

## **Indigenous Female Agency and the Feminine Principle in Indian Children's Picture Books**

This paper uses an ecofeminist framework to analyze picture books published by Indian children's publishing house, Tulika Books. Environmental activists like Vandana Shiva (*Ecofeminism, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*) and Zohi de Ishtar (*Daughters of the Pacific*) have brought attention to indigenous women's shared commitment to the nurturing and protection of Mother Earth. Fictional picture books *Putul and the Dolphins* by Mariam Karim-Ahlaway and Proity Roy and *The Magical Fish* by Chandrakala Jagar and Shakuntala Kushram illustrate the intrinsic connections between humans and Nature, while also showcasing the power of female agency in preserving natural environments and creatures.

Vandana Shiva sees the feminine principle as the larger creative force in the world, arguing that "the new insight provided by rural women in the Third World is that women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life." According to her, "The feminine principle is based on inclusiveness and its recovery in men, women, and nature, is the recovery of "creative forms of being and perceiving" (Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 53). In the folktale *The Magical Fish*, which has been passed down oral tradition in indigenous communities, tribal women take the initiative to save their community from the sadness and conflict that has resulted from environmental destruction. The path back to happiness depends on their recovery of the community's connection to nature, symbolized by a (female) magical fish who spreads happiness. In *Putul and the Dolphins*, a young tribal girl saves the lives of endangered dolphins, and is able to convince her community to do the same. Both books illustrate nature as a "living and creative process, the feminine principle from which all life arises" (Shiva xv), while also showcasing the impact of female intervention in preserving humans' organic connections to nature.