**CINEFORUM**
ISSN: 0009-7039
Vol. 66. No. S5, 2026 (Special Issue 5)

# Reclaiming Wholeness: Ecofeminist Spirituality And The Healing Of The Self In Krishna Sobti's Listen Girl!

**Richa Khurana[1],Dr.Vivek Kumar*[2]**
[1]Galgotias University
Email ID: Rkhurana728@gmail.com
[2]Galgotias University
Email ID: vivek@galgotiasuniversity.edu.in
***Corresponding Author**
Dr.Vivek Kumar
Galgotias University
Email ID: vivek@galgotiasuniversity.edu.in

**ABSTRACT**
This paper attempts to study how the depiction of ecofeminism is reflected in Indian writer Krishna Sobtis novel Listen Girl (2002). Furthermore, this paper investigates how this English translation of the Hindi novel explore the interrelation of ecofeminist idea, Indian spirituality and the healing of the self. However, the term ecofeminism appeared specifically within the western and feminist thought, its involvement with the connection between women and nature needs differentiated parameters when understood through Indian traditional structures. Classical Indian culture considers that women and nature are similar as they are warm-givers, compassionate, & supportive. Indian women revered the natural world as Prakriti and protected it, which gives humans the ability to survive. The Indian philosophy of Shaivism claims that Shiva and Shakti as complementary universal principles whose integrity leads to creation, vitality and reality. Such concepts support an alternative structure for comprehending the interconnection between feminine, nature and the cosmos beyond the primarily ideological paradigms of western concept of ecofeminism.
Within this frame of reference, the paper shall first probe into the intricacies of ecofeminism and then analyze the selected Indian English novel in light of Sobti's understanding of ecofeminism. The research assesses the Ammu's interaction with the environment, the natural world, and the cosmos. To release Ammu from the trials and tribulations of life and to foster a connection between humans and the natural world apart from the problems she faces, Ecofeminism served as both a medicine and a spiritual force for Sobti during her life.

**Keywords**: Ecofeminism, nature, spirituality, healing,

## INTRODUCTION

In the irresistible chasing of progress and development, influenced by science and technological progress, we are hampering our own life without evaluating the damage and destruction caused to our natural world and human life. The concepts related with the Enlightenment and Industrialisation have laid out darkness and gloom in the environment. It leads to the increasing gap between the nature, and human existence. In the Western culture, the movement of Enlightenment declares a uniform, static, universal promises to give a world order to society. On the contrary, they fail to value religion, faith and beliefs. They started to see themselves distinct from nature. The earth, nature, land, and its inhabitants are all considered inferior by him, and the entire purpose of science, progress, and development is to subjugate them. The agnostic man tries to surmount and control nature and acts himself as superior and independent from it. King states that "[Ecofeminism's] challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing" (King 20). The aforementioned statement implies that both women and the environment are subjected to oppression and exploitation. In her book "The Second Sex," Simon `de Beauvoir said that whereas men are more preoccupied with the concepts of inventions and discoveries, women are a kind of non-human animal that is more concerned with the reproduction of creativity (Beauvoir, 2011). She analyzes the traditional assigned gender roles considers woman as the 'other' within the hierarchy. She similarly scrutinizes that women and nature are placed as inferior within the patriarchal frameworks. This similarity between nature and women prove that women are innately closer to nature.



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM

Ecofeminism is a movement that connects feminist concepts and ideas to ecological subjects. It finds in different ways in which nature and females are interlinked to each other. Francoise d'Eauborne, a French feminist, used the phrase "ecofeminism" in her book LeFeminismeoulaMort (Feminism is Death). Ojha states it as "the intermingling of ecological and feministic ideology which intends to terminate the inequalities based on race, sex, class, caste, age and other distinctions" (Borah, 463).

Traditional Indian culture, treats both nature and women similar to each other in terms of being caring, nurturing, affectionate, warmth – givers, spreading positivity and love. Feminist Critics contend that women are uniquely suited to assist Mother Earth in her healing process because they have a stronger connection to the universe than anybody else. The Indian women treated nature i.e Prakriti as preserver that supports life to human beings. In the ancient times, Prakriti had the essence of organic, artistic, natural and original principles from which the life appears. The women and nature in India are amiable to each other. As Vandana Shiva mentions in her book Staying Alive: "Prakriti is worshipped as Aditi, the primordial vastness, the inexplicable, the source of abundance, she is worshipped as Adi Shakti, the primordial power. All forms of nature and life in nature are the forms, the children of the Mother Nature who is nature itself born of the creative play of her thought" (Shiva,38).

As in Act 1 of Kalidas'sAbhigyanshakuntalam, Shakuntala says "The Madhavi plant is my sister; can I do otherwise than cherish her?"(Kalidasa,22) Such kind of relationship exists between women and the nature in classical times. Nature mirrors the incorporation of the feminine principle in all its beings. She is nurtured and taken care of the feminine to generate life and allow nourishment. The force from which flow of motion arises has a kind of dynamic energy within it as Shakti. All natural beings arise from the primitive energy which is the base of everything i.e. Shakti. The evident and apparent power of energy is called nature (Prakriti). Prakriti states in Kulachdamin Nigama,

"There is none but Myself
Who is the Mother to create" (Shiva, 37).

Nature experiences the feminine principle (Shakti) of the universe in co-existence with the masculine principle (Purusha). According to Shaivism, the whole universe is manifested and powered by two fundamental forces - Shiva and Shakti, a perfect union from which everything is mad of. Shiva and Shakti are the different sides of the same coin. Shiva refers to the consciousness and Shakti symbolizes the stimulating of power and energy. Shakti represents the maternal essence of energy, activity, power, movement and nature. In the Human and Animal kingdom, the mother is the provider of warmth, security, safety and nourishment. On the other hand, Shiva (or the Purusha) is the pure consciousness – the static, universal and unswayable observer. The Prakriti without Purusha is unable to act and the Purusha without Prakriti is incapable to create anything. When they both intermingles, it leads to action, change and formation of the existing being.

The French critic and the exponent of ecofeminism Francoise d' Eaubonne, American writer Hazel Henderson and the Indian activist Vandana Shiva considered nature as sacred and they all appreciate Eastern cultures where nature is treated as a resource. These ecofeminists emphasize the intrinsic spirituality present in nature. Hazel Henderson asserts that ecofeminism revives the primitive cultures that worship nature. As Vandana Shiva in her Staying Alive affirms that the Tulsi is treated as herb and considered sacred in Indian Houses. Man and nature are inextricably linked since all life originated from the feminine principle, according to ontology. She writes that "All forms of nature and life in nature are the forms, the children of the Mother Nature who is nature itself born of the creative play of her thought" (Shiva, 38).

Vijay Rettakundi Nagarajan in her article "Soil as the Goddess Bhudevi in a Tamil Women's Ritual: The Kolam in India" stresses on the element of spirituality in nature and confirms how the assumed holiness in nature can give rise to responsibility to preserve and protect nature (Bala,188).

In Indian psyche, there has always been a kind of eco-consciousness in our minds and hearts as nature is divine and they worship it naturally. Thus, the term given by Westerner scholars as Spiritual Ecofeminism comes instinctively to the Indian writers and authors who depict human characters within the spectrum of nature through divinity, inter-connectedness and reciprocity.



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM

**SOBTI'S UNDERSTANDING OF ECOFEMINISM:**

In Krishna Sobti's novel Listen Girl!, Ammu (Durga Devi) struggles with disease and aging in her later years, which causes her to become extremely anxious. The protagonist feels that one must face a profoundly personal loss alone, so she is bothered and desirous of doing so. Ammu is a prisoner of her illness in the final days before she passes away, but she miraculously comes out of it as someone who will not give up on her situation. Due to her protracted illness, Ammu remains bedridden and her body is scarred from the effects of time. Her words, "All my life, my body enjoyed the bed and now that very bed is doing me in time!Ladki, listen, listen. When all resources are exhausted, this storehouse of energy too packs up. That"s what they call old age" (Sobti, 43). Her inner thoughts and critical insights are evidence of the spiritual healing that comes with the character of the protagonist. Ammu shows up as an enduring character who accepts age-related physical transformations with grace. Ammu establishes her relationship with the cosmos while having a conversation with her daughter saying "The soul has to find one way or another to leave the body" (Sobti, 17). Robert Herrick in his immortal lyric "Gather ye Rosebuds" suggests:

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a – flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying" (Herrick, 14-15).

She also states "This body is a mere garment. Wear it and you're in this world. Take it off and you are in another world, away from your own!" (Sobti, 21). The famous shloka of Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 22) also emphasizes the immortality of soul:

"Vaasaansi jiirnaani yathaa vihaaya, navaani grrihnaati naro paraani
Tathaa shariiraani vihaaya jiirnaanya, nyaani sanyaati navaani dehii"(BG, 2(22)).

The spirit leaves the old body and takes on a new one, just as a man throws off his old clothes and puts on new ones, according to Lord Krishna. Fire, water, earth, air and sky make up the human body, yet a person's soul endures forever.

Ammu says to her daughter "You have looked after me in my last days, made me comfortable. As your mother I suckled you and you, my little one delighted in my milk. But our relationship isn't just one of flesh and blood. Is it? It's the soul, right? Isn't it all connected, intertwined..." (Sobti, 18). Here, she discusses the idea of karma, or the deeds or actions one commits throughout this lifetime. Hinduism believes in karma or the accumulation of good and bad deeds.

Ammu also states that "The sky is never-ending, so too the earth. Only the race that we bipeds contest comes to an end" (Sobti, 23). She is on her deathbed having various wounds on her body which is painful to her still talking about the universal and permanent cycle of life. True ecofeminists are the ones who by projecting the brighter side of life decrease stress levels and have a sway of confidence within her. On the contrary, being cowed down by the problems of life, she tries to spread positivity and energy to others.

She reiterates the position while speaking with her daughter: "Who has seen the Baikunth Dhaam with his own eyes? Places of pilgrimage for the living are here in this world. Nowhere else" (Sobti, 104). She affirms that both worlds have their importance and the balance between these worlds is necessary. On one side, she knows the importance of the traditions but at the same time she advocates for this human life.

Hinduism views the body as the physical manifestation of the immortal, indestructible spirit that experiences various cycles of birth and death. This never- ending cycle comes to a stop at Moksha, or Mukti. In this phase, the parmatma (the entirety) and the atma descend together. As the protagonist talks to herself on her deathbed about her belief in the idea of moksha.

"All waters pull to the rivers
All rivers to the ocean
So life towards liberation
Mukti!" (Sobti, 52)

Ammu exhibits a great regard for the favours of almighty through five senses in this material world. She questions that "Is there anyone of flesh and blood who can savor juicy mangoes, ripened on the trees, after his death" (Sobti, 54)? She also enjoys the pleasure of worldly nature, a deep sense of appraisal of the senses, and the bliss of



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM

interpersonal relation. She is grateful that she has five senses to experience the universe whether it's her morning tea, delectable entrees, soups, or seasonal fruits. Her description of the morning tea has a dexterous and poetic touch which turns the simple, routine drink into a nectar: “Morning tea is no less than music. Water, at first boil, the cup nicely warmed, and the tea leaves in the kettle, fresh and strong, mmm...what sweeter music” (Sobti, 35)! She simply adores consuming such drinks and takes great pleasure in their taste. While chewing the dry currants she proclaims thus: “The last fruit of the season, child. This is joy indeed, a sheer joy” (Sobti, 31).

Not only tasty food, she is also fond of enchanting sights and sounds of nature. She describes dawn in a breath-taking way: “Dawn is a great blessing. The one who sleeps through it, misses so much. They see neither the union of day and night nor their parting. When birds sing in the faint flush of daybreak, the entire creation reverberates with it” (Sobti, 32). Sobti’s The Heart has its Reasons, Kripanarayan, the protagonist of the book, exhibits Ammu's identical fondness for Delhi's fruits and sweets. When he says, “Jamun, Shahtut, Phirni, Chat- Pakod, bedmi, Kachauri, Rabri Khurchan. Ahh! Ghantewala’spista-lauj” (Sobti, 22). When people eat these foods, it reminds them of the blessings that the Almighty has bestowed upon human kind. Nonetheless, both of the characters' sense of astonishment and delight is evident. When Ammu talks of visiting Chandpal Ghat with her family and praising its beauty, she is expressing her own sense of joy and enjoyment and the “exuberance of life on earth and water” and questions “Who would want to leave this earth after such a vision” (Sobti, 78). Whitman describes how humans and the universe are mutually connected in the first few lines of his poem "Song of Myself."

“ I celebrate myself and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (Whitman, 1-3).

Ammu is a kind of great example who while celebrating every moment of world doesn’t forget the sight of her approaching death. It always hovers over in her mind. What is the factor that gives her immense confidence? The answer to it could be found in her profound faith in her traditional culture and strong familial relationships which helps her foresee and welcome the things as they are. Her nature towards life is real and practical in nature. As she portrays life in her words:

“Some things in life are salty and some sweet. That’s all. What’s there to regret? Life’s blueprint brings bright and dark phases for each one of us. Joy and sorrow, gain and loss, ups and downs, each plays itself out in turn. No one’s life is an eternal celebration with firecrackers. Everything studies into each other, the good, the bad, the unpleasant. Only the one above can stop this flow... Only the one who makes a boat can ride it to sea. Those who work shall reap the fruit. That’s life” (Sobti, 47).

Readers will certainly have a good understanding of her outlook on life. Various experiences of life has helped Ammu to become her true self which can be seen through her conversations, “When you were grinding the raisins, cardamom and cinnamon. And five almonds, my ears were watching. I am in vanaprastha, the last stage of man’s life. Ears watch and eyes listen” (Sobti, 38).

She thinks that gods also yearn for this period of life on earth. She has fully immersed herself in life's drama:

“He [her husband] is feeding honey to the child on his lap.
Sometimes drops of grape juice. Sometimes he touches
the child’s lips with a pomegranate seed with such
absorption as if there is nothing in this world beyond this
play of life” (Sobti, 54).

Ammu is engrossed in enjoying all facets of human life. She states that “the sky is never ending, so too the earth. Only the race that we bipeds contest comes to an end” (Sobti, 23). Her most common topic of conversation is the lives of "bipeds," or humans. She draws such a beautiful image on the canvas of the minds beginning from the process of creation to the creator which engrosses the readers in the drama of life.

Whether it's the process of getting pregnant or having children, she tells her daughter about it by saying “Ladki, making a baby is like performing a yajna. During those days, woman draws energy from the whole cosmos to recharge herself. She feels that special kind of existence that is hers. She watches the skies within her, even as she creates life, becoming one with nature, its textures and rhythms” (Sobti, 55-56). Instead of a replication that degrades a mechanical process, she elaborates on it as creativity. She approaches motherhood with an artistic



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM

sensibility and a deep feeling of commitment and respect. Motherhood for her is something which is pure, divine, sacred and without any conditions. She elaborates:

"Ladki, it is important for a mother to give birth to a daughter cast in her own image. It is an act of great faith. A daughter makes the mother immortal; she never dies thereafter. She is here today. She will be here tomorrow. From one generation to another, from mother to daughter, daughter's daughter, and so on and on, that is the source of all life in our universe" (Sobti, 56).

There is a disparity in the concept of motherhood in the words of Simon de Beauvoir who describes womanhood in pejorative terms. She clearly says in her authoritative tone that woman is a womb. Here she may be valid in context to the hardship faced by womenfolk in the male dominated society.

It's important to remember that feminists like Ammu highlight the negative aspects of patriarchy. She is a kind of woman who favours the practical stance in a situation. She respects her feminine characteristics and features like motherhood, nurturing and carrying a family together. She is able to manage everything on her own and at the same time she is proud of it too. Instead of being a woman who is depressed by her femininity and sees it as a burden, she is content to show off the fact that she is the only one who is capable of bearing children. In her view, women should be honored to have been selected to carry out the responsibility of creation, rather than viewing it as a barrier. She also states

"We will create anew by the grace of the sun. The Sun is thegrand hero of the universe. Other planets are nowhere near. If the sun had covered Kunti, life would've been annihilated. The fact is that every male in this world draws his strength the sun. By the sun's grace is the invigorated, his passions aroused. And the woman...She favours the Earth. She is the supreme energy. She surrounds the male from all sides, drawing him within her folds" (Sobti, 40).

Rohini Aggarwal remarks: "Unlike the contemporary feminist writers, the woman characters in Sobti do not take motherhood a burden or confine" (Agarwal, 37).Ammu praises the value of jnani – the mother who gives life to an infant without denying the importance of role played by father. This is how she puts it: "That's the law of nature. It invests the father with the power to provide the seed of life, but keeps him out of the process of shaping the body" (Sobti, 57).

According to Ammu, the worldly insights are delight to watch such as: "When for the first time, new earings are put in the ears of a daughter, she looks very pretty. A tagadi around the little son's waist looks still prettier. And the first innocent smile on the lips of a child is very charming. To see with one's own eyes the first steps of a tiny feet is the prize of life, ladki" (Sobti, 54). Ammu finds the inherent pleasure and delight in inter- personal relationships. Since family ties form an integral idea of relationship, she enjoys them whole heartedly.

She further claims that the male has "musk of life," like to that of a musk deer. By giving life to the concept of the musk deer and turning the transient into the permanent, she skilfully crafts an image that elevates the act of replication from the tangible to the beautiful. She states:

"Man as a musk deer spreads its perfume through its transient
world and flits away instantly.
The woman holds its fleeting deer for a few moments and becomesa creator.
This is the play of creation. From her starts the cycle of generations…an unbrokenchain of progeny" (Sobti, 57).

In the very opening picture of Zindaginama, the author has generated a beautiful image of the village where the farmland activities have been enjoyed and relates respect and honour to the profession of farming where the farmers are regarded as annadaata – the one who the provider of grain.

"The Night of Sharad Punya
The mud houses of the village glowed brightly. The moonlight
Spread lightly over the fields, trees making them shine.
The sweet music of the wells caused ripples in the hearts.
The pairs of oxen returning along with the ploughers filledone with desire.
The fresh smell of dung cakes wafting from fireplaces madeevery house and courtyard aromatic.
O God! May these happy times decorate human life always!" (Sobti, 17)



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM

**CONCLUSION**:

Ecofeminists favour the idea that the females play an important role in environment protection because women have artistic ability to praise nature, while men desire to dominate both nature and women. Men are responsible for the damage done to the nature and women are the ones who keep influencing the society for nature either through eco-literacy or household management. Krishna Sobti spreads the message to the readers through her novel Listen Girl! i.e., to keep intimate relationship with nature, Mother Earth, the cosmos and their healing power. This text of literature emphasizes the value of the natural world, karma, the universe, spirituality, yoga, and healing techniques developed by the neo-pagan environmental philosophy and reminding us to return to our roots, the novel emphasizes the spiritual meaning of women presenting nature as prakriti. During this process, the disintegrated self goes towards reunion, harmony and acceptance, therefore proposing a procedure of reclaiming wholeness. Thus, Listen Girl! reconceives Ecofeminism through an Indian philosophical structure in which there is a interconnection of relationship between nature, feminine and the universe leads to the healing and reintegration of wholeness.

**REFERENCES**

1. Agarwal, Bina. “The gender and environment debate: Lessons from India.” Feminist Studies, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, pp. 119-158. <JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3178217>
2. Bala, S. “Introduction to feminism: An indian perspective.” Literary Endeavour, vol. 9, no. 3, 2018, pp. 186 – 192. <www.literaryendeavour.org>
3. Beauvoir, S. “The Second Sex.” Vintage Publishers. 2011.
4. Bhaktivedanta, A. C. “Bhagavad Gita as it is.” Macmillan Publishers. 1972.
5. Borah, R. “A Study of Ecofeminism and the conflict between civilization and nature/men and woman in Ramayana with reference to Chitra Lekha Banerjee’s Novel The Forest of Enchantments.” Research Journal of English Language and Literature, 7(4), 2019, pp. 463 – 471. <http://www.rjelal.com>
6. Buckingham, S. “Ecofeminism in the twenty- first century.” Geographical journal, vol. 170, no. 2, 2004, pp. 146-154.
7. Cavaliere, Stefania. “Polyphonic Voices in the Works of Krishna Sobti.” Krishna Sobti. Routledge India, 2021. pp. 115- 125.
8. Dwivedi, Shubha. “Traversing Gendered Margins through the Lens of Mother - Daughter Relationship: A Reading of Krishna Sobti’s Listen Girl! and Geetanjali Shree’s Tom of Sand.” Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation, 2023, pp. 32-50.
9. Herrick, R. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.” The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick, 1963, l. 13-14.
10. Kalidasa. “Abhigyanshakuntalam.” Sahitya Sarowar, 2017.
11. King, Ynestra. “The Ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecology.” In Healing the Wounds Philadelphia: New Society, 1989.
12. Kubavat, Rajeshvari. “ Studying Krishna Sobti as a Feminist Writer: In Light of Her Select Novels.” Vidhyayana - An International Multidisciplinary Peer - Reviewed E- Journal, vol.4, no. 4, 2019.
13. Murphy, P. “The Routledge handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature.” Taylor and Francis Group, 2022.
14. Rekha. “Renegotiating Gendered Space: A Reading of Krishna Sobti’s Fiction.” Indian Literature, 2009, pp. 163- 191.
15. Shiva, Vandana. “Staying Alive.” Women Unlimited, 2010.
16. Sobti, Krishna. “Listen Girl!” transl. Katha, 2016.
17. Sobti, Krishna. “The Heart Has Its Reasons.” transl. Katha, 2003.
18. Sobti, Krishna. “Zindaginama.” Raj KamalPrakashan; First Edition, 2019.
19. Tripathi, Pranjal, & Mohd Saici. “Tracing the Growth of Ecofeminism in Modern Indian Literature through the Selected Works of Kamala Markandaya, Amrita Pritam, Manjula Padmanabhan and Anuradha Roy.” International Journal of Research in Academic World. vol. 3, no. 4, 2024, pp. 146- 151.
20. Warren, Karen. J. “Feminism and Ecology: Making connections.” Environmental Ethics, vol. 9, no. 1, 1987.
21. Whitman, W. “Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself: A sourcebook and Critical Edition.” Psychology Press, 2005.



OPEN ACCESS © CINEFORUM