poem realises:

i understand these are the clichéd fantasies
of twenty-five million longings
that spring spontaneously to life
every generation. (CP 302)

In “Each One, Pull One” the speaker explicitly expresses her contempt for the white rulers as revealed in the line, “We know why the White House is white” (CP 376). She does not expect justice from the rulers but exhorts the blacks to unite and resurrect the martyrs of segregation, “Each one, pull one back into the sun” (377) and declares, “no matter what they do / all of us must live / or none” (377) Thus with equal emphasis she pictures the helpless submissiveness, the suppressed rage, the open outrage and the silent realisations of the victims caught in racial and gendered
oppressions. Walker is ambivalent in the depiction of the Negroes in Africa. During the trip in search of her roots, she often feels at one with the natives, as expressed in lines like “you are like my aunt’s cousin” (28) and “my African Dad” (43). But at times she feels alienated and reflects that:

The man in the
Scarlet shirt
Wanted to talk
but had no words. (33)

Often she also got the feeling that the native women considered her strange. “In These Dissenting Times”, “Ndebele”, “My Ancestral Earnings” and “Ancestors to Alice” express the speaker’s acknowledgement of the ancestral struggles. In “Women” featured in a section of the volume titled “In these Dissenting Times”, Walker elaborates on the strong feminist traditions of the black women and expresses her gratitude for what they have done. She calls her mama’s generation as ‘headragged generals’ (159) with stout steps and hands, who did heavy labour and gave their children books, desks and a place for themselves. Walker, who is also an activist, highlights in her poems, the exploitations rampant at all levels of society while portraying human relationships. In “Lost My Voice? Of Course”, addressing her childhood bully Beauie, she offers her vocal cords to that revolutionist who had lost her voice after many a verbal altercations and tries to bring her fiery spirit back to her life. “Telling” is about a little sister who goes through the anxieties of abortion/delivery whom the speaker attempts to soothe with words of comfort. She expresses her wish to be with the girl through her
pain and sadness, relief and joy and poses the question, “Is solace anywhere / more comforting / than in the arms of sisters?” (418). Walker’s womanism is unveiled here in the boundless tranquility she wishes to extend to the suffering sisterhood.

Sugathakumari, with a humanitarian zeal portrays the relationship of human beings across differences as a compassionate one, but the rebel in her questions the disparity some of them have to suffer because they are born into an oppressed class like the aborigines, women and other marginalized humans. At the sight of a beggar woman in her courtyard singing hymns, the speaker in “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman) thinks of the woman’s happy life in Bengal, and of the sudden riot which turned her into a refugee. The speaker’s heart embraces the woman compassionately. Though she wants to do it physically, her false pride prevents her from doing so. The speaker refuses the woman’s demands like rice and an old sari and asks her to go away with the few coins she had given her. But at heart she feels ashamed of her pitiless act and she laments on the transition the refugee woman has had from a shy innocent village girl to a shameless shabby beggar woman. She blames herself for her hypocrisy in not expressing the real love and fellow feeling to this poor woman. The empathetic but ineffectual condition of the speaker is more vivid in “Jessy” in which she presents the different stages in the life of her classmate; her progression from a poor woman in old clothes to a sophisticated cabaret dancer. Their last meeting is at the airport when Jessy, now an old woman is boarding the plane to a Middle East country, to work as an ayah in a Sheik’s house. The speaker is surprised that Jessy has no more worries about her future. Though she wants to dissuade Jessy from trying her luck in the distant land and likes to offer her what little
comfort she could, in the severe heat her tongue dries up and she cannot utter a word. Revealing the silent distress of the aborigines in “Aadivaasi Saksharatha” (Literacy for the Aborigines), Sugathakumari questions the improper and hazardous plunder of the people and the forests. These are instances of an ecofeminist outlook which illuminates the relationships and differences in human society; pointing out at the same time the hegemonic exploitations and hypocrisies within them.

Ecofeminism attempts to build up compassion and show solidarity to the marginalized humans and the non-humans. This aim is achieved by the sensitive ecofeminist writers, before whom nature unfolds itself in myriad representations, by illuminating the network of relationships between humans and the rest of nature. Freya Mathews observes that, “To recognize that our humanity is the wellspring not only of a consuming destructiveness but also of the precious compassion which counters it, may be a redeeming thought, which will help to lead us out of the moral impasse created by the divorce between humanity and nature” (244).

Walker’s portrayal of the human relationship with nature is in tune with the ecofeminist perspective of a non-identitarian, cooperative and mutually respecting attitude. The way she presents a spider as the teacher of weaving for her ancestral women in “The Moment I Saw Her” is a case in point. The moment the speaker of the poem sees the spider, she visualizes how her ancestral women might have watched the spider weaving its web and imitated the process using reeds, which finally let them make baskets. By adopting her great Grandmother’s native name Tallulah which means basket maker, she claims her connections with the
ancestral women who were weavers. She calls the spider her kinswoman and also claims the lineage to:

    The brilliant
    Ancestral
    Body
    Of
    Her art. (ATGE 50-51)

To call a little creature the teacher of her ancestors reveals the all-embracing poetic vision of Walker where she tries to weave an interrelationship between the non-humans and the humans who jointly share this earth. In “The Tree” the tree is depicted as the world tree with singular characteristics like singing, growing from Heaven to Earth and disappearing from the shamans’ dreams, once pestilence and deforestation started affecting the people and the land. “Bring Me the Heart of Maria Sabina” presents Walker’s yearning for a heart like that of Maria Sabina, the priestess and shaman who:

    Looked
    To the earth
    For help
    In
    Healing us
    &
    Found it. (ATGE 223)

Maria Sabina also advocates her motto for sustainability that human beings should take only what the earth offers “& wants / Freely / To give” (ATGE 228).
Sugathakumari expresses the ecofeminist attitude of coexistence with the non-human nature, and gives them equal status and respect by personifying them and also by voicing their (imagined) thoughts. The person’s dreams compared to seeds in “Nattu Maranna Vithu” (The Seed Planted and Forgotten) portrays how the seed of an old dream once planted and watered with tears and then forgotten, is seen singing in the breeze as flowers when she walks that way years later, in a voice she could recognize. The sight of the blue tower of flowers, her former sorrows, swaying in the wind brings tears to her eyes. The intense bond between nature and human beings is symbolically expressed in this poem. The hospitality shown by the forests of California to the foreign guest in “Kalifornia Kaadukalil” (In the Forests of California) and the forest responding “Baby” to the speaker’s call “Mother” in “Silent Valley” are other profound instances in which the poet relates with nature. Rain as the male lover beckoning her in “Mazhavilichappol” (When the Rain Beckoned), rain pictured as bringing boon to the land by nourishing the drying up rivers in “Mazhakaalathinu Nandi” (Thanks to the Rainy Season) and night rain as a comforting presence to the person in distress portrayed in “Rathri Mazha” (Night Rain) convey the varied ways in which rain rejuvenates the land physically and the human beings psychologically. “Oru Puravritham” (A Legend) expresses the poet’s hope in the ability of human beings to protect the earth mother by alleviating her misery. The earth mother’s confidence in asking man to find a remedy for the impending flood, makes him more conscious of his responsibility.

Ecofeminist literature often makes implicit references to the way the differences between the humans and the non-humans shape our
relationship with and within nature. In “Ground, Pivot, Motion: Ecofeminist Theory, Dialogics, and Literary Practice” Patrick D. Murphy refers to an “ecological process of interanimation”, a term which means, “the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day, age to age” (149). Ecofeminist writers affirm the relationship within nature by highlighting the voices and experiences of women as they have a better understanding of the non-human world.

Walker articulates a realistic view of life and earth in “When You Look”. She doesn’t fantasize that one can perceive couches and chairs for the weary in the sky. Heaven is instead a matter, “Not of inventing / Glory / But of recognizing it” (ATGE 128). As for her, if we keep our eyes and hearts open to the beings around us, we recognize that we are all equal to God. Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire argue:

If we are to forge a just and balanced world, men and women alike must look to the full spectrum of human presence on earth for clues to a time when gender equality and an unalienated relationship with nature may well have existed. This is not necessarily to legitimate or sentimentalize some past paradise, but rather to allow ancient memory to fuel our imaginations as we explore new, life-affirming possibilities for the future of our planet. (200)

Walker wishes to retain the unique and different identities of every being in nature, even amidst an unalienated relationship between human beings and nature. The minute feel of the climate of the Southern Hemisphere, its moisture, its warmth, and the smell of rain are presented in a sensuous
manner revealing its unique identity in “The Climate of the Southern Hemisphere”. In “Without Commercials” she speaks against the artificial methods of tanning, bleaching and trimming in order to change one’s looks. She feels it good to retain the original as she believes that all beings are the splendid descendants of the primeval wilderness, Eden:

    Copied skilfully
    as Adam.
    Original
    as Eve. (CP 382-383)

She respects Jane Goodall for being natural and close to the wild chimpanzees and nature in “You Too Can Look, Smell, Dress, Act this Way”. What counts for Walker is originality and being natural, despite the differences of gender, race or species.

Though in many of her poems Sugathakumari registers high hope for human beings, she is keen to expose the dark elements in society while depicting the sufferings and exploitation of nature, women, the poor and the helpless. She turns to nature to reflect on solidarity and selfless love. In “Nishasalabham” (The Moth) the speaker makes out a distinct cuckoo call at midnight for nothing, but learns that it was a warning to the moth that lay half asleep on the leaves of a book, left open by the speaker. The moth wakes up hearing the call and flies away. The speaker interprets the unnatural call of the cuckoo as, “Get away soon, they would cheat”. The bond among the non-humans is strongly revealed in the depiction of the wishes of a dying tree in “Pazhmaram” (The Futile Tree). In its last stage of disintegration, the tree is unwilling to die thinking of the two birds who used to visit it every morning and the little breeze who took rest on its lap.
for a while. With a motherly angst and care, the futile tree rejuvenates itself to grow and give shade, once it receives the drops of love from the sky. The concern the tree shows to other beings in nature proposes an alternative to the destructive, anthropocentric attitude of human beings. The mother-daughter bond the speaker has for the Silent Valley forest and the forests of California, compassion for the suffering and the surprise at the majestic appearance of the natural entities—birds, flowers, trees, animals, mountains, forests, sea and rain—in several of her poems reveal how much the poet respects and cherishes the existence of every being. Presenting the differences and unique characteristics among them, the poet makes us feel the value of each and every living being. Ynestra King, who advocates a radical restructuring of human society according to feminist and ecological principles in “Toward an Ecological Feminism and a Feminist Ecology” perceives “the survival of species as necessitating a renewed understanding of our relationship to nature” (120). Both Walker and Sugathakumari strike home the same message through their poems.

The varied branches of ecology which differ in their concepts are but united in their comprehension that diversity is essential for survival. Arne Naess, the deep ecologist explains:

Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival, the chances of new modes of life, the richness of forms. And the so-called struggle of life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships, rather than ability to kill, exploit, and suppress.
'Live and let live’ is a more powerful ecological principle than ‘Either you or me.’ (121)

The social ecologists prioritise diversity as Murray Bookchin observes in “The Concept of Social Ecology”, “The capacity of an ecosystem to retain its integrity depends not upon the uniformity of the environment but upon its diversity” (157). Ecofeminist literature too underscores the centrality of human diversity and biodiversity essential for our survival on this planet.

The rich biological diversity is vividly presented in “African Images” which shows an array of birds and animals quietly roaming in the African jungles. She celebrates human diversity in “Song”. The world full of coloured people with pink, yellow and brown skins, black hair, black and brown eyes is a joyous thought to the speaker who sings, “People of Color / Colorful people / Tra-la-la!” (CP 396). In “What Will Save Us” the poet gives equal importance to the cow and the pig, the child, the woman and the man implying that there is an unseen bond between the human beings and the animals. Walker has shown how the tree, the spider and the Petunia exert great influence on humans. Sugathakumari’s poetic canvas is rich in non-human characters—forests, flowers, rain and sea, dog, buffalo, birds, elephants and lion—expressing their own distinct characteristics as in “Nishagandhi” (The Night Queen) and “Koonanurbumbu” (The Hunch Back ant), glorifying human identifications as in “Kavihridayamo Nee Vihagamo?” (Poet’s Mind or Bird Art Thou?) and “Kanikonna” (Golden Shower), or highlighting the intrinsic worth of each being as in “Muthuchippi” (The Oyster) and “Kaakkapoovu” and the need for developing a cooperative relationship between the humans and
the non-humans as in “Vidhi” (The Judgement), and “Aana” (The Elephant). The representations of the impatient poetic mind craving for freedom which goes parallel with the unease of the caged peacock in “Kavihridayamo Nee Vihagamo?” (The Poet’s Mind or Bird Art Thou?) and the human soul symbolized by the multiheaded snake Kaliya who stood with head held high receiving every pang as god’s blessing surrendering its ego to God in “Kaliyamardanam” (Crushing Kaliya) can be perceived as poetic attempts to portray the speaker’s self, even as the identifications stop short of erasing the individuality of the bird and the animal presented. The hunch back ant who continues its trail of carrying loads, forgetting spring and love, is glorified by the ecofeminist poet by reading into the mechanical life of the ant, an affirmation of its identity in “Koonanurumbu” (The Hunch Back Ant). The poem “Eruma” (She-Buffalo) makes a loose identification between an aged and useless she-buffalo who revels in the marsh and the speaker’s mind which sinks deep in the foul smelling, muddy, dirt of black sorrows, disappointments and cold indifference. The dignity with which the wounded lion endured its pain until it breathed its last as portrayed in “Murivetta Simham” (The Wounded Lion) and the pathetic sight of a stoned dog in different poems bring in the empathetic mind of the ecofeminist poet. In “Kurinji Pookkal” (Kurinji Flowers) even when the poet with her pen stroke catches the mountainscape full of blue blossoms, a rare sight that occurs once in twelve years, and lavishly praises its beauty, she finds space to express the agony about the transience of the marvellous sight. She doubts whether man’s encroachments will destroy the solitary valleys where Kurinji blossoms, for rubber plantations and other projects. A self-same angst can be read in Walker’s sharp sketch of the sight of elephant bones
“in a store / to hold / Umbrellas” (CP 14), in her journal picturing calm jungle life. Both poets show how biodiversity is threatened by the economics of development and political power. The forest, its resources and the natives of the land are exploited by the powerful, as poignantly portrayed in “Aadivaasi Saksharatha” (Literacy for the Aborigines). By presenting the plight of the starving Aadivaasi women who have to walk a long way to fetch water the poem underlines how the violation of the rights of nature is intimately linked with the violation of rights of farmers, tribals and women, who are the primary beneficiaries of biodiversity. Both the poets praise the aborigines for their life lived in harmony with nature and project them as the ones who give most respect and value for diversity.

The vital importance of diversity is expressed by Sugathakumari in the emotive poem “Vidhi” (The Judgement). It presents the earth mother as a petitioner in the court of God against man’s incursive attitude to her and other creatures living on earth. She is accompanied by the tortured birds and animals, the witnesses for the trial. She describes how the forests burn and fall, the rivers shed tears and dry out and how fears rain from the holes in the sky. The great God finally gives the verdict that the fruits of man’s deed will be borne by his next generations. By presenting the scenes of exploitations that render havoc to the life of humans and other beings alike, in “Ningalenn Lokathe Enthu Cheythur” (What Did You Do to My World?), “Attappaadiye Swapnam Kandu Njaninnum” (Today too, I Dreamed of Attappaadi), and “Thaivekkal” (Planting a Tree), the poet reiterates the significance of the preservation and nurturance of biodiversity, for the survival of all species including human beings on earth.
Recognizing the imminent threats to the planet from globalization, patriarchy and capitalist attitudes, ecofeminism analyses the politics behind them, rings the alarm and calls for the conservation of biological and cultural diversity on earth. Ecofeminist literature sketches the multifarious relationships among the humans and the non-humans transgressing the bounds of race, gender, and power, thereby illustrating how they can exemplify the democratic ecological ethics envisioned by this movement. This is a poetic perception devoid of anthropocentrism, which distances itself from economic profits, political mileage, social power and privileges, and gives space to diversity in all its richness as a creative source.

The ecofeminist acceptance of the multiplicities inherent in identity readily acknowledges the presence of diversity within living beings and nature. The interconnectedness among the species and organisms envisioned by ecofeminism recognizes the importance of regarding life as a biologic process and not a matter of human will. The experience of continuity is brought into a larger dimension by realizing it as a ‘process’ by ecofeminists when they perceive, as Patrick D. Murphy observes in “The Women Are Speaking: Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique” that, “Preservation needs to be understood precisely as an ongoing working out of relationships and process rather than as a static condition of existence” (24). This basic assumption leads ecofeminism to cherish the motto, ‘trust in the process, not just the product’, as part of ecological ethics.

Ariel Salleh observes that it is imperative to split what is inextricable; binaries like space and time, culture and nature, because they
set up profoundly repressive codes (138). The myth that abetted man’s cultural and intellectual productions—that the natural is inherently inferior and impoverished—has a particular significance within the Eurocentric discourse. The outcome of this strange epistemology is that the product takes precedence over the process. This results in the attribution of an essentialist norm to everything in nature including man since, as Barbara Adams observes, “the artefacts of culture are created apart, fixed in their uniqueness, taking on a material existence with a difference: externalized, abstracted, bounded and isolated from the processes of life and ecological interconnections” (95). Ecofeminism shows its discontent to this perspective by asserting its trust in ‘process’ and protests against the damaging features of our dominant practices and theories built on the ‘product’. The ecofeminists put forward a partnership ethic to achieve these goals. A partnership ethic of earth care allows both women and men to enter into mutual relationships with each other and the planet independently of gender. Maria Mies and her colleagues have developed the subsistence approach as a politics of ecofeminism, which is based on the partnership ethic which demands the whole community including the producers and consumers to join together to become self sufficient, for example in the case of food security, instead of letting women alone to shoulder the whole responsibility of production and distribution of food. Mies affirms in “Women, Food and Global Trade” that, “Where self-sufficiency and self-provisioning and not profit maximizing and economic growth, are the main aims of economic practices there people will maintain biological and cultural diversity and therefore food security, for all” (37).
The holistic approach provided by ecological science highlights the importance of the cyclical processes, the interconnectedness of all things and the assumption that nature is active and alive. The cycle holds all the dynamic interactive relationship between its parts and processes on a non-dialectical plane. The emphasis on the dynamic ‘processes’ of nature, has its implications in human society too. It encourages an open discussion of alternatives in which ecologists, technologists, lawyers, workers, women and men participate as equals. Ecofeminists are interested in the ways of being in ‘enduring time,’ the enfolding of time in pleasure and suffering, hardiness and commitment, stability and security, because these are the qualities of engagement that marginalized workers, women and subsistence dwellers bring to their material conditions. The idea of process in ecofeminism thus leads to the philosophy of interconnectedness, and allows space for complexities like the indigenous cultures and unique ecosystems round the world.

Walker brings under one roof the distinct aspects of people in America, the black, the white and the red (the natives) in the poem “Somethings I Like about My Triple Bloods”. She warns the blacks against ‘putting down’ themselves blue and asks them to take pride in belonging to Africa, which is ‘everybody’s mother.’ She congratulates the whites for the too many roads they make very well. The red people are appreciated for their cool attitude to time, they “never start / anything / on time”. (CP 417) The poet is happy about this cultural diversity that enriches the society, which she presents as ‘my triple bloods’ (416). The portrayals of the revengeful attitude of the speaker to the white judge in “January 10, 1973” and the ironical depiction of the white man in “The Right to Life” transform themselves to an optimistic note in the tone of
the black servant of a white household in “Remember?” who claims to hold the twin flowers of justice and hope for everyone, including her torturers. This shift in attitude to the oppressors reveals the transition in human perspectives caused by the social, political and cultural changes that took place in course of time, a proof that the unbroken process is still on.

“Kalifornia Kadukalil” (In the Forests of California) of Sugathakumari shows how the speaker feels the same comfort and protection she has in her mother’s abode, on her visit to the alien forests of California. This ability to connect with other lands puts forth the ideas of partnership and interconnectedness and is a pointer to the ecofeminist assertions that human beings and nature are partners in life. The mother-daughter bond between the speaker and the Silent Valley forest, revealed in “Silent Valley” is yet another example of the realization of a strong bond between a human being and nature. “Ithu Mahabharatham” (This, the Great Bharat) reminds how the Indian Classics highlight the tradition of coexistence in nature. The poet laments the end of that holistic culture which has given way to a more developmental and exploitative phase in Modern India already plagued by deforestation, pollution and atrocities against women and children. The portrayal of the rain cloud as one who visits every nook and corner injecting life into fields, rivers and hearts in “Mazhakalathinu Nandi” (Thanks to the Rainy Season) and the sketching of the couple’s past lives as fish, flowers, deer, snakes and gypsies in “Janmandarangaliloode” (Along the Cycles of Birth) in their own unique ways reveal interconnectedness of all beings on earth, across time and space, emphasizing the ecofeminist perception of continuity and process.
By focussing on relations and interconnectedness among all beings on earth, the ecofeminist movement prioritizes the necessity for social transformation and moving beyond power politics and introduces an alternative participatory ideology to the current oppositional political discourse. Lourdes Torres observes that ecofeminism is about a profound transvaluation, because “the most radical, activist politics develop when one comes to understand the dynamics of how one is oppressed and how one oppresses others . . . When one comes to understand the basis of one’s own pain and how it is connected to the pain of others, the possibility of forming coalitions with others emerges” (275). Ecofeminists and social environmentalists share the thesis that the best analysis must articulate lived experience. Kamala Platt views: “The environmental justice movement extends the argument that ecofeminists posit, adding the recognition that the experience in question is racially and economically defined, as well as gendered” (142). Ecofeminist literature, in its ‘natural’ texts and poetic experiences joins hands with ecofeminist movements against environmental racism. It does so by contributing to the theoretical, experiential and epistemologic levels of oppositional consciousness. It thus becomes “a medium for raising awareness in a variety of different, but overlapping, audiences and ‘classrooms’ ” (144). Ecofeminist literature offers a critique of oppressive contexts like class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and the subjugation of woman and nature, through the lived experiences captured in its canvas to shape a critical consciousness in society. From the ecofeminist perspective these literary and poetic realisations sustain the process of social transformation.
This standpoint is underlined when Walker and Sugathakumari give voice to the silent subjugation suffered by the marginalized people—the blacks, the aborigines, the poor, the powerless and women. As a black woman who takes pride in her roots and who rejects the chains of convention, Walker gives equal significance to the life of the Africans and Afro Americans in her poems. The colonized Africans, the Karamojongs clan on the verge of extinction, and the freedom demanding young black man in America who tried to crash barriers in order to swim nude at a white beach in Alabama are some of the vivid images appearing in “Once”, suggestive of the long history of victimization endured by the blacks. Walker reveals in “We Have a Map of the World” how the policies of environmental racism have made the native lands the platform of nuclear tests, a common phenomenon across the world. The poor and the powerless are deceived by the old men who assert their power. The poet envisions how the natives suffer the trauma accompanying such explosions and urges children and artists to wake up and defend against the destructive powers. “Ballad of the Brown girl” and “The Girl Who Died # 2” unmask the suffering of black girls victimized by their own society, revealing how their gender and race conjure to double their oppression. “Thousands of Feet below You” discusses how a little boy who was fleeing from the bombs, is shattered to oily, slimy bits. “Why War Is Never a Good Idea” warns against the poisonous war seeping into the food and water everywhere, resulting in total annihilation. Walker’s condemnation of the racial, gendered and colonial oppressions in these poems is extremely relevant in the postfeminist-ecofeminist context.

Sugathakumari is also very prolific in drawing similar structures of oppression and her poetic vision encompasses regional, national and
global issues. “Ithu Mahabharatham” (This, the Great India) condenses the political, social, cultural and environmental degradation of the nation. Poems commemorating the Father of the Nation like “Rajaghattathil” (At Raj Ghat) and “Ha Rama!” (Alas, Ram!) also lament the loss of the country’s cherished values. Many of her poems address the tortures and neglect women endure in a patriarchal society and the gender-based oppression often linked with power, economy, race and class. The refugee woman from Bengal portrayed in “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman) and the mad woman from Gujarat in “Chudunna Nenjumay” (With a Blazing Heart) are preys of a male-centred system. The speaker in “Abhayardhini” (The Refugee Woman) reveals how her fake pride prevents her from the wish to embrace the refugee woman. The hypocrisy of the society the speaker represents intensifies the helplessness of the poor woman. The little girl-mother in “Ottavala” (The Single Bangle) carrying a child though she is still given to innocent childhood pranks is another victim of the society that considers woman as an object of recreation. The angst of a woman writer is depicted in “Rajalakshmiyodu” (To Rajalakshmi) which talks about the protagonist’s suicide as she was unable to bear the censure of her family and society, and shows how even the women’s freedom of expression is curtailed by patriarchy. Those who rebel against this invisible hiatus will have to face dire consequences or surrender as Rajalakshmi did. When “Vanitha Commission” (Woman’s Commission) presents panoramic details of atrocities that various women suffered, “Queue Nilkunnu Njanga” (We Are in Queue) shows the people of India victimized by the corrupt bureaucracy. Environmental racism is highlighted in “Vidhidinathil” (On the Judgement Day) which pictures the dropping of the atom bomb and its impact on the innocent
victims. When they get engulfed by the deadly radioactive cloud of dust, even brothers look at each other with hatred. The poems “Aadivaasi Saksharatha” (Literacy to the Aborigines) and “Attappadiye Swapnam Kandu Njaninnnum” (Today too, I Dreamed of Attappadi) portray the multiple levels of oppressions of the aborigines: their race, class and gender determining the intensity of oppression they endure. The general misery of the people, the women tortured physically and mentally, and the land suffering from drought, the birds bereft of their nests intertwine in these poems creating a poetic evocation of darkness and evil. All these poetic attempts contribute to the ecofeminist realisation of a critical consciousness that works to attain a world free of all pain and oppression.

Val Plumwood observes in “Ecosocial Feminism as a General Theory of Oppression” that the interconnectedness of forms of oppression can be viewed as a network which “enables a balance between the requirements of identity politics and the requirements of connected opposition which arises from the connected nature of oppressions” (215). The treatment of nature and woman as inferior has supported and ‘naturalized’ not only the hierarchy of male over female but the inferiorization of many other groups of humans seen as more closely identified with nature. Treating women’s movement isolated from other struggles is problematic because:

there is no neutral, apolitical concept of the human or of society in which women can struggle for equality, and no pure, unqualified form of domination which is simply male and nothing else which oppresses them. And since most women are oppressed in multiple ways, as particular kinds
of women, women’s struggle is inevitably interlinked with other struggles. (214-215)

The strategies for dealing with networks of oppression require cooperation among the victims, which is what the ecofeminists strive to achieve with their democratic ecological ethic. Ecofeminism envisions a world free of all kinds of oppressions, where all species, human and non-human, live in fraternity, equality and cooperation. Ecofeminist literary endeavours emphasize the urgency of political action aimed at dismantling institutions of oppression and building up of egalitarian and ecocentric webs in their place.

Contemporary ecofeminism, guided by the ecological principles, tries to construct a democratic culture which accommodates all distinct identities among humans, non-humans and nature on an equal footing. It treats diversity with respect and advocates the continuity of the life’s process on earth without disruption through an ethics of coexistence. It is from this wider canvas that ecofeminism answers the criticism, that this discourse is essentialist and works with a feminist bias and that it is so diverse as to have no centre, raised against it. By affirming the existence of multiplicity, plurality and dialogue it opens up new spaces of social, political and ecological life that creates according to Plumwood, “a democratic culture beyond dualism, encoding colonized relationships and finding a mutual, ethical basis for enriching coexistence with earth others” (Feminism and the Mastery of Nature 196).

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