

*Acknowledgement*

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**\*MLA-7<sup>th</sup> edition is followed in formatting**

*Abstract*

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## Abstract

American literature shares a major role in the development of feminism. Feminism in America developed over three waves. During the third wave feminism ecology found its place with feminism. This has formed a new scope in literature that leads to the present day theory of ecological feminism or eco-feminism. Eco-feminism is an important part of eco-literature with its focus on domination of women and nature. The term *ecofeminism* was first used by French radical feminist Françoise d' Eaubonne in 1974, who combined ecology and feminism in this movement because she realised some strong interconnections between the domination of women and that of nature.

Barbara Kingsolver was born on April 8, 1955, in Annapolis, Maryland. From an early age, Kingsolver enjoyed telling stories to her parents instead of listening to them. Surrounded as she was by fields and woods, Kingsolver became fond of studying nature. Mastering in Ecology and Evolutionary biology, her scientific training influenced her literary writing. The thematic concerns in her writings include feminism, environmentalism and post-colonialism. All these concerns arise because of her passion for the pursuit of social justice.

Barbara Kingsolver brings out close interaction between women and nature in her novels. The thesis entitled "*Nurturing Bonds: An Eco-Feministic reading of the select novels of Barbara Kingsolver*" is devoted to examine these interconnections as revealed in her novels, *The Bean Trees* (1988) and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), *Animal Dreams* (1990), *Prodigal Summer* (2000), and *Flight Behaviour* (2010). These novels focus on environmental challenges like climate change, animal/species extinction and loss of biodiversity, use of pesticides etc. and the struggle of the female protagonist with the patriarchal system in society. There is a systematic domination, over both women and nature, underpinned by a

conceptual set of dualisms. Focusing on these themes Kingsolver's select novels are critically studied and the ability of women to utilise the benefits of their environment and also develop a community, is highlighted.

The introductory chapter focuses on the growth and development of American literature from its origin with respect to feminism. It outlines the major works in American literature starting from the classics to the contemporaries. It further traces the fictional writers of feminism and ecology, and places Barbara Kingsolver among the other eco-feminist writers.

The second chapter entitled, "Re-grounding: The Bonding of Woman with Nature" delineates on Eco-feminism in Kingsolver's novels. The study helps understand how the issues of nature and women are interwoven. Karen J Warren is a feminist writer and she speaks widely on environmental issues, feminism and critical thinking. In her book *Eco feminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on what it is and why it matters?* (2000) Warren elaborates on the historical and causal, conceptual, Empirical & Experiential, Epistemological, Symbolical, Political, Philosophical and Ethical connections that are basic and important to understand the connections between feminism and the environment. Kingsolver's novels are analyzed based on these connections to understand the close relation between women and nature. Kingsolver uses coyotes as symbols of her characters' instinct for survival in both *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*. In the novel *Flight Behaviour* Dellarobia's state of life is symbolically presented before her through the relocation of the monarch butterflies. As the butterflies take flight at the end of the novel, she also chooses her way of life.

"Self-discovery: Man, Woman, Culture and Nature" is the third chapter which elaborates on the eco-feministic views in Kingsolver's novels to show nature is exploited and

over-ruled by mankind and how men and women play their part in nature and society. Sherry Ortner in her essay *Is female to male as nature is to culture?* (1972) makes two arguments about the relationship between nature and culture. First, she sees culture as an object that has the ability to act upon and transform nature. Second, she equates the relationship of nature and culture to the universal devaluation of women. The novels are studied on these two parameters.

*Prodigal Summer* exposes the dichotomy of nature vs. civilization in which nature is coded non-white and female while civilization denotes the white and male. Kingsolver's men fail to see the destruction that arises out of their activities. The water pollution at Grace in *Animal Dreams* is an example. The men living at Grace think that they can shift their place once the mountain is entirely polluted, and can stay away from harm. Women on the other hand are keen at noticing the changes in nature as they are closely related to nature and they can also not be entirely parted from culture. Codi and Dellarobia, respectively from *Animal Dreams* and *Flight Behaviour* enlighten the people around them of their ignorant state, because they are the initial indicators of natural calamities. They are interconnected with men, culture and mainly with nature. The study reveals that men and women should be seen as active members of culture, for positive development.

The fourth chapter entitled "Space, Place and Ecology" brings out the essential space that women and the eco-system need. The interconnections of Nature, Woman, Man and Society are explored. In *Prodigal Summer* Garnett uses pesticides and herbicides to keep his land tidy and protect his saplings. But he is not aware about the deadly consequences of its effects. The dislocation of monarch butterflies in *Flight behaviour* indicates the consequences of deforestation that lead to the deluge and landslide. All of nature and the environment are connected in the web of life and if any single part of it is lost the entire eco-system



gets affected. So the eco-system needs its own place. Mankind and nature are mutually interconnected. Each should be given the due space, for them to flourish, which will ensure a healthy environment.

The Summation brings together all the ideas of ecological feminism and shows how it is all treated in the novels of Kingsolver. It brings to the forefront the struggle for survival of both, the women and nature together. The relationships between Kingsolver's women are similar to the relationship between the rhizobia and the wisteria vines. As a result, like the wisteria vines, the women flourish with the support of community. The style in Barbara Kingsolver's novels highlighting her symbols, style, themes, and her vision for a better future is delineated. This also proves Kingsolver as an eco-feminist writer committed to writing for the welfare of the society and the greatness as a contemporary American novelist who not only cares for human beings but also for nature.

Eco-feminist literature asserts that the notion of power must be re-structured and relationships should be nurtured. Creating an interconnected community, in spite of the patriarchal or other forms of hierarchy is the aim of eco-feminism. Kingsolver tries to recreate this interconnected society through her novels. The future needs women and nature, so they should both be protected. Barbara Kingsolver focuses on the natural connections of suffering between nature and the female, dominated by the patriarchal society, and as an effective eco-feminist writer, gives a clarion call to join hands against the exploitation of nature as well as women.

## *Abbreviations*

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## Abbreviations

TBT	-	<i>The Bean Trees</i>
PIH	-	<i>Pigs in Heaven</i>
AD	-	<i>Animal Dreams</i>
PS	-	<i>Prodigal Summer</i>
FB	-	<i>Flight Behavior</i>
HTL	-	<i>Holding The Line</i>