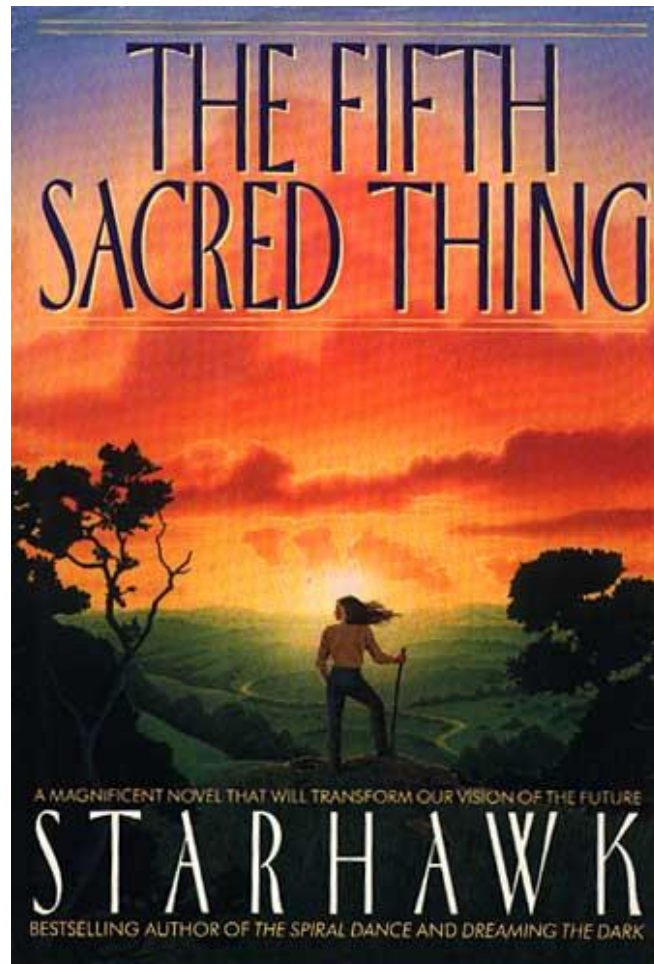


**The Sustainability of Women with Eco-feministic Elements in  
Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing***

**Ms. M. Pavithra, M.A., M.Phil. (F.T), PGDCA, DKMT**

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**Abstract**

Feministic literature focuses on the vulnerable inequalities and atrocities faced by women on day to day basis. Their need for support and protection against the ruthless predicaments imposed on them by the society makes them appear a weaker sect of the society. This paper analyses the capacity of women in facing problems standing on the opinion of Starhawk with special reference to her *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. The apocalyptic utopian vision of Starhawk is well exhibited in this novel. This novel gives a great

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introduction to Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a movement that makes connection between environmentalists and feminism. All the female characters are interconnected with the environment and spirituality. Spirituality leads to respect and sustainability of women. They do not control the nature for their profit; instead they cultivate and protect the environment. Starhawk explores the characters in two ways. While one sect is affected by extreme poverty and corruption in society the other is projected to help the other through the five cosmic elements namely earth, water, air, fire and soil. Starhawk concentrates on ecological feminism that is fundamentally related to the plot of novel. This paper intends exploring those two facets of projections given on women with an aspiration to create awareness to the society which in turn may result in learning the protective avenues.

**Keywords:** Starhawk, Ecofeminism, Sustainability of Women, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*

### **Features of Feministic Literature**

Feministic literature addresses appropriate political issues, current attitudes toward women in society or attempts to break down gender- specific misconceptions. It is not restricted across culture or religion; it is from politics to race, religion, and the institution of marriage, among others. Feminist Writing portrays characters or ideas that effort to change gender norms. It strives to modify inequalities between genders across societal and political arenas. Finally, it needs to change societal and political issues often overlooked feminine-specific voice and tone to gender and social inequalities where a feminine voice is needed to make an impact.

Feministic literature focuses on the capacity of women and their need for support and protection against the ruthless predicaments imposed on them by the society makes them appear weaker sect of the society. This paper exploring two facets of projections given on women with an aspiration to create awareness to the society with in turn may result in learning the projective avenues. This paper analyses the capacity of women in facing problems standing on the opinion of Starhawk with special reference to her *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. It is a post- apocalyptic novel set in 2048 in California. Starhawk is well- known as a global justice activist and organizer.

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## Starhawk's Writings



**Starhawk**

Courtesy: <http://starhawk.org/blog/>

Starhawk's writings include twelve books including the classics *The Spiral Dance* (1979), the ecotopian novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), and her latest novel *The Empowerment Manual: a Guide for Collaborative Groups* (2011). These are mostly about spiritual practice for surveillance of nature. As mentioned, in this study Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is under analysis through eco- feminist theories. This novel is about a community that is diligent, sympathetic and has respect for reliability of non-human animals, nature and natural elements such as air, water, fire and earth. Another part of society resource insufficiency leads to poverty, illness, drug addition, violence and death. Among all these crises, Starhawk provides strategies for sustainable development through the perspectives of her main characters Maya, Madrone and Bird.

### Exploration of Characters

Starhawk explores the characters in two ways. While one sect is affected by extreme poverty and corruption in society the other is projected to help the other through the five cosmic elements namely earth, water, air, fire and soil. Starhawk concentrates on ecological

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feminism that is fundamentally related to the plot of novel. It focuses on women's role in achieving sustainability on earth, which demands using water sustainably, utilizing renewable energy and protecting the biodiversity of lands. According to author, In this Utopian/Dystopian novel, natural elements such as air, water, fire and earth that sustain all life are considered sacred in the Utopian North which its management and defense groups' members are mostly women.

### **Feminism in *The Fifth Sacred Thing***

Feminism is concentrated in this novel in two ways. There are societal and ecological perspectives. The term "social evil" refers to a broad number of problems deemed dangerous or descriptive to society. In twentieth century, Rowntree explains the worst evils are "gambling, war, slavery and poverty". In societal perspective, Farnaz Mirjalali analyses "the character of Bird, Maya's grandson has been imprisoned by the stewards in the south for ten years when the novel opens. Initially, his memory is foggy and he is uncertain of who he is. However, he overcomes the physical and mental pain incurred by his captors and manages to escape and return to the North.

Bird's return to the city coincides with rumors of a pending invasion by the stewards and in order to learn more and to make alliances with rebel groups, the council and the community decide to send Madrone south. While on her journey, Madrone acts as an evangelist of sorts, spreading the message to both active rebel groups in the hills and dissenters within the city that there is a viable alternative to the racist, sexist and fundamentalist system of the stewards and Millennialists. While she is gone, the Steward army invades but residents of the City resist using nonviolent non-cooperation rather than violence. Although the army does respond with violence nonetheless and many residents are killed, some of the soldiers, seeing the racial and cultural harmony of the City as well as the equitable access to water and other resources, begin to question their leaders and some desert. The Stewards recapture Bird and attempt to force him to betray the City by revealing its "secret weapon." The Stewards can neither break the spiritual strength of Bird nor of the City's residents. A widespread mutiny among the soldiers alongside the City's nonviolent resistance blocks the Stewards' plans to destroy the City.

### **Working against the Moral Fabric and the Sway of Authoritarianism**

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All of them work against the moral fabric to degrade the human experience and encourage the vice. The classic example of some people's social and religious attitudes identifying something as a social evil and another set of the population's as doing the opposite. In this novel the place of social evils called southern California, people are forced to obey the corrupt official religion, dying of hunger and thirst and suffering from even greater crimes of humanity. The environment was totally collapsed and everybody was negatively affected.

In authoritarian country, the voice of women in society, Madrone is a main character and helping or healer of the rebel groups. She imagines the city as a "fairytale". She gave respect to the environment and people also. She hardly helped everyone has drink and eat and that everyone has equal respect and opportunities. Healthcare is free to everyone and marriage is not institutional and everything contributes sustainability and justice system. Lily, as the main member of defense council, she refuses perpetuating violence and the great waste war.

### **The Voice of Women on Medical Perspective**

Madrone is one of healers in the city; her knowledge of medicine goes beyond an understanding of traditional and herbal treatments. She connects with her patients spiritually, entering a trance state in order to evaluate her patients on a metaphysical level. A powerful healer and dreamer, Madrone's services are in high demand, both in the city and as the novel progresses in southern California, among other rebel groups. She tries to save the life of fevered pregnant women. Madrone rescues Katy that was arrested by stewards. Madrone explains,

"... [we try] healing of the earth, or at least not being destructive...we make papers from hemp, not from trees." (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, p.275)

As Farnaz Mirjalali depicts a good example of this, is the women of the utopian North, who in providing food and nourishment of their families do sustainable agriculture, in protecting their lives and environment prevent war and military waste, and in order to save the depleting natural resources, use them sustainably. In the societies which women are deprived from their rights and oppressed, Environmental Sustainability is a farfetched aim. Madrone explains:

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“...We plant a garden, we create an ecosystem that can sustain itself...” (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, p.296)

### **Ecological Feministic Perspectives**

Starhawk's ecological feministic perspectives are based on the four sacred things. As Starhawk clarifies the cosmic elements as “The earth is a living, conscious being. In company with cultures of many different times and places, we name these things as sacred: air, fire, water and earth. These sacred things compared to the breath, energy, blood and body of the mother or as the blessed gifts of a Creator or as symbols of the interconnected systems that sustain life. All people, all living things, are part of the earth life and so are sacred. No one of us stands higher and lowers than any other. Only justice can assure balance: only ecological balance can sustain freedom. Only freedom can that fifth sacred thing we call spirit flourish in its full diversity”. Author honored the four sacred things as

“Tohonor the sacred is to create conditions in which nourishment, sustenance, habitat, knowledge, freedom, and beauty can thrive. To honor the sacred is make love possible”. (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*)

### **Distinct god and goddess**

In this novel, all natural elements had separate god and goddess. There are the crone-goddess of Harvest, Gaia or Tonantzin- Goddess of Earth, goddess of love, goddess of river, goddess of sea and many shrines like earth shire, air shire, water shrine and fire shire. The upper slopes of the hill were dotted with shrines to goddess and gods, ancestors and spirits. Some were elaborately sculpted and painted some as simple as an offering basket under a tree. They encompassed an eclectic mixture of traditions. Maya the central character spends much time communicating with the spirits of those from her life who have died particularly Johanna and Rio, two of her lovers.

All sacred things connected with living beings like the ritual fire was lit by four masked figures bird, fish, coyote and deer that symbolized the four directions and the four sacred things. In fire season (summer) the moon brings a time of hope and danger to the people. All are part of earth, part of the air, the fire and the water and part of one another.

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Women gave respect for spiritual ideas and values of natural elements. Their knowledge also saves the world from the change of modern. In this novel author used the technique play with in a play “one act can change the world”. A young girl was blessing the food and drink while others thanked. The ancestors and spirits and the four sacred things are to end the formal part of the ritual. Madrone narrates that,

“The four sacred things are earth, air, fire, and water. Nobody can own them or profit from them, and it’s our responsibility to heal them, t hat’s the basis of our policy and our economy”. (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, p.272)

### **Productive Gardens, Corruption, Poverty, Etc.**

The city was filled with productive gardens growing on street corners, flowing streams, gondolas as public transport, and a happy, engaged community that fosters cultures, roots, and ideas. Energy healers, witches, engineers, strong female leaders, and all kinds of people- young and old- live in multicultural neighborhoods where everyone speaks more than one language and all religions are honored. It is look like a magical city.

One part of life is full of corruption, poverty and violence and other part of life is different- live a life in harmony and appreciation for the environment. They have chosen to honor the four sacred things that sustain life. Starhawk connected the story with spirituality in nature, pagan rituals and rich cultural diversity. She created the story to show how the Ecofeminism can promote our species and world. This book *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is an earth based spirituality and it teaches more about the movements. It teaches how love can save the world.

### **Two Societies in Opposition to One Another**

In this novel are about two opposed societies in the year of 2048. In the Utopian North, people are living in peace and harmony with nature. Madrone explains,

“We say that there are four sacred thing, (earth, air, fire and water), and the fifth is Spirit. And when you live the right relation to the four, you gain the power to contact the fifth”. (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, p.300).

In the South, sexism, racism, and the oppression of lower class exist as a result of power hierarchy. The population in the utopian North which its main managers and consultants are women do not suffer from environmental pollution and has enough to drink

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and eat. In her travel, Madrone who is a healer from the north describes their lives for the South's women in this way:

“Everybody has enough food and water. Everybody has a place to live and care when they're sick ... we share and we have enough. Because everybody works, and works hard” (*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, p.272)

## To Conclude

Women always thought about the reuse of all the natural elements like how to use and reuse every drop how to feed chickens on weeds and ducks on snails and let worms eat the garbage. As eco feministic vision, women's oppression is linked to environmental deprivation. The relationship between human and non-humans, and men and women in patriarchal society results in the view of nature and women as the lower level. Women are oppressed in this society; the educated and skillful women are depressed with the struggle to retain their right to maintain their occupations.

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