Chapter 1

The Earthling Psyche: Defining Ecocriticism

Section 1

We have a beautiful mother
Her green lap immense
Her brown embrace eternal
Her blue body
everything
we know.

Alice Walker (Blue Body 460).

In a world that is in the throes of ecological and economic crises with catastrophic dimensions for the universe, only a profound change of perception, outlook and values can bring about a desirable change. Therefore, it is highly essential to promote greater ecological literacy among all members of the community in order to counter the destructive forces of utilitarianism. Mankind with its unique literary talent, bears the great responsibility to influence human behaviour so as to enable him to maintain healthy relationship with his natural environment. Glen Love, in the article “Revaluing Nature”, evaluates the need for giving proper representation to nature. An epistemological remapping is necessary to promote interdisciplinary scholarship. With the unique gift of consciousness and the concomitant gift of language, mankind has the great responsibility of
assuming guardianship of the earth. In order to explain this, Love quotes the words of the distinguished cell biologist, Lewis Thomas that “it is up to us, if we are to become an evolutionary success, to fit in, to become the consciousness of the whole earth. We are the planet’s awareness of itself . . .” (ER 237).

Realizing the magnitude of present day global environmental crisis, many writers feel the need to write about the earth and its life supporting systems which are under increasing stress. Environmental concerns have found a significant presence in literature only since the mid-eighties. Cheryl Glotfelty traces the development of literary ecology in the introduction to Ecocriticism Reader. The first major attempt was made by Frederick O. Waage in 1985 with the edition of Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources. This consisted of course-descriptions from scholars who sought to attribute considerable significance to environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines. This was followed by the American Nature Writing Newsletter in which, brief essays, book reviews, and classroom notes were published with the intention of providing information pertaining to the study of writing on nature and the environment. Academic sessions in this field, especially the one organized by Harold Fromm entitled “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies” attracted keener attention to this new field. A symposium on “American Nature Writing” chaired by Glen Love and the formation of ASLE, a new Association for the Study of Literature and Environment with Scott Slovic as
president, both in 1992, nurtured the growth of this green critical enterprise. Environmental literature gained ground with the establishment of the journal ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, the purpose of which was to provide a forum for critical studies of literature addressing environmental considerations (ER xvii - xviii). It gained visibility and recognition as a critical school by 1993.

The editors of Reading the Earth, a book on practical applications of ecocriticism point out the relevance of such a study in their introduction to the book: “Environmentally informed literary scholarship offers a profound opportunity to read literature with a fresh sensitivity to the emerging voice of nature” (Reading xiii). This ecologically sensitive literary criticism is known as ecocriticism or green criticism which implies “move towards a more biocentric world view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human’s conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment” (xiii) Ecocriticism explores new ways taken by nature writers with a view to developing an ethic of caution and reciprocity in our interactions with nonhuman nature. Moreover, it attempts a cultural change which enables the humans to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. This green reading examines how a text resists, expresses, or inspires the biophilic desire of the human species or the impulse of fascination and affection that inspires our bonds with the nonhuman world.

Critics suggest various names for this relatively young branch of literary criticism. The term “ecocriticism” was first coined in 1978 by
William Rueckert in his essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. By “ecocriticism”, Rueckert meant “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (ER xx). Joseph W. Meeker uses the term “literary ecology” for the study of biological themes and relationships that appear in literary works. He says that man’s unique characteristic of creating literature bestows upon him the responsibility to “determine what role, if any, it [literature] plays in the welfare and survival of humanity, and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us” (The Comedy 4). In spite of such taxonomic debate, the fact remains that ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it (ER xxi). Ursula K Hein while introducing the term explains that “it investigates how nature is used literally or metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genres and tropes...” (ASLE).

Most ecocritical works share a common concern also: the troubling awareness that mankind has reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life-supporting systems. Entrusted with the moral responsibility of environmental restoration so that the global catastrophe can be avoided, humans have to recognize their role in current environmental problems.

An exploration of the various phases of man-nature relationship over the ages leads to an awareness of how human attitudes towards nature can mould cultural traditions that have precipitated the present catastrophe. In
early days, nature was seen as an ensouled organism that was alive and articulate. It was not at all passive, but an "active complex that participates in change over time and responds to human induced change" (Revolutions 25). As a result of constant human interaction and interference, nature has lost much that has been natural about it. Human consciousness socially constructs nature in different ways in different historical epochs and cultures. Carolyn Merchant says that humans negotiate "reality" with non human nature. In the book entitled Earthkeeping, the principal authors, Loren Wilkinson and Aileen Van Beilen present the discussions made by a group of scholars on the broad issues about Christian stewardship of natural resources. While tracing the human negotiations with nature in Hellenistic thought, they speak of four distinct views of nature which emerged in Hellenistic thought and which had influenced the worldview of the peoples around the Mediterranean. These are the Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean and Stoic views of nature. Plato considers that the ceaseless mutability of the sensible world is due to imperfection and hence finds it abhorrent. Discovering some order and stability in this changing cosmos, the Platonists try to explain that "the orderliness in nature results from its participation in the forms of a transcendent, perfect world, one not apprehended by the senses at all" (Earthkeeping 106). The impact of this thought is that "the Platonic world is dualistic—split between a changeable, transient world of matter known by the senses and an eternal world of ideal forms known only by the intellect"
This Platonic view of nature had engendered a “Contemptus Mundi”, i.e. a contempt for the world, which had far-reaching adverse effects (106).

Aristotle held the view that nature is intricately and intrinsically ordered and hence there is no need for human interference. Stoicism, though not popular as Platonism and Aristotelianism, became more of a religion and continued to exert its power and influence on the Roman Empire for quite some time. Wilkinson and Beilen state: “The basic Stoic doctrine is that there is in the universe a dynamic ordering principle which is the source, pattern and goal of all things, including humans. The Stoics called this ordering principle by a variety of names: God, Zeus, creative fire, ether, the law of nature, Providence, soul of the world, wood and so forth” (111). The good person, according to this philosophy, is one who is in complete harmony with the rest of the universe, as he or she is guided by the same “life-giving word” which animates all the universe, humanity and nature alike (111).

Epicureanism acts as an “accurate prefiguring of some aspects of modern scientific views of nature” (113). According to this view, all things are composed of atoms and all things, including our thoughts and sensations, originate from these atoms and their combinations (113). It is made clear how Epicureanism influences human thought and action. This basic idea of Epicureanism — “a universe explicable only in physical terms, with no value other than what is available to the senses” also underlies modern scientific conceptions of nature. These four views in spite of their diversity, place man at the centre of the universe.
Lynn White Jr., the historian, while tracing the historical roots of ecological crisis, censures the Judeo-Christian religion for its anthropocentric arrogance and the dominating attitude towards nature. White states that in its western form, “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen”. He continues: “Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions . . . not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (ER 9-11). White condemns the antiecological doctrines of Christianity in his words: “By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (ER 10). In the developing of western phase, the scientists held that the task and the reward of the scientist was “to think God’s thoughts after him” (ER 11). In short, modern western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology which hailed man as the crown of creation.

Many ecologists share Lynn White’s opinion. But the authors of Earthkeeping point out that White has mistaken Christendom for Christianity. Orin G. Gelderloos makes a distinction between the two: “The teachings of Christianity are those teachings of the Christian scriptures which are recognized as canonical. Christendom, on the other hand represents the teachings, writings and practices of members of religious organizations or churches” (Eco-theology 21). Wilkinson and Beilen explain: “What White and others have pointed to as the destructive influence of Christianity is, in fact, the destructive influence of pre-Christian ideas, imperfectly transformed
by the gospel, and too often mistaken for the gospel itself” (Earthkeeping 104). Christendom was influenced considerably by the Platonic, the Aristotelian and the Stoic viewpoints. These viewpoints hold that at times, nature appears to be evil, at other times it appears to be good. In either case, the belief in humanity as the centre of the universe is rarely questioned.

The medieval European attitude toward nature was one of harmony. Medieval nature was characterized by “an unchanging order, with everything in its place, and since people found their place within that order they had no impetus to rearrange nature” (Earthkeeping 118). In spite of this it was a time when Europe proved its mettle to change the environment. Wilkinson and Beilen say: “Human powers to build, to use, to alter, and to destroy nature were certainly alive in the Middle Ages” (119). Another important phase in man-nature relation is marked by the impact of the scientific revolution. They trace the role played by the foundational figures of modern scientific thought. The new discoveries in astronomy brought about drastic changes in man’s perception of the universe. Galileo maintained that knowledge about the laws governing the falling bodies could be derived only by means of precise measurement. His conviction that measurement and observation form the only reliable and certain way of knowing nature continues to the present times. Another impact of Galileo’s scientific attitude was a detachment from the world of senses. His inference was that “such sensible qualities as color, smell, taste and warmth were not a part of the fundamental particles, but “secondary”, added by the mind (127). Galileo’s dismissal of the world of
senses as insignificant has influenced later scientific thoughts and practices. The universe as seen by him was "a sized, shaped, weighed abstraction" reduced to numerical certainties.

The final lap of transformation from the medieval to the modern, mechanistic view of nature was made by Isaac Newton who considered nature as a cold and mechanical model. Wilkinson and Beilen comment: "And because Newton's science seemed to work very much like a vast machine, nature, the heavens, and to some extent man himself came increasingly to be understood as a kind of elaborate clockwork" (128). This marked the death of the old living world and in its place, man created a dead, inert environment that could be phenomenologically measured and quantified.

The history of American literature is a sequence of spiritual appropriation of the land which the settlers and their descendants found and altered. The land in turn altered the settlers. The first Puritan settlers of New England were guided by the mechanistic views of scientific revolution. They made practical use of scientific knowledge to bring nature under the control of human power. The first settlers looked upon wilderness as evil or wicked. For the new settlers, "the promised land" was the land that could be shaped by means of human enterprise and divine blessing (Earthkeeping 136). The Americans viewed nature with a kind of pride, a pride instilled out of owning a vast expanse of untouched nature. This national pride prompted the Americans to entertain a kindly attitude toward unhumanized nature which
shaped a Romantic view of nature in the nineteenth century. Romanticism was, to some extent, a “reaction against the mechanization of nature, which came about as a consequence of the scientific revolution, and against the pervasive image of the universe as a machine” (139). They considered the mind superior to nature because it was the mind that promoted a creative revitalization of the natural world and the great agent of this revitalization was imagination (140). Transcendentalism was the most identifiable form of Romanticism in America and its greatest exponents were Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Emerson. Both of them have tremendously influenced American thought and especially the American attitude toward nature. They explain that though the word “transcendental” appears to be paradoxical, it “reveals that the origin of the new view of nature is in the separateness of the mind from nature and in the consequent access of the mind to a reality beyond nature” (141). The awareness of the transcendent mind impelled Thoreau to a deep appreciation of the natural world and a fundamental critique of the manipulative attitude to nature. These New England Romantics described nature in deeply personal terms. They looked deep into wild nature for “intimate experience and also back to the period when nature had been adored as a mother, nurse and teacher”. Twentieth century New England is a product of the colonial and capitalist ecological revolutions. Carolyn Merchant describes the menacing effect of industrial capitalism in the following words: “Acid precipitation from the smoke stacks of the East and Midwest has attacked New England’s crops, trees and shrubs. Sulfur
dioxide and Ozone emissions have damaged the coniferous forests" (Revolutions 262). Merchant gives a picturesque description of how the growth of high technology and computer-based industries have altered human perceptions of the earth. In her words:

Computer advertisements and popular media depict the earth variously as electronically wired; encircled by floating cars, calculators and computers; enclosed within laboratory flasks; squeezed by human hands and lemon juicers; and demonstrated by oversized white males standing on its surface. The symbols of nature that permeate and structure modern consciousness present a mechanized artificial, instrumental nature. It has become completely mechanical, having lost any semblance of organic life. (262)

In the face of such global crisis precipitated by megamachines and grand masters of science, ecological thinking offers the possibility of a new relationship between humans and the environment which alone can restore the health of the planet. It entails a shift in paradigm, which according to Bill Devall is “a shorthand description of the world view, the collection of values, beliefs, habits, and norms which forms the frame of reference of a collectivity of people” (Key Concepts 26). Carolyn Merchant gives a description of the characteristics of an ecological paradigm. In her opinion, an ecological paradigm promotes new assumptions about nature which are in sharp contrast with those of the mechanistic paradigm. According to an ecological
paradigm, everything is connected to everything else in an integrated web. This web-like interconnectedness is the major principle of ecological sustainability and this is given due importance in the works of ecologists and ecoconscious writers. A second important assumption is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Non human nature is active, dynamic and responsive to human actions and sees people and nature as a unified whole. Moreover, ecology offers a new ethic for grounding human relations with nature (Revolutions 263). She also points out how an ecocentric view differs from the mechanistic view. Mechanism adheres to an ethic of “natural rights” in which each individual uses nonhuman nature to maximize his or her self interest. On the other hand, an ecocentric ethic is based on a network of mutual obligations rather than natural rights. It takes as its guiding principle the land ethic of Aldo Leopold that widens the boundaries of the community to encompass “soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively the land”. The basic thought of Leopold’s land ethic is that a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, beauty, and stability of the biotic community (qtd. in Revolutions 263).

The new science of ecology had its origin in the organismic school of biology during the nineteenth century. The term was coined in 1866 by a German biologist, Ernst Haeckel who defined it as “the science of relations between the organism and the surrounding outer world” (The Web 33). The word is derived from the Greek word “oikos” which means “household’. Hence Capra feels that it can be rightly considered as the study of the
relationships that interlink all members of the “Earth Household”. Rosemary Ruether explains ecology as “the biological science of biotic communities that demonstrates the laws by which nature, unaided by humans, has generated and sustained life. In addition, its study also suggests guidelines for how humans must learn to live as a sustaining, rather than destructive member of such biotic communities” (Gaia 47). The word “Umwelt” which means “environment” was used for the first time by the Baltic biologist and ecological pioneer Jakob Von Uexkull. The credit for coining the term “ecosystem” goes to the British plant ecologist, A. G. Tansley. It was this concept of ecosystem that shaped subsequent ecological thinking. Ecosystem refers to “a community of organisms and their physical environment interacting as an ecological unit” (The Web 33). The ecosystems are sustainable communities of plants, animals and micro organisms. A sustainable society seeks to satisfy its needs without diminishing the prospects of future generations. It promotes a “Live and Let Live” attitude rather than an “Either You or I” view (Key Concepts 120).

In Capra’s opinion, being “ecologically literate” or “ecoliterate” means understanding the principles of organization of ecological communities or ecosystems and employing these principles for building up sustainable human communities. Mankind can learn important lessons from the planet’s ecosystems that “have organized themselves in subtle and complex ways so as to maximize sustainability” (The Web 290). This wisdom of nature forms the essence of ecoliteracy. Capra advises mankind to
follow the basic principles of ecology and use them as guidelines so that the culture of life can replace the culture of death. Capra stresses that in the new millennium, survival depends on ecological literacy and the human will to shape their lives in accordance with the principles of ecology. The basic principles of ecology, according to Capra, are "interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility and diversity all of which help to promote sustainability" (295). The transition to a sustainable world is to be legitimated by changes in values, perception and knowledge.

A spectrum of new theories and concepts infused with ecological consciousness has evolved in the fields of science, philosophy, psychology and theology. The changing paradigm of scientific knowledge created by Albert Einstein, Wolfgang Parli, Neils Bohr, and others shook the foundations of western science. The new physics broke down the distinction between spheres which rendered it impossible to distinguish between matter and energy. Newtonian physics lost its stronghold as it became doubtful whether science could demarcate an objective realm of "facts", distinct from subjective perspectives (Gaia 37). Ruether explains:

Newtonian physics had assumed that matter could be reduced to hard entities, atomic particles that remained inert until external force was applied to them to make them "move". This mechanical system resided in a fixed, static framework of space and time. Under the influence of relativity and quantum theory, this concept
of matter, with its fixed framework of time and space began to dissolve. (38)

With the formulation of Einstein's famous formula regarding mass and energy, the atomic and subatomic world lost its fixity. Scientists further noticed that matter which appeared in wavelike patterns in interdependent relation showed probable tendencies to exist. Their studies pointed towards a void like web of relationship in which events arise in interconnection with each other. This relational web is coterminous with the entire cosmos, in which everything is connected with everything, not only across space, but across time as well.

In the field of philosophy, Heidegger's rejection of traditional metaphysics provides an influential thought towards more immanent non-reflective relations to nature. Heidegger criticized many aspects of modern technological and mass culture as a forgetfulness of being. As far as he is concerned, the Being-of-humanity is always a Being-in-the-world and inseparably bound to it. Heidegger suggests that only the rare individual, the poet or artist is in a position to realize, by means of an aesthetic transcendence of technological wisdom, the promise of authentic relations to Being. As against Freudian psychology with its stress on individual, Carl Jung's collective unconscious highlights the universality of experiences and cultural patterns. It holds that the contents and modes of behaviour are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. The similarity of
experience helps better understanding among beings and instills empathy for the others.

Ecosophy seeks new paradigms based on nature's "inherent activity, self-organization, permeable boundaries and resilience" (Revolutions 267). Founded on integrative thinking, the new consciousness is constituted by imitation, synthesis, and creative reciprocity between humans and nature.

Carolyn Merchant offers a peep into certain works which challenge positivist epistemology through participatory forms of consciousness. For instance, she draws attention to Gregory Bateson's "Ecology of Mind" which sees nature as "a network of information moving from brain to hand to stick to earth, to eye to brain" (Revolutions 267).

A more profound and radical imagery of the earth as a living being is found in the works of planetary biologists like James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. Based on the study of atmospheric chemistry, they contend that the earth is a living organism, perhaps the largest organism, and that it has maintained, over geological eons of time, an atmosphere conducive to life. Lovelock says that the persistence of the beautifully anomalous atmosphere at a steady state is possible only due to a certain controlling mechanism. He calls this planet-sized creature "Gaia" after the Greek goddess of earth (Key Concepts 353). The entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae could be regarded as constituting a single living entity capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its
constituent parts. In New Age literature and art, one comes across several references to the earth as Gaia, as the term has caught on among the seekers of a new ecological vision. They like to look at it as a kind of feminine planetary organism.

Deep ecology is an offspring of geocentric scientific thought, which calls for a fundamental transformation in western epistemology, ontology and ethics. Deep ecologists underscore the need for an ecological consciousness rooted in biospecies equality and infused with an environmental ethic oriented toward forming sustainable relations with nature. As against shallow ecology which is anthropocentric or human centred, Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher recommends "deep ecology" which recognizes the value of all living beings and views human beings as just one particular strand in the web of life. It looks at the world as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Naess recognizes expansion of the self all the way to the identification with nature as the basis of deep ecology. Deep ecology projects the relational, total field image which completely dissolves the man-in-environment concept. It promotes biospherical egalitarianism which implies close partnership with other forms of life. A deep ecological awareness has its foundation on the principles of diversity and symbiosis. Naess explains: "Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival... 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” (Key Concepts 121).

Bill Devall, who promoted and developed deep ecology by means of a series of newsletters and articles, thinks of deep ecology as the revolutionary stream of environmentalism which seeks a new metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, and environmental ethics of person and planet. It aims at transformation of values and social organization. He traces the source of deep ecology in his article, “The Deep Ecology Movement”. The chief source is the influx of eastern spiritual traditions into the west as a result of the writings of Alan Watts and Deisetz Suzula. Devall says that the eastern spiritual traditions provided a different man/nature vision. He explains how in the late 1960s and 70s, philosophers, scientists, and social critics made a comparative analysis of the eastern and western philosophical traditions. He refers to the works of Capra, Joseph Needham and Huston Smith which all emphasize the need for an alternative approach to science and human values. These philosophers expressed their hope that the philosophies of the east will form a spiritual and ethical basis for modern science. According to Devall, a second stream of thought which influenced deep ecology has been the attempt to revalue traditional religions, philosophies, and social organizations of native Americans during the 1960s and 70s in “objective, comparative, analytic, and critical ways.” (Key Concepts 129) Devall also identifies the important themes of deep ecology. He states: “Man is an integral part of nature, not over or apart from nature” (133). One basic principle of deep
ecology in his view is that “man flows with the system of nature rather than attempting to control all the rest of nature”. Deep ecology entails an objective approach to nature. The new paradigm requires a pervasive awareness of total intermingling of the planet earth. Bill Devall states that deep ecology is liberating ecological consciousness (Key Concepts 130-135).

Carolyn Merchant, in the introduction to Key Concepts relates how an extended view of deep ecology is promoted by later Australian philosophers like Warwick Fox and Freya Mathews. Fox linked deep ecology with transpersonal psychology by developing the idea of identification of an expanded self that was capable of moving beyond the atomized, isolated ego. In 1991, Freya Mathews developed the foundations of deep ecology in relation to the principles of interconnectedness, intrinsic value, and self-realizing systems which profoundly influenced ecological thoughts and writings in later years (Key Concepts 8).

Capra remarks that ecological consciousness is spiritual in its deepest sense. The new mode of integrative thinking is holistic and nonlinear and attempts a reconsideration of values. He explains:

The whole question of values is crucial to deep ecology; it is in fact, its central defining characteristic. Whereas the old paradigm is based on anthropocentric (human-centred) values, deep ecology is grounded in ecocentric (earth-centred) values. It is a world view that acknowledges the inherent value of non-human life. All living beings are members of ecological communities bound together in a
network of interdependencies. When this deep ecological perception becomes part of our daily awareness, a radically new system of ethics emerges. (The Web 11).

Capra highlights the need for such a deep ecological ethics in order to prevent the life-destroying activities of scientists and encourage the “life furthering” and “life preserving” ones.

Social ecology forms a variant of ecological thought which is defined and defended by social philosopher, Murray Bookchin. Bookchin holds that the domination of human beings is historically and casually prior to the domination of nature. His argument in support of this view is that the early tribal societies were basically egalitarian and lived within nature, but the increasing prestige of the male elders created social hierarchies and inequalities. That led to power over other human beings, especially women, and ultimately over nature. The goal of social ecology is to remove hierarchy and domination from society, including the domination of people over nature (Key Concepts 9).

Ecological consciousness took a new turn when it got merged with the rising feminist consciousness. With the publication of Feminism or Death by the French feminist, Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, the term “eco-feminism” occupied a pivotal position in debates on ecology. Maria Mies traces the development of this consciousness in the book Ecofeminism, co-authored by Vandana Shiva. She says:
Ecofeminism grew out of various social movements—the feminist, peace and the ecology movements—in the late 1970s and early 80s. Though the term was first used by Francoise d’Eaubonne, it became popular only in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked off initially by recurring ecological disasters. (13)

Ecofeminism draws impetus from social ecology in identifying isomorphic connections between various levels of exploitation. It also aims at breaking hierarchies and domination. At the same time, it absorbs biospherical egalitarianism from deep ecology. But instead of putting blame on anthropocentrism for the impending ecological disaster, they vehemently protest that androcentrism is the root cause of the modern crisis. It attempts a synthesis of the concerns taken up by both feminism and ecology. Merchant remarks: “Writing as a militant radical feminist, d’Eaubonne placed the problem of the death of the planet squarely on the shoulders of man” (Introduction 10). In “The Time for Ecofeminism”, d’Eaubonne condemns the male society for executing its patriarchal power. She warns: “If the male society persists, there will be no tomorrow for humanity” (Key Concepts 193).

The present wave of women’s movement makes use of three different strategies to critique male domination: a search for the roots of women’s power, attacks on male sexism and attack on biological determinism. It is impossible to overlook the affinity between feminist and ecological politics.
Both aim at the overthrow of patriarchy with its oppressive rationality and technocratic values. Kate Soper brings out the link between the two in her words: “Indeed the ecological call for a rethinking of our approach to the natural world has seemed not only to be consistent with, but in a sense to encompass the feminist demand for an end to sexual hierarchy, and for a revaluation of all those activities and dispositions traditionally linked with femininity” (What is Nature? 122). Soper feels that there is an underlying rationale in the symbolic alignment of woman with nature. The ecological valorization of nature marks a “dissent from Enlightenment conceptions of the natural and animal world as a lower order to be exploited in the interests of humanity” (122). Likewise, feminism dissents from the idea of woman as inferior being whose subordination is justified by reference to male superiority. The feminine and nurturant powers of Mother Earth that have been suppressed and abused by “the hubris of male science and technology are viewed as the energizing source of a renaissance at once both sexual and ecological” (122). The precise and comprehensive definition of ecofeminist criticism offered by Gretchen T. Legler in “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism” is highly relevant in this context:

Ecofeminist literary criticism is a hybrid criticism, a combination of ecological or environmental criticism and feminist literary criticism. It offers a unique combination of literary and philosophical perspectives that gives literary and cultural critics a special lens through which they can investigate the ways nature is
represented in literature and the ways representations of nature are
linked with representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality.
One of the primary projects of ecofeminist literary critics is
analysis of the cultural construction of nature which also includes
an analysis of language, desire, knowledge and power.

(Ecofeminism, Women 227)

Maria Mies explains the chief concerns of ecofeminism. In her words:
An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new
cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in
nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of
co-operation and mutual care and love. Only in this way can we be
enabled to respect and preserve the diversity of all life forms,
including their cultural expressions, as true sources of our well-
being and happiness. (Ecofeminism 6)

The warning note struck by Mies is powerful enough to make one
desist from thoughtless manipulation of the environment. She says that it is
impossible to save oneself individually. The consequence of the deeds of the
machineman will eventually affect the whole universe as everything is
interconnected and interdependent. Ecofeminist works have underscored the
growing awareness of isomorphic connections between patriarchal violence
against women, people of colour, and nature. In defying patriarchy, women
show their loyalty to future generations and to life and the planet itself. In
“Women and Power”, Petra Kelly maintains that the oppression of women is
deeply embedded in societies and psyches. She believes that to rid the world of nuclear weapons and poverty, people must put an end to sexism and racism. As long as social and economic power vests in the hands of the white males, women and people of colour continue to be discriminated against, and poverty and the military mentality will continue unabated. The world is under the sway of masculine institutions and ideologies. All sites of catastrophe and aggressive violence were dominated by technology and patriarchal values. Mies explains that “unlimited progress” is a dangerous myth as it implies rape and destruction of the living nature. She says: “As White Man has for centuries treaded nature like an enemy it seems that now nature is hostile to us” (Ecofeminism, Women 93). Most development projects tear apart the soil and sever the bonds between people and the soil.

Kelly warns: “The ultimate result of unchecked, terminal patriarchy will be ecological catastrophe or nuclear holocaust” (Ecofeminism, Women 113). Noticing the clear and profound relationship between militarism, environmental degradation and sexism, Kelly remarks: “Any commitment to social justice and non violence that does not address the structures of male domination of women is incomplete” (114). This forces women to question the structures of male domination.

U.S feminism grew out of the Civil Rights Movement and the demonstrations against Vietnam war. Racism and Sexism are bound up with the colonial expansion of Europe and the rise of modern science. Maria Mies says: “The distinction between white people as ‘humans’ and blacks and
brows as nearer to 'nature' along with the parallel distinction between men and women, found its clearest expression in the age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Ecofeminism 178).

Problems of environmental justice arise when certain decisions and practices disproportionately affect a group of people. In the opinion of several environmental scholars, minorities, women, and the poor are often the victims of environmental racism in the US. Environmental reports reveal that the worst victims of pollution and devastation are women of colour. Karen J. Warren relates data regarding the hazardous effects of environmental destruction on the blacks. Native American women face unique health risks because of the presence of uranium mining on or near reservations. As a result of uranium mining, an increase in the percentage of miscarriages was noticed. There were extremely high rates of cleft palate and other birth defects and also contagious diseases.

According to a 1986 report, two million tons of radioactive uranium trailings have been dumped on Native American lands. The study made by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice reveals that “race is a major factor in the location of hazardous waste in the United States” (Ecofeminism, Women 11). The study also shows that the greatest concentration of hazardous waste sites in the United States is on the predominantly African American and Hispanic south side of Chicago. Many of the municipal incinerators and landfills are located on the African American neighbourhoods. It has often been remarked about the US
environment that it is an environment where the rich become richer and the poor get poisoned. This indicates that environmental racism is a major issue that needs immediate attention.

Another environmental issue is the health of children. Lead poisoning endangers the health of the majority of children. Cancer associated with pesticides on fruit and reproductive organ cancer have come to the notice of researchers. Warren states that the three elements which make up the major part of Third World disasters are deforestation, desertification and soil erosion and the primary victims are women and children. Hence it is quite natural that women of colour have been “at the forefront of the struggle to draw attention to hazardous waste disposal, exposure to toxins, pollution and environmental contamination” as Dorceta E. Taylor points out in “Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism” (Ecofeminism, Women 39).

Under such conditions, women of colour are forced to become activists for environmental justice. They feel the need to focus on theory and practice with greater emphasis on practice. While the death and devastation demand immediate attention, they cannot afford to theorize in splendid isolation. The environmental justice movement takes up fights against the most vicious and pervasive kinds of inequalities based on race, gender and class. Environmental justice groups emphasize that civil rights cannot be separated from environmental rights and environmental justice. Therefore “it is important for people of color to define for themselves and not be defined by others” (Ecofeminism, Women 68). Taylor believes that the challenge for
ecofeminists is to “increase their awareness of issues devastating communities of color, explore ways of developing, understanding and mutually respectful working relationships and be open to changes that will come from such alliances” (69).

Critics have drawn attention towards certain limitations of ecofeminism. One allegation is that with its predominant white shades, it has failed to pay due attention to the environmental struggles of women of colour in the United States. Moreover the focus is on struggles of women in developing countries and tends to ignore the environmental problems in developed countries. It is important to notice that only a few women of colour consider themselves ecofeminists. They look at nature in a way different from the others. The inequalities rooted in centuries of racism have changed their perception. Josephine Donovan states that women of color have a different cultural history and continue to have a different cultural experience than white women (Feminist Theory 156).

Both African American literary criticism and ecofeminist criticism have emerged out of reactive, polemical modes of criticism. Belonging to a group which experiences unique form of oppression that is specific and complex, black feminist literary theorists seek popularized methodologies that might reveal the ways in which that oppression is represented in literary texts. Unable to find a perfect fit with deep ecology or social ecology, black women with their unique and complex issues look for a new strategy. Taylor suggests: “The best strategy for women of colour is to work within a
movement that overlays several other unimportant social movements, and to build bridges with people from these closely related movements” (Ecofeminism, Women 70). Their methods are necessarily flexible and they question a variety of standards of valuation that mainstream feminist and androcentric Afro-Americanist theory might naturalize.

Alice Walker, a versatile Southern black writer employs such a flexible strategy while taking the challenge to reimagine nature and human relationships with the natural world.

Section 2

Born and raised in Eatonton, Georgia, as the daughter of a sharecropper, Alice Walker is closely associated with the Southern land. This has instilled in her a deep passion for the earth. Though her feelings for the Southern society are ambivalent, her love for the beautiful Southern landscape is indisputable. Her works reveal how human imagination interacts with the land to create beauty and art. Walker’s oft-quoted essay, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” brings out a meaningful relation between land and literature. Her mother’s garden—“a garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity”—had been a perennial source of inspiration for her. She is highly ecstatic about her mother’s gardening skill. She describes: “Whatever she planted grew as if by magic. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms—sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea . . . and so on and on” (Gardens 241). Walker
admits quite significantly: “Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength—in search of my mother’s garden, I found my own” (243). Houston A. Baker makes an interesting comment about the garden, which according to him serves as a metaphor for artistic creativity: “In a word, Walker as both reader and poet discovers through the image “garden” how the world is made anew”. Baker continues:

By phenomenologically recovering her mother’s vernacular ‘garden’ and presenting it as literate poetic image... Walker opens the field of Afro-American women’s consciousness in its founding radiance and claims for herself an enduring spiritual legacy (Workings 52).

Walker’s stance as an ecologist encompasses wider dimensions than that of a feminist, ecofeminist or deep ecologist. Instead of favouring one school against the other, Walker tries to integrate their approaches into a coherent ecological vision so that she can address the problems faced by women of colour. The word “womanism”, coined and popularized by her, rightly explains this coherent ecological consciousness. She gives a four-point definition of the term consciously differentiating it from feminism. The first point she wants to make clear is that womanist, derived from “womanish” refers to a “black feminist or feminist of color”, a woman who is outrageous, audacious, courageous and capable of willful behaviour (xi). Lovalerie King in “African American Womanism”, analyses each point of her womanist aesthetic. Regarding the first point, she remarks:
Though Walker includes the straightforward statement that a womanist is a ‘black feminist or feminist of color,’ the qualities associated with the womanist are not confined to racial, gender, or other categories. The womanist subject is at once precocious and determined, someone whose thoughts and actions place her ‘ahead of the game,’ perhaps even in the position of visionary. She is direct and assertive, a person who willingly and aggressively takes responsibility for her own life, and who claims the right to full existence. (African American Novel 235)

This explanation emphasizes her primary concern with the black woman and also the autonomy she would like her women to possess.

The second point of Walker’s definition highlights her ecological vision more explicitly:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility [values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter], and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, . . . (Gardens xi)

When she speaks of survival and wholeness of entire people, she does not exclude the non-human beings. She has stated very clearly that “everything is a human being”. Hence this part of the definition is a clear manifestation of
her concern for the health of the planet. King's explanation of the second point also strikes a similar note: “The second component of Walker's womanist aesthetic describes the womanist vis-à-vis her relationship with others and with herself, stresses connectedness over separatism, encourages an acceptance of a collective past as it is exhibited in the many hues of the African diaspora, and celebrates a legacy of resistance to oppression” (African American Novel 239). The quest for personal and communal wholeness is an important aspect of her womanist philosophy. She employs “recurring motifs of the spiritual journey or questing self, rebirth and transformation, the universality of pain and suffering, and a holistic view of life that brings her idea of connectedness into full relief” (239).

Walker states her own reason for preferring the term “womanism” to feminism in her collection of activist writings Anything We Love can be Saved. In response to Audre Lorde’s questioning of Walker's use of the word “womanist”, Walker explains that the word has “more room in it for changes... sexual and otherwise”. She adds that the term is “more reflective of black women's culture, especially southern culture” (Anything 80). Walker considers it a necessary act of liberation to name oneself with words that fit. The multiplicity of definitions given to the word itself bears evidence to the flexibility and fluidity which allows her to incorporate several concerns. Instead of confining herself to a rigid fit, her womanist consciousness is informed by feminism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and also indigenous cultures.
Pamela Smith summarises what a womanist is, from an ethical and spiritual perspective, in the manner of Gretchen E. Ziegenhals, who says that a womanist is one who speaks out, speaks up, speaks against or in defence of something important – a woman who loves herself, a culture and who is committed to survival (Crosscurrents 1). Smith prefers to call Walker’s ecofeminist poems “ecowomanist”. She explains: “Just as the term ‘ecofeminist’ expresses the perception that the degradation of the Earth is of a piece with the subordinating and bullying of women, racial minorities, the poor and the marginalized, the term ‘ecowomanist’ expresses the burden of this perception on a woman of color” (5). Martin Delvaux too establishes Walker as an ecowomanist with ample illustrations. According to him, Walker very deftly links questions of gender and race with environmentalist concerns. He demonstrates how she suggests an ecocentric view, which can be regarded as a precondition for an aesthetic and ethical appreciation and love for the environment, by placing human beings and nature on the same moral plane (“Transcending” 1). Walker believes that ecosystems do not just refer to the relationship of plants and animals in their habitat but include human beings together with the physical environment. All her literary expressions are aimed at the noble task of saving the battered earth. With this aim in her mind from the very outset, she is all armed against oppression and victimization of any sort.

George Mathew Nalunnakkal, an associate professor in the Department of Theology and Ethics at the United Theological College,
Bangalore, suggests the term “organic womanism” as against “a western, middleclass and at times elitist brand of ecofeminism”, a perspective which would address the issues of women and nature in the context of the tribal women’s meaningful participation in movements for environmental justice. He explains that the prefix “eco” carries a patriarchal baggage and hence reductionistic (Asia Journal 58). With special reference to the Indian context, he adds: “The adjective ‘organic’ is engaged here to highlight the natural relationship that Dalit and tribal women have with nature, which women of middle class and other sections of society do not possess at the same level of intensity” (58). The contention here is that even the word “organic” appears to be superfluous as the word “womanism” addresses an organic view.

Walker tells David Bradley that her search for a word that is organic has resulted in “womanist”; it “comes out of the culture, that really expresses the spirit that we see in black women” (“Novelist Alice Walker” 30). As such, it is better to fix on “womanism” because it is eclectic and transcends the limitations of deep ecology and ecofeminism to address the environmental problems in an African American context.

As a womanist, Alice Walker takes the missionary stance of protecting the earth from utter peril. She is obsessed with the urge to change the world as it is not good enough. She tells O’Brien: “I believe in change: change personal, and change in society” (Interviews 194). She exhorts the girls of Sarah Lawrence college in the convocation address: “Your job, when you leave here, — as it was the job of educated women before you—is to
change the world" (Gardens 37). Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* has tremendously influenced Walker. She acknowledges that it is a book that made her happy to be a writer, and bolstered and brightened her consciousness about the role other women can have in changing the world.

The obsessive urge for change had its origin in a wound in the eye caused by her brother’s pellet shot. The brothers were given air rifles which shot copper pellets. She remembers the event quite vividly: “The brother who’d always attacked me with threats and fists before, who was two years older and quite a bit larger, now used his gun to shoot at me. One day he shot me in the eye, destroying the pupil” (*WM* 16). In Gardens also she narrates the same event more vividly:

One day while I am standing on top of our make shift “garage”—pieces of tin nailed across some poles — holding my bow and arrow and looking out toward the fields, I feel an incredible blow in my right eye. I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun. (386)

For a long time, it was painful and was covered by scar tissue. Though the parents tried to dismiss it as “Alice’s accident,” she found it difficult to forget the hostile curiosity of her classmates. She relates: “For a long time I felt completely devalued. Unseen. Worthless”. As a consciously feminist adult, she could think of it only as a “patriarchal wound” (*WM* 17). This wound helped her to connect herself with the oppressed. Because it happened at the age of eight, she claimed that it enabled her to understand the pain of
the girls who were victims of genital mutilation and the resultant psychic mutilation.

Another equally disturbing wound was inflicted while she was travelling by a greyhound bus from Georgia to Atlanta to join Spelman College as a student. Walker relates this painful experience in her interviews: “I deliberately sat in the front section of the greyhound bus. A white woman complained to the driver. He—big and red and ugly—ordered me to move. I moved”. The shame she felt was so deep that a strong desire for revolutionary change filled her veins. She says: “But in those seconds of moving, everything changed. I was eager to bring an end to the South that permitted my humiliation” (Gardens 253). The urge for change stemmed from deep shame that was the result of soul injury. Living in the brutally racist, completely segregated state of Georgia, Walker had several such painful experiences of being discriminated. She describes: “I could neither eat at a public restaurant nor use a public library or rest room without the certainty of being arrested by a white male agent of the state who would undoubtedly physically or verbally abuse me” (Anything 200). Because of the racist wounds, she started thinking about the black woman and the struggles she had to face in her daily encounter with a white world. She decided to turn the wounds into warrior marks that would transform her from “someone nearly devastated by childhood suffering into someone who loves life and knows pleasure and joy in spite of it” (WM 17-18).
As Gretcher E. Ziegenhals remarks: “Affirming that her perspective is informed by a legacy of oppression, she uses her art to write about the earth” (Christian Century 1036). She focuses on the sacredness of all life, mourning the vegetation that is being poisoned, choked and “denatured” by the careless greed of the society. She believes that one has to learn a lot from the art and history of past cultures, by the elements, and by the trees, the flowers, and most especially the animals. She constantly invites her readers to make these lessons part of their life. In her works one can easily trace the change or growth from a neglected self to a wholesome one.

Another important aspect of Walker’s womanism is the feeling of connectedness with every one and everything. She tells Elena Featherston, “We [the black writers] have the capability to connect to absolutely everyone and everything, and in fact, we are all connected. . . . I discover that my family is like any other family in the world of same class. When I write about my family, about things from the South, the people of China say, ‘Why, this is very Chinese’” (The ST 269). While speaking about the making of the film Warrior Marks, she says: “What we can do is say: Out of our own suffering we can recognize yours. Out of our own outrage, we join our voices to yours. Out of our own self-respect, we affirm your right to be self-respecting and free from unwanted invasion or attack (Anything 149). She connects her own blindness with the sexual blinding of the little African girls. She explains in The Warrior Marks:
Without its pupil, the eye can never see itself, or the person possessing it, reflected in the eye of another... Without the clitoris and other sexual organs, a woman can never see herself reflected in the healthy intact body of another. Her sexual vision is impaired, and only the most devoted lover will be sexually 'seen'.

(WM 19)

She always advocates this kind of meaningful empathy with the rest of the world. She states in a reassuring manner: "We can also tell you that mutilation of any part of the body is unnecessary and causes suffering almost beyond imagining. We can tell you that the body you are born into is sacred and whole, like the earth that produced it, and there is nothing that needs to be subtracted from it" (19).

Walker's fiction is suffused with a concern for the environment which has been fostered by a series of events in the 1970s and 80s that are detrimental to the environment. The post-war deterioration of the environment and the use of defoliants in the Vietnam war provoked her as it did many ecoconscious writers. Martin Delvaux traces the earthling influences back to her bringing up by parents who were both rooted in the earth, both faithful to their love of nature and the beauty of the seasons. He remarks: "The confluence of an environmentally conscious upbringing and a heightened public ecological awareness has evidently prompted a strong thematic examination of 'green' ideas in Walker's writing" ("Transcending" 4). Walker is never tired of speaking about her mother's influence in
moulding her earthling psyche. When Pratibha Parmar asked her about the
source of inspiration for writing Possessing the Secret of Joy a novel which
deals with female genital mutilation, Walker acknowledges:

My strength comes from the earth, which I really understand. As a
child I bonded with nature very early, because my mother has
always been a very great earth spirit. She knew the land and she
knew what it produced and she worked with it and she loved it, so
this has been my heritage. I believe that the body of woman is our
symbol of the earth and earth’s processes. So working on this
book, I have been able to think of the body of woman, scarred and
battered, as the body of the planet scarred and battered. And to see
that helping woman to be whole, will help restore her strong
connection to the earth and to the protection of the earth, which
only women, I think, can feel, in the way that you can empathize
with anything that resembles you so closely. (WM 271)

She is constantly inspired by the black grandmothers and mothers who
“were not saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the
springs of creativity in them for which there was no release” (Gardens 233).
In her opinion, they were “Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste,
because they were so rich in spirituality – which is the basis of Art in that the
strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane”
(Gardens 233). Walker exhorts the black women to pull out of themselves
and “look at and identify with [our] lives the living creativity some of our
great—grandmothers were not allowed to know” (237). Speaking about the fountainhead of the over burdened black woman, Walker remarks: “We have constantly looked high, when we should have looked high and low” (237). The mothers have handed on the creative spark which acts like a seed. Walker remembers with appreciation: “Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother’s stories” (240).

Several women in the past have served as trail blazers for Walker in formulating her womanist consciousness. The influence of nineteenth century cultural feminists is undeniable. Going beyond the fundamentally rationalistic Enlightenment theory, these feminists look for broader cultural transformation. Josephine Donovan speaks about their influence and importance in the passage cited below:

While continuing to recognize the importance of critical thinking and self-development, they also stress the role of the non-rational, the intuitive and often collective side of life. Instead of emphasizing the similarities between men and women, they often stress the differences, ultimately affirming that feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and a fount of public regeneration” (Feminist Theory 31).

An important vestige of cultural feminist theory was a matriarchal vision which lifted up society, a society of strong women guided by essentially female concerns and values. Donovan throws light on the forces which have given rise to such a shift in thought. According to her, this came
as a response to the masculinist ideology of social Darwinism. Another force that stimulated the matriarchal vision lay in the strong urge to perpetuate the experience of intense female bonding that characterized nineteenth century female society (32). The cultural feminist tradition was initiated by Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1845. Inspired by American transcendentalism, Fuller in this book, "stresses the emotional, intuitive side of knowledge and expresses an organic world view" that differs from the mechanistic view of Enlightenment rationalists (32).

Fuller’s influence on Walker can be traced easily. Fuller’s idea of organic growth is echoed in Walker’s obsessive concern for “survival whole”. In Fuller’s words, “What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold [her] powers . . . (qtd. in Feminist Theory 38). Fuller’s contention is that each individual is born as a seed with a unique design imprinted within, in the course of one’s life, it must be allowed to unfold. Walker’s endeavours to promote the development of self aim nothing less than this. The matriarchal vision that guides her throughout is partly due to Fuller’s influence.

Another thought that emerges in this book, according to Donovan is Fuller’s concern about loving relationships and connectedness to community. Fuller exhorts the women of her time to think apart from men instead of being taught and led by men. Women should dedicate themselves to the Sun of Truth and act out of the fullness of being. Donovan remarks in this
context: “Such isolation and self-development through communion with one’s own truth, according to Fuller, make one better able to relate to others, to love out of strength, not weakness” (33). Walker repeatedly mentions the need to listen to the dictates of one’s own heart and act accordingly. This thought finds expression in Walker’s belief in the spirits for moral empowerment. She turns to the goddess within.

Besides possessing the freedom to unfold their faculties, women need, collectively as women, to discover who they really are. Fuller firmly believes that “at present, women are the best helpers of one another” (qtd. in Feminist Theory 34). Alice Walker highlights the idea of the sisterhood of women and it is by means of this bonding that Walker’s women discover their latent power. Fuller notices that women possess unique power, “an electric nature” that has been suppressed by the socially defined roles women are supposed to take. Donovan explains that Fuller seems to refer to the “intuitive perception that goes beyond reason to understand the subtle connections among people and among all life forms” (34). In other words women used to cherish a holistic vision. Man’s inability to discern such subtle connections results in a negative tendency to ridicule women. Throughout her works, Alice Walker envisages such a holistic vision which is expressed in her zeal for mutuality and reciprocity of relationship between the human and the nonhuman. A denial of women’s realities and experience is oppressive and detrimental to women. Fuller envisions a radical change which may result in a vaguely conceived cultural androgyry or in a “feminization of culture” (35). Fuller
believes that a "psychic synthesis of masculine and feminine attributes would be reflected in the outer world creating a dialectic of complementary opposites, like yin and yang, an organic, harmonic whole" (35). Fuller links the liberation of women with the amelioration of life on earth which is taken up by later feminists. Alice Walker hopes for such a synthesis and she pinpoints that every struggle for change should be undertaken by a "multiracial," "bisexual" army as she says in Possessing the Secret of Joy.

Another writer who serves as a powerful source of inspiration is her Southern forerunner, Zora Neale Hurston, upon whom Walker bestows her literary motherhood. Whenever Walker speaks about Hurston, she seems to share the exuberance of the latter. She is greatly inspired by the dauntless courage of Hurston. The epitaph dictated by Walker to be engraved on Hurston’s tombstone reveals the latter’s greatness: “A Genius of the South/Novelist, folklorist/Anthropologist” (Gardens 107). Zora’s contribution towards enlivening the African American culture is documented by Walker in this collection of essays. She says: “After all, with her pen, she had erected a monument to the African American and African-Amer Indian common people both she and I are descended from. After reading Hurston, anyone coming to the United States would know exactly where to find the remains of the culture that kept Southern black people going through centuries of white oppression” (46). Her works provided access to the music, the speech, the people’s relationship to the earth and to the animals. Walker acknowledges: “Reading her, I saw for the first time my own specific culture, and recognized
it as such, with its humor always striving to be equal to its pain, and I felt, as if indeed, and I felt as if indeed, I had been given a map that led the remains of my literary country” (46).

Zora Neale Hurston was immersed in her culture so much that it was impossible to think of her outside it. She celebrates the black people who could be “peculiar and comic”. It never crossed her mind that they would racially or culturally be inferior to the Whites. Walker recounts the delight she felt while reading Mules and Men, a book which gave back the black Americans all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed” and “showed how marvellous, and indeed priceless, they are” (Gardens 85). She appreciates the racial health which is a pronounced characteristic of Zora’s works, a sense of black people as complete, complex, “undiminished” human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature. Zora was a woman who wrote and spoke her mind without any inhibition. She was before her time, in intellectual circles and she chose a life style much ahead of her time. Walker points out that during the early and middle years of her career, Zora was a cultural revolutionary simply because she was always herself. Alice Walker speaks of Zora “as the freest of all black women writers” (Gardens 236).

Valerie Smith, in the article “Black Feminist Theory”, says that while examining the relationship between Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker, Dianne Sadoff reveals a compelling tension between the explicit subjects of each author’s work and the subversive material that underlies the surfaces.
Smith adds: “An ancestor claimed as significant by most recent black women writers, Zora Neale Hurston misrepresents herself within her fiction, Sadoff argues” (Changing Our Own Words 49). Sadoff thinks that Walker affirms her tie to Hurston by inscribing a double agenda throughout her work. Though Hurston apparently celebrates heterosexual love in Their Eyes Were Watching God, she manipulates narrative strategies to ensure that the male is eliminated and the female liberated. Similarly, Walker too problematizes the status of heterosexual love.

Hurston emphasized the affirmative potential of myth. For example, in Their Eyes, Zora provides continuing commentary on the protagonist’s experiences through the Babylonian myth of Ishtar and Tammuz, the Greek myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, and the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris (Modern American 222). Craig Warner looks at Hurston’s willingness to assume a variety of masks as a reflection of her radically Afrocentric sensibility. Lissie, the vibrant goddess/priestess in The Temple is portrayed like Janie who creates a mythopoetic environment. Hurston never tries to impose a controlling theoretical structure on an infinitely complex and ever-changing experience. She tried to prove by means of Janie’s and Avray Henson’s experience that it is always possible to survive and triumph by articulating one’s experience. Walker too underscores the power of myth and she reworks a curse prayer collected by Zora Neale Hurston in her story “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff”. Zora always remembered her mother, Lucy Hurston as an image of female strength. As far as Alice Walker is concerned,
the women of her mama’s generations were “Headragged Generals” who possessed invincible strength. For her mother, “being an artist has still been a daily part of her life” (Garders 242). Craig Werner says: “Hurston records her youth in relatively pastoral terms, emphasizing the unified consciousness she developed growing up in all black Eatonville . . .” (Modern American 225). As Hurston used to revitalize her creative energy by reestablishing contact with the Southern black culture she had left behind, Alice Walker too makes constant trips to the south looking for wholeness. In fact, Zora has played a vital role in shaping Walker’s earthling psyche.

Besides Zora, a nineteenth century forerunner of Walker is Isabella Bird who writes about her celebrated journey to the Rocky Mountains. A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains is a series of letters written by Bird to her sister which are all vibrant with her total determination to experience the wilderness on her own terms. She tries to find inspiration in the mountains, but her treatment of natives and the creatures is totally different from what Walker visualizes. Another writer who places thrust on the environment is Mary Austin, an American writing about a landscape that is her home. She is primarily concerned about relationships between the geologic and biophysical landscape. Hence she “seeks to resolve the conflict between nature and culture—to find a means of valuing all aspects of nature by overcoming hierarchical traditions in western culture that imply the desert is wasteland, snakes are evil and man controls nature” (ER 331). Austin spent most of her life in the south or in the desert. Austin values the challenges of nature not for
the sake of overcoming them, but in themselves for the effect they produce and the interactions they reveal. She expresses her belief that in order to survive, one must adapt oneself to the rhythms of the land. Hence she points out her belief that her culture requires a certain defeat of pride before it can accept the requirements of life in the wilderness. She learns more about herbs from local native women than from her own scientific training. She chides her culture for following "on a very careless usage, speaking of wild creatures as if they were bound by some such limitations as hampers clock work" (qtd. in ER 334). She asserts that nature and culture are interactive processes; human culture is affected by the landscape as well as effecting change on it. Austin pinpoints the need to respond to nature in an interactive rather than a hierarchical mode. Many reflections of Austin's ideas about nature and culture can be located in the works of Alice Walker who also stresses the mutuality of culture and nature.

Rachel Carson brought about a remarkable change in American literary ecology with the publication of Silent Spring. She caused an upheaval in women's consciousness and as a result more and more women realized that they could make significant contributions to an understanding of the American environment. Carson echoes Mary Austin's view that one does not understand a people until one has lived in the place from which they spring. Explaining the reason for the popularity of a book which doesn't directly say anything about human life like The Sea Around Us, Carson says: "The materials of science are the materials of life itself. Science is part of the
reality of living; it is the what, the how and why of everything in our experience. It is impossible to understand man without understanding his environment and the forces that have moulded him physically and mentally” (qtd. in ER 335). Thus Carson recognizes an organic, interactive connection between humans and the rest of the biosphere. She was very much baffled by a dilemma: “The growth of civilization destroys the environment, but only through increased knowledge (a product of civilization) can destruction be stopped” (ER 336). In Silent Spring, Carson points out the impending disasters due to nuclear war and the contamination of the environment with harmful substances. These harmful substances accumulate in the tissues of plants and animals and can penetrate the germ cells to shatter or alter the very material of heredity upon which the shape of the future depends (Spring 8). She is disturbed by the sudden silencing of the song of birds and the advent of spring “unheralded by the return of the birds” (Spring 103).

Carson’s work stimulated many young writers to speak for nature and take up the environment as a major concern. One of the important issues in contemporary nature writing is how the literature translates into concrete changes in the readers’ attitude toward the environment, and into more environmentally sound behaviour. Alice Walker tries to create an awareness in her readers towards developing such an attitude. The very first collection of poems speaks about the killing of animals for leather and meat and horns. In the preface to her collection of essays, Living by the Word, Walker pronounces quite emphatically that she wants to be reconnected with the old
planet, “the planet of enormous trees and mellow suns”. She wants to tell it how much she loves it. Hence she sets out on a journey to find her old planet and comes to the conclusion that “it cannot tolerate much longer the old ways of humans that batter it so unmercifully.” She feels that one has to learn a lot from “the art and history of past cultures, by the elements, and by the trees, the flowers, and most especially the animals” (37). In all her works one can easily trace the change or growth from a neglected self to a wholesome one.

The health of the universe is of crucial importance to her. She says: “It must become a right of every person to die of old age. And if we secure this right for ourselves, we can, coincidentally, assure it for the planet. And that, as they say, will be excellence, which is perhaps, only another name for health” (LBW 36). She hopes that art can heal oneself and others. In her words: “I think we were given art to heal ourselves, and by extension, to help other people heal themselves” (Critical Perspectives 323). She thinks of art as a way to make herself healthy and happy. Besides the redemptive power it possesses, art serves as “the mirror, perhaps the only one, in which we can see our true collective face” (The ST 32).

Walker’s commitment to writing is combined with social and political activism. She is actively involved in demonstrations and anti nuclear campaigns. Her defiance of the white man is quite bold and outrageous. After quoting the curse prayer collected by Zora Neale Hurston, Walker bursts out: “If we have any true love for the stars, planets, the rest of creation, we must do everything we can to keep white men away from them. . . . Under the
white man every star would become a South Africa, every planet a Vietnam (Gardens 341). She is determined to protect her home at any cost and stresses very particularly that "only justice to every living thing (and everything is alive) will save humankind". In his deliberations on Walker's earthling subjectivity, Ikenna Dieke points out that one exemplification of her earthling subjectivity is manifested in the act of hallowing the place of nature in the lives of ordinary people. Ikenna Dieke observes: "For Walker, the creative mind that perceives nature is an attingent traditional mind that hallows and celebrates the reciprocal dependence of internal and external processes of natural ambience" (Critical Essays 198). Dieke further explains that part of Walker's earthling consciousness is focused on the sympathetic symbiosis between her creative intellect and the natural environment. Instead of looking at the natural environment as "other", she looks at it as an essential part in the expression of one's individuality. For example, in the poem "African Images", she amplifies the interfusion of nature in the lives of the people of Kenya. The lines: "Beads around/my neck/Mt. Kenya away over pineappled hills/kikuyu land" shows the awareness of how closely human life is integrated with physical environment (Blue Body 8).

Ever since her participation as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Walker has been a spokesperson "for life and flourishing and loving kindness through poetry, short stories, novels, essays, journals, feature film and documentary" (Crosscurrents 1). Her concern for wholesome survival is that of an ecologist. Her empathy and her belief in the
continuum of experience encompasses the non-human also. She can never be a separatist and this is highlighted by the idea of interconnectedness she maintains in her works. Lovalerie King observes: "Walker's valorization of connectedness (the opposite of separatism) allows her to trace a continuum of pain and suffering and continue the development of her idea of the universal" (African American Novel 244). With her redemptive art, Walker enters into a healing process through narration and struggle for justice and self-development. She fights against patriarchy, capitalism and cultural imperialism which inflict physical and psychological wounds in her people. She repeatedly says that she likes to be the voice for the voiceless. She articulates the plight of the muted black woman, the animals and plants.

According to Dieke, the earthling psyche can be defined as the immanent act of the artistic mind that celebrates immanent reality, a consciousness of the pursuits and interests of earthly life (Critical Essays 206). It embodies a somewhat "primitivistic quasi theologic view of reality in which the earth as a whole is conceived as the primal or numinous source of terrestrial life" (206). Its characteristic elements include, but are not limited to a flair for the common place in the affairs of common people, an impassioned animist-ecologist celebration of nature and an exploration of the phenomenal self (206). So she writes about her parents, her friends, her daughter and the people around her. She believes in listening to everyone and everything; she says: "I believe in listening—to a person, the sea, the wind,
the trees, but especially to young black women whose rocky road I am still travelling” (Interviews 211).

In the novels, The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar and Possessing the Secret of Joy, Walker dramatizes the social and environmental issues raised in her collections of essays, Living by the word and In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens. She argues for the rights of animals, pleads for the protection of the land, and locates immanent divine in the elements of nature. While Meridian takes up the political dilemmas of Civil Rights Movement, The Third Life of Grange Copeland and a later novel By the Light of My Father’s Smile seek to heal familial estrangement. The collections of poems are equally reverberant with ecological overtones.