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THE CORRELATION OF WOMEN AND NATURE IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S
THE BEAN TREES AND PIGS IN HEAVEN

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims, to bring out the importance and the interconnection between the women and nature relations symbolically, to study the oppression and exploitation of women in these works of Kingsolver, to trace out the deep link of women with nature throughout their lives, with the help of the characters and to finally find how the female characters in these novel overcome their situations, and to reveal all the possible advantages to the world as a result of leading a happy and interconnected life with Nature.

KEYWORDS - Eco-Feminism, Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven*.

Barbara Kingsolver is an eco-feminist writer who brings out the close knit between women and nature in her sequel novels. In *The Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven* she has used the symbolical connections that exist between women and nature. There also exists a symbiotic relationship between the women characters during adverse circumstances. These are echoed with nature imagery and symbols.

The Bean Trees concerns Taylor Greer, a young woman who leaves her small hometown at Kentucky to search for a more fulfilling life. While driving west across the United States, Taylor becomes the guardian of an abused child whom she names Turtle.

"The Indian child was a girl. A girl, poor thing. That fact had already burdened her short life with a kind of misery I could not imagine. I thought I know about every ugly thing that one person does to another, but I had never even thought about such things being done to a baby girl." (31)

The violence against women is rape, which is forced upon the small child just because she was female. Nature is often described in feminine and sexual terms as nature is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled and mined. The dominations of women, child and nature are explained thus, just because its nature and the child a girl, they are forced into oppression or domination.

The encounter of the bird, with turtle's exploitation of situation and the scene of rattle snake are linked to share the eco-feministic perspectives of symbolism. In both the scenes the bird and the bird's eggs symbolize Turtle (the female child) who is already assaulted and was oppressed all these days and its effect on her. The symbiotic relationship between the rhizobia and the wisteria vines represents the theme of the interdependency between people in a community. The key to woman-nature connections is found in these novels. The dominations of masculine over feminine, reason over emotion, spirit over body, white over black is against nature. Women struggle to form a bond. Women and Nature can be juxtaposed as they represent each other together as oppressed and exploited.

Through-out the novels, *The Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven*, symbols are the main focused feature towards explaining the aspects of ecological feminism. Birds, animals, plants, and nature itself are the symbols brought effectively through its sufferings symbolising the female sufferings. Turtle, a two year old female child, was molested just because she was a girl, as birds are crushed under the wheels on the road just because they are not being bothered for. This female child seduced stands representing the whole of the female community in the world, who are dominated over. She was named for her grabbing ability as a mud turtle.

Pigs in Heaven is the sequel to *The Bean Trees*, Kingsolver's critically celebrated first novel. Set three years later, *Pigs in Heaven* centers on Taylor's discovery that she has no legal claim to Turtle because she did not get approval from the Cherokee nation before initiating the adoption process. Asking that the girl be returned to her reservation, Cherokee lawyer Annawake Four killer argues that only the tribe, a decreasing minority group and a tight-knit cultural community, can properly provide for turtle and instill in her an understanding of her heritage and identity. She is dealing with "Mama Bear." "... The thing they say about getting between a mother bear and her cub?"(84) It is difficult to separate Turtle from Taylor, just like the cub from the mother bear. A mother analyzed with the name of the animals and their motherhood in common is Kingsolver's style of using symbols.

Boma, the old lady of the Cherokee nation used to "stand in the middle of the street and have a conversation with the oaks" (230) that shows the un-departing tendency of the nature with the woman as well as the indigenous people. Eco-feminist writer Susan Griffin in her work *women and nature: the roaring inside her*(1978), says that,

"Women speak with nature. That She hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature."(1)

Griffin explains how women are spiritually associated with nature more than man. Images of nature's cycles and systems recur throughout the novel. In addition to animal imagery, birds, pigs, turtles, and horses are often used to explain the predator-prey relationship with human behaviour. The book suggests that sometimes human beings act out of a survival instinct to protect themselves and their families. This animal instinct acts according to the laws of nature. When Taylor sees the salmon ascending the ladder to get back to their birthplace, she is reminded of herself, struggling to care for herself and Turtle. Like the salmon that works just to be eaten by sea lions at the top of the ladder, Taylor also works to find herself.

With many symbols of animals and birds Kingsolver has portrayed the novel *The Pigs in Heaven*, beautifully through the feminist aspects. The birds like pigeons, meadowlarks, mocking birds, horses, squirrel, fishes and so many other animals and birds are referred and explained with the part of Eco-feminism. "No matter what kind of night you're having, morning always wins."(6). It is nature to face troubles and situations so hard, but always there are some solutions for everything. The struggle for survival of the human and the other creatures are expressed effectively by Kingsolver and finally she also gives some kind of compromising solutions with a little sacrifice. And by forming a community and standing together with determination gives the courage to face every obstacle. Hence, the symbolism is well dealt by Barbara Kingsolver through her novels with various birds and animals.

Karren J Warren is a feminist writer and she speaks widely on environmental issues, feminism and critical thinking. She has written *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on what it is and why it matters?* (2000). The theory of relating symbolic connections are brought out distinctly between women and nature in both the novels of Barbara Kingsolver. Eco-feminist literature asserts that the notion of power must be re-structured. Collaborative relationships should be nurtured instead of power dynamics.

Eco-feminists say that women are often described in animal terms such as cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, pussycats, cats, bird-brains, hare-brains. Throughout both the novels of Kingsolver's women have been called by the names of turtle, poppy, horse, bear, rock, snake, lizard, chicken, etc., which says that women are treated as nature by giving such term.

Melissa Pritchard says, "Barbara Kingsolver is a writer of rare ambition of unequivocal talent". Margaret Randall described "*The Bean Trees* as a story propelled by a marvellous ear, a fast-moving humour

and the powerful undercurrent of human struggle". Kingsolver frequently draws on biology to create parallels between the interconnections of the natural world and human society.

Eco-feminist literature asserts that the notion of power must be re-structured. Relationships should be nurtured. Underlying much of the activism is the aim of creating an interconnected community, in spite of the patriarchal or other forms of hierarchy. An ultimate goal might be described as a reality where all life commands its own essential value. And that is what Kingsolver tries to create through these novels, by finally creating a communal relationship between the indigenous people and the young generation.

The main task is not to remake nature so that it is fit for humankind, but to make humankind right for nature. The future needs women and nature, so women and nature should be protected and brought out for their survival. A partnership relationship means that a human community is in a dynamic relationship with a nonhuman community. Each has power over the other. Nature, as a powerful force, has the potential to preserve human lives and to continue to evolve and develop with human beings. Man should understand the importance of nature and women and help them survive. Barbara Kingsolver focuses on the natural connections of suffering between nature and the female, dominated by the patriarchal society, as an effective eco-feminist writer, giving a solution for the benefit of future world to join hand against the exploitation of nature as well as women.

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