

Chapter III

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Self-Discovery: Man, Women, Culture and Nature

Nature refers to the physical world including plants, land, soil, animal and other elements of the Earth. There is a deep relationship between nature and man. Man and nature are knit together by a bond of association since ancient times. Man cannot live without nature. Nature too flourishes with the support of mankind. This balance in ecology started facing problems when men moved towards industrialization. They did not mind the large scale deforestation programs as they needed new industries. Later for the requirement of industries, trees were felled, rivers were dammed, and also fertile agricultural lands were transformed into plots. Trees vanished making the land barren. Some rare birds and animals became extinct. Dams flooded lands. Industrial pollution poisoned the atmosphere and has made the river water unfit for use. Felling of trees has caused landslides, desertification, and climate change.

*“There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.”*

(Byron, Childe Harold's pilgrimage, canto IV, The Sea)

Elizabeth Gould Davis, a critique in her book, *The First Sex*, published in the year 1971 says that, “Man is the enemy of nature; to kill, to root up, to level off, to pollute, to destroy are his instinctive reactions.(335)” Though man is civilized, he is cruel towards the natural world that has served his material purposes. The value of land, water and forest has been weakened by man’s determination to use them selfishly. The lakes, ponds and streams are among the most important recreational resources. But rivers are choked with the wastes of civilization. Lakes are poisoned by industrial and sewage pollution. The water is not potable and the plants die. Using his knowledge, man has brought in machines that have exploited his environment. The environmental pollution and degradation directly affect the lives of women and animals. Toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their first toll on women, their reproductive systems, and children. These hazardous chemicals are initially tested on laboratory animals to determine the levels of toxicity. This practice, with the enormous environmental costs of factory farming and meat eating, demonstrate the linkages between environmental degradation and the oppression of animals. The loss of fertile land, damming of water and tree felling, all contribute to the crisis of survival. As the main provider of food, fuel and water, women find it harder to sustain their families and themselves.

Andree Collard, the feminist critic sees women’s bodies in a direct connection of the natural world, and men as in a destructive relation to it. Women are considered to nurture and love, and men to destroy and compete. Ecological dangers of industrialization are apparently on the increase. This concern is not just about the dangers to the human life, but for the entire world. Women experience particular hardships such as profitable farming. Logging and mining invade their traditional way of life and they are drawn towards highly exploitative and

health threatening forms of reproduction. Women and children are the section of society directly affected when nature is threatened by mankind. This connection of exploitation and degradation of the natural world is connected with the oppression and subordination of women in the society, and is known as ecological feminism.

The modern understanding of the relationship between man and nature is of emotions and rationales for its exploitation, domination and preservation. Out of a web of events and ideas, the conception of nature emerged, as an object of scientific inquiry and as a resource for economic progress. The culture-nature divide is a concept that has been particularly dominant and long-lasting in the Western countries. The culture-nature dualism was a product of the 16th and 17th centuries. Earlier to this period, Europeans appeared less concerned with separating themselves from the rest of nature. During the Scientific Revolution, Europeans began to conceptualize nature as something to be observed, analyzed, and studied. This enabled the concept of nature as something separate from man. The new concept of Culture-Nature duality led to a study of the relationship between culture and nature. The human behaviors with and without culture and nature were also discussed and studied. This led to an awareness of the importance of nature, man, culture and their interconnectedness.

The relationship between nature and culture has been a common and challenged theme due to the argument of whether the nature/culture dichotomy is a given universal or a constructed reality relative to one's own culture. According to Sherry Ortner in her essay, *Is female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* published in the year 1972, mentions that "much of the creativity of anthropology derives from the tension between the demands for explanation of human universals on the one hand and cultural particulars on the other." (5)

The background of the novel *The Bean Trees* is set in the northern America where Taylor Greer and her mother Alice are settled at Tucson, Arizona. They are the half-blood of Cherokee community. The Cherokee was one of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes who had been moved by the United States government from the south-eastern United States to Oklahoma in the 1830's and 1840's. The Cherokee Nation settled in Northwest Georgia, Eastern Tennessee, and Southwest North Carolina as assured to it in a 1791 treaty with the United States. The Cherokees established a governmental system similar to that of the United States and adopted a constitution that declared them a sovereign nation, meaning that they were not subject to the laws of any other state or nation. They lived peacefully until gold was discovered on their land in the late 1820's. So they were once again removed from that land and during the immigration many Cherokees died. This incident was called the trail of tears. According to Levi-Strauss, "the symmetry postulated between nature and culture involves the assimilation of natural species on the cultural plane." (124-125)

Mayans are another type of tribal community focused in *The Bean Trees*, and they were also forced to move out of their homeland. The novel also explains about the sufferings of the character of Estevan and Esperanza, who were Mayans, as well as the refugees. Mattie, the tyre shop owner hides and helps them to safe place. They represent the real historical political refugees who were lucky enough to escape the brutal, repressive regimes of the time in Latin America. During the next two years, the Sanctuary movement grew. United States became a safe haven for political refugees. Despite the efforts of the government to control the Sanctuary movement, the united community of sanctuary workers remains committed to providing aid to Central American political refugees. Kingsolver herself helped refugees from Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala in 1986.

Levi-Strauss describes women as biological individuals and also he argues that they were actually “natural products naturally procreated by other biological individuals.” (123) Continuing his comparison of women to objects, Levi-Strauss differentiated them from goods and services, which he describes as “manufactured objects (or operations performed by means of techniques and manufactured objects), that is, social products culturally manufactured by technical agents.”(123). The principle difference, he concludes, is that one *‘thing’* is derived from culture and the other from nature. Levi-Strauss writes of culture’s dominance over nature when he states that nature considers women as equal but culture “asserts them all to be subject to the same type of beliefs and practices since in the eyes of culture, they have the common feature that man has the power to control and increase them.” (125)

Kingsolver’s first novel, *The Bean Trees*, engages with political issues from Native American adoption and US foreign policy in South America, to the nation’s low-waged underclass. In this novel, protagonist Taylor Greer is placed in situations which challenge her liberal and patriotic sense of American identity. Greer is a typical Kingsolverian character, embodying a broader political conflict through its effects on her personal life.

Kingsolver’s novels tell stories of rural American women struggling against environmental, political and personal injustice. Lusa Landowski in *Prodigal Summer* is one who also struggles to find intimacy in an unfamiliar environment and adopts a daughter through a chance encounter. Lusa’s character resembles the character of Taylor from *The Bean Trees*. Kingsolver herself notes that the themes of Native American culture, US foreign policy in South America or in Africa, environmental issues, parent-child relationships and women taking charge of their own lives, are all the issues of her works. Kingsolver explores Native American adoption, fast food culture, political

refugees, colonialism, injustice on a global and local scale, alternative agriculture, poverty, images of beauty, and environmentalism, among a variety of contemporary issues.

In *Animal Dreams*, Codi's desire to belong again in her old hometown runs alongside the novel's political theme of overcoming ethnic and environmental oppression. Kingsolver's fiction engages strongly with ecofeminist principles. Kingsolver's characters and environments are represented according to the broad ecofeminist premise that women and nature are linked by their shared experiences of domination and that women should work to create a healthy environment. Women interact with the environment, and struggle to combat pollution in *Prodigal Summer* and *Animal Dreams*.

French anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss was firm in the argument of a divide, writing that there existed "only two true models of concrete diversity: one on the plane of nature, namely that of the diversity of species, and the other on the cultural plane provided by the diversity of functions." (124)

The male characters in *Animal Dreams* are resigned to the mining companies pollution of their orchards, believing that "the trees can die and we can just go somewhere else, and as long as we fry up the bacon for them in the same old pan...it would be home" (AD 179). It is the women who are left to coordinate the protest against environmental damage. Feminism, in the liberal sense of a commitment to fighting gender inequality, shapes Kingsolver's characters' personal and political choices, and underpins her authorial identity. However, Kingsolver's celebration of strong, intelligent and politically enthusiastic female characters highlights binaries.

Kingsolver brings in the idea of community, by challenging the power of the men inside the community have over the outsider and providing an opportunity for the outsider to

become integrated into the community. In the ecological framework of *Prodigal Summer*, the web of familial, economic, and emotional interconnections that make up the community symbolizes the larger web of environmental interconnections. Lusa, the widowed scientist turned farmer, stands at an important connection of these interconnections, and the difficulties she both faces and creates explain the complicated and often contradictory nature of the terms family and nature. Lusa is an outsider, but through marriage she inherits the family farm. She struggles to find acceptance being an outsider. Though she is highly educated, she strives hard to learn everything from use of pesticide to goat farming.

By showing her commitment to the land, and by refusing to give up, Lusa fits into the Zebulon community. Lusa's integration into the community finds a parallel in the honeysuckle plant that symbolizes her status as an outsider as well as her fight to become an insider. In the beginning of the novel, Lusa recalls an argument she and her husband had about the invading plant and an article in the newspaper recommending a stout chemical defoliant to get rid of it. In this argument, Lusa plays the role of the arrogant, cultured outsider.

Finally, at the end of their disagreement, Lusa says that "the world will not end if you let honeysuckle have the side of your bam." (PS 15) Near the end of the novel, after Lusa has established her goat-raising business with the help of community labor and community knowledge from Garnett Walker, Nannie's nemesis, she sees the bam almost entirely lost beneath the dense growth of honeysuckle. She wonders how she could have been so self-satisfied about honeysuckle. At that point she realizes that the honeysuckle is not a native plant, but an exotic invasive species that has crowded out less violent native plants; she comes to the final realization that Cole's instincts about the plant had been

right and that she needs forgiveness for a city person's courage. In the honeysuckle, Lusa sees herself as a foreign invader crowding out the natives.

In Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Animal Dreams*, which is set in Grace of Arizona, the inhabitants of this town are struggling to live in a forsaken landscape. They live in dry community clinging to the river running through their town. The town seems inhospitable because of the scarcity of water, and the problems with the river. The smallness of the town provides a strong sense of community and connects the people to each other. The difficulty of living in the desert landscape also serves as a metaphor for Barbara Kingsolver's approach to nature writing.

In both *Animal Dreams* and her later novel *Prodigal Summer*, Kingsolver constructs narratives of community inhabited by characters with a vivid awareness of the natural world and the threats to that world. These novels feature strong female characters who long for a more harmonious life within nature. The novels present ecofeminist themes, with the women in the novels representing ideals of ecologically sensitive living who seek to educate their communities about threats to the environment and the defenses against those threats.

In *Prodigal Summer*, Lusa and her husband, Cole, are arguing about the seemingly contradictory needs and concerns of farmers and environmentalists when the topic of a bee infestation at the local church comes up. Cole attacks Lusa's urban background, saying that people like her get sentimental in a place where nature's already been dead for fifty years. He says that she cannot see the real problems that nature creates for rural communities, and that, as a consequence, she sentimentalize nature. Cole states

that nature is dead in the city. He also feels that sentimentalism as a false way of looking at nature, without facing the practical realities of every day.

As Lawrence Buell points out in *Writing for an Endangered World*, that traditional nature writing highlights on the exemplary landscape, tends toward the "downplay if not the exclusion of social justice concerns." (6) Traditional nature writing admires the beauty of sunrise. It spreads the nature/culture divide by presenting an unspoiled landscape untouched by human hands as the only model for environmental concern. This ignores the social realities of the environmental concern about the white males, who work for the preservation of typical landscapes in rural Arizona.

In *Prodigal Summer*, all the main female characters clearly represent nature, and the men represent agriculture. Not only do the women represent nature, they represent different stages of nature. Deanna is the maternal, as she discovers she is pregnant by the end of the novel and represents primal earth-goddess. Nannie Rawley is the old woman with the lifetime of natural traditional wisdom stored up in her head. Lusa is the educated woman who uses her intelligence as well as her fierce determination and family attachments to become a more ecologically sensitive farmer than any of the men who farm around her could hope to be.

The nature symbols explained in the novel, points how hard Kingsolver tries to construct an ecofeminist model. With no significant exceptions, the men in the novel remain connected to industrial agriculture and the modern chemical industrial complex that soaks large-scale farming. The essential caring of mother earth with the toxic man becomes an imitation. The connection between these opposites becomes weak when the concept ignores men from the community. The pressures in the novel between the

opposing sides of ecofeminist and toxic man cannot be resolved. Kingsolver's characters find themselves feeling confused and they also sympathize towards their opponents. Health issues due to chemicals also affect women. There are three main ways in which chemicals can enter the body through inhalation, ingestion or absorption through the skin. Kingsolver brings out the causes and effects of chemical pesticides in her work through her characters.

The argument over the use of pesticide between Nannie Rawley, the old woman organic farmer, and Garnett Walker III, the retired vocational agriculture teacher of agricultural chemical use, explains the indication and uncertainty of the female-nature/male-culture dichotomy. Garnett is planning to kill the pests in his gardens with stronger chemicals, and Nannie tries to set him straight. Finally they sit down so Nannie can explain the Volterra principle, which states that usage of pesticide kills both predator and prey insects. Continuous overuse of pesticides can increase the number of pests because their natural enemies have been killed off more effectively. Also the soil becomes unfriendly to cultivate. When Nannie finishes explaining this, Garnett says, "I didn't find the fault in your thinking." (PS 8) Toxic Man expresses his frustration that he cannot prove the argument false. They come closer to friendly terms, discouraging the opposing terms.

In Kingsolver's construction of ecological themes, the central human concern is community, and this notion is developed by William Shutkin, an environmental lawyer and activist who writes about local environmentalism in *The Land that Could Be*. He sees parallels between "the rise in economic and social inequality and the deterioration of the American environment, both built and undeveloped." (9) For Shutkin, the most important

force for change is community-based environmental action. The community creates an anthropocentric emphasis on environmentalism as an instrument of social justice against an ecocentric emphasis on caring for nature as good. Many of the people leading the environmental justice movements are women and minority group members.

In *Animal Dreams* the environmental issue Kingsolver opposes is the usage of water. In *Animal Dreams* and in *Prodigal Summer*, she fights for the power structure that is destroying the environment. Codi, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, enters the town where she finds herself forced to confront the evil machinations of Black Mountain Mining Company. Codi is not really an outsider, but is returning to and discovering her roots. The fight with the mining company is not single combat but involves the community women rallying to save the town. Codi faces both her past and the patriarchal power structures to arrive at her understanding of home and environment.

With Loyd's guidance, Codi considers that all humans are God's visitors, and lists more of the environmental destructions in and around Grace. Not only was the Black Mountain mine poisoning the water, but it was also leaving behind huge contaminated loads of mine wastes. Another mining concern was destroying another mountain to obtain pumice to be used to manufacture stonewashed denim jeans. "To people who think of themselves as God's houseguests," she thinks, "American enterprise must look arrogant beyond belief." (AD 25) Codi's epiphany signals an important opinion in the novel. Before this, her feelings for the environmental degradation had been characterized by an anger and hatred that the scientific evidence was ignored, but her spiritual understanding provides her with a more powerful style of tool to use.

Codi's activism pulls her toward ecofeminism, as it involves a group of the women of Grace known as the 'Stitch and Bitch' club. Through the group's dynamics, Kingsolver constructs an ecofeminist vision of community and ecological action. When the women gather to discuss the town's future, they dismiss the men as being ineffectual or uninterested. The men, one woman notes, are too busy watching the football game to help plan a response to the mine's actions. The women fear that the environmental degradation is ultimately about the degradation of the home. Although men cannot take action, the women can, allowing Kingsolver to set up an ecofeminist dichotomy of nature and culture that she again complicates and deconstructs. 'The Stitch and Bitch club' sets out to call attention to the plight of Grace, hoping to gain wider attention and thereby forcing the mining company to make reparations.

A notable uniqueness of Grace is a large population of peacocks brought by the Spanish family that originally settled in the town. The Stitch and Bitch women traditionally construct peacock-shaped pinnatas for special occasions, and they decide to make dozens of the peacocks with a small history of the town and its problems with the mine attached, and then sell them in Tucson to raise funds for a legal challenge. When the group of small-town women appear in the city with the brightly colored-pinnatas, they capture enormous attention that eventually aids their victory over the mining company. Their pinnatas are an old cultural tradition in the town, and the women are the guardians and teachers of the tradition. By using the pinnatas to represent both the cultural traditions of the community and its environmental problems, the club also challenges the concept that nature and culture are subtle objects. Culture is rooted in the natural surroundings and is properly thought as a product of the environment.

The company that is causing so many problems for Grace is called Black Mountain, and Codi shortens the name to '*the Mountain.*' Her friend Viola curtly admonishes her: '*Don't call that company the Mountain,*' she tells her because she does not want to associate the mining company with something natural and immovable. Codi replies that she heard the men call it so. Here again, the men are unable to differentiate between natural the mountain and the manmade company, the Black Mountain Corporation. They also fail to understand the seriousness of the problem that the town faces. Viola takes the important linguistic stand of separating the exploitative practices of the company from natural processes, and thus makes the company an alien or the intruder that can be defeated.

People fail to understand and appreciate their landscapes. They have fallen from Grace. The spiritual failings that lead to this fall from Grace also contribute to a loss of the sacredness. When sacredness is lost, humans and nature become commodities. By the end of *Animal Dreams*, Codi has realized that she must take the responsibility for reclaiming her grace and fight for the preservation of her home's environment. Water, is necessary for life and is considered sacred in their community. But the inability to see it as something other than a commodity represents another denial of grace. Through her involvement with the Stitch and Bitch club, Codi has found a way to save Grace.

Barbara Kingsolver's ecofeminist narratives are firmly rooted in the earth. The barren desert of Grace and the forested mountains of Zebulon are both, marginal communities. People of Grace maintain a soft hold on life, by clinging to the river that runs through their community. Even that river has been poisoned by the neglect and the criminal behavior of the outsiders. The biodiversity is considered as something that is

good for several reasons, indicating that greater diversity involves greater value. It is believed that the human activity is the main threat to rich biodiversity.

Climate change and biodiversity are the two main environmental monitoring outlines. The close connection between science and policy in these two areas concerns a shift in the conceptual categories according to which people understand and value nature. Climate change and biodiversity involve an understanding of environmental protection as global concern. These two essential concerns are closely connected to the human survival and welfare. Biodiversity is important for strengthening ecosystem's flexibility and supporting the adaptability of the ecosystem to the environmental variations such as climate change. The changing conditions have contributed to the rearrangement of biological systems and man-made climate change. This man-made climate change is the source of such variation, threatening to increase the loss of biodiversity.

Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* is set in a rural mountain community of Appalachia. Dellarobia Turnbow, mother of two children, out on a meeting in the mountains, views something magical and different. Initially she thought it was something strange and beautiful about the trees. But suddenly she came to know that it was a colony of roosting monarch butterflies. This was the main incident that changed her views of life and also her life itself. Dellarobia's family and her in-laws Bear and Hester live on the same sheep rearing farm in Feathertown, Tennessee. They plan to invite the Money Tree Company to clear the forested hillside where the monarchs have settled. But it is not an easy decision and soon church, family and outsiders come to know about these incidents and they start opposing the idea of destroying them. They are even ready to fight for the natural environment against economic interest and survival. With the arrival of the butterflies,

their Mexican winter habitat destroyed by climate-change brought flood and mudslides. To view this change in the forests there came eco-tourists, activists, miracle-seekers, TV crew and most importantly the entomologist Ovid Byron. Byron, is an expert on monarch butterflies. He camps in the Turnbow's farm, studying the reasons for their change in flight behaviour.

Byron recruits Dellarobia to assist him. Just like the butterflies, a displaced Mexican family appears at Dellarobia's doorstep with their little daughter. The little girl Josefina explains that her father was a tourist guide for those who wanted to see the roosting monarch. Because of the flood in their Mexican hometown, the butterflies stopped coming and they lost their livelihood. There comes harsh winter over Feathertown and the gorgeous monarchs are threatened by extinction. People are so worried whether the butterflies would survive the freezing temperatures. This is all because of the man-made climate change. Deforestation and desertification are the root causes of the sudden flood that made this weather change, of which these butterflies struggle for their existence. Kingsolver has portrayed the possibilities of these climate related catastrophes.

French anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss was firm in *The Savage Mind* (1962) the argument of a divide, writing that there existed "only two true models of real diversity: one on the plane of nature, namely that of the diversity of species, and the other on the cultural plane provided by the diversity of functions." (124) According to Levi-Strauss, "the symmetry postulated between nature and culture involves the assimilation of natural species on the cultural plane."(124-125). His writing *The Savage Mind*, reflects the discipline's

expansion of the nature/culture debate in the 1960s and 1970s to include the idea that women could be symbolized as nature and men as culture.

In her essay, *Is female to male as nature is to culture?* Sherry Ortner (1972) deliberates on two arguments in regard to 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*” (7). Throughout her essay, Ortner repeatedly admits bold universals in discussing the dichotomy. Her statement is that “*in every known culture, woman is considered in some degree inferior to man*” (7) Ortner focuses on the universality of rituals as “an assertion in all human cultures of the specifically human ability to act upon and regulate, rather than passively move with and be moved by, the givens of natural existence.” (10-11). The culture distinction of nature, is that it has the power to transcend the natural and manipulate it for its own purpose. Ortner defines culture specifically as this process of transcendence, “by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural givens of existence. At some level every culture incorporates this notion in one form or another, if only through the performance of ritual as an assertion of the human ability to manipulate those givens.” (24)

Culture is not only distinct from nature but its ability to transform nature actually makes it superior. Culture dominates nature, because it is identified nearly everywhere with men, as they occupy the higher positions to perform the tasks and rituals to create and sustain culture. Ortner argues that “the universal devaluation of women could be explained by postulating that woman is seen as ‘closer to nature’ than men, men being seen as more unequivocally occupying the high ground of ‘culture.’” (12) Women in every society are generally viewed as more symbolic of nature than men.

In the end, Ortner makes her own views as how women should be viewed in the nature/culture divide. She writes that both man and woman (due to her role of raising and socialising children in her culture) can be seen as active members of culture. According to Ortner, “men and women can, and must, be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women easily be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectic with nature.” (FB 28)

Biodiversity and climate change regulation help construct nature and culture as separate categories and give rise to the notion that a natural state is worth protecting from human intrusion. In biodiversity and climate change regulation, the concept of the nature portrays the idea of untouched nature as desirable, whereas human activity is questionable, representing both destruction and restoration. Human intervention threatens the desirable state, for example by interfering with the climate system, intentionally or unintentionally introducing alien invasive species, and destroying environment. Defining humans as separate from natural systems indicates that humans and everything they do, by definition, are non-natural. The notion of man is deeply ambiguous, because humans have the power and skill to protect and even recreate natural nature, for example, by restoring or creating wetlands and so-called wildlife corridors, and by establishing protected areas. According to this concept, nature is neutral, whereas man is purposeful since humans are both destroyers and rescuers. Thus, in climate change and biodiversity policy there is a profound ambiguity in the view of the relationship between humans and their environment.

The analysis of the UNFCCC and the CBD shows that the concepts of nature and the natural are not stable and neutral, but political concepts that have to be negotiated and filled with meaning according to particular circumstances. The intention behind using

these concepts in environmental regulations, to protect the environment and natural resources, is certainly positive. The presence of the concepts themselves, however, is dubious for at least four reasons: it may result in futile boundary-setting between humans and nature; it may be counterproductive to environmental protection; it assigns responsibility in a narrow way; and it provides an artificial dichotomy between humans and unspoiled nature.

By treating humans and nature as inter-related, discussions of environmental protection and social justice could focus on how to reduce human weakness and accomplish sustainable living conditions, instead of being caught in futile negotiations around how to define and distinguish natural and human impacts.

Traditionally, droughts and floods are considered disasters only when humans and human communities have been seriously affected. Humans make land more drought prone and more flood prone by removing the vegetation and soil systems that absorb and store water. Ecofeminists consider that the three elements that make up the major part of third world disasters are deforestation, desertification and soil erosion. The chipko movement is a grassroot, women initiated, ecologically aware, non-violent protest movement that is about trees. It is also about the interconnections of women, nature and other humans. Pesticides and industrial pollutants contribute to many types of reproductive impairment in humans for example, difficulty conceiving, miscarriages and spontaneous abortions and fetal/infant related problems. Children are particularly vulnerable to toxins. They tend to consume greater amount of food that contains toxins. In US the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) estimates that more than half of the lifetime risk of cancer associated with pesticides on fruit is incurred before the age of six. While all humans are affected by environmental degradation,

women, people of color, children and the poor throughout the world experience environmental harms disproportionately. Nature is indeed, a feminist issue.

Nature and culture are not given entities as such, but are conceptual categorizations found in almost every society. Through the body and through the social roles that are shown upon, a woman is equated with nature. Ortner's land highlights that a woman's physiological processes often restricts her social spheres of action, which is seen to be closer to nature than that of a man.

In Kingsolver's construction of ecological themes, the human concerns are not ignored, but are presented as parallel and inseparable from, the concerns of non-human nature. Cole thinks that humans and nature are separate. Kingsolver asserts their interdependence. The central human concern is community. The people leading the environmental justice movement are women and minority group members. In both of Kingsolver's novels the environmental movements are led by women because these women see the sources of the problem directly, which are hidden to the eyes of men.

Kingsolver also challenges the power that the community insider has over the outsider and provides an avenue for the outsider to become integrated into the community. In the ecological framework of *Prodigal Summer*, the web of familial, economic, and emotional interconnections that make up the community symbolizes the larger web of environmental interconnections. Lusa, the widowed scientist turned farmer, stands as an important link of these interconnections, and the difficulties that she faced creates the complicated and often contradictory nature of the terms family and nature.

In *Animal Dreams* the environmental issue Kingsolver opposes is the use of water in their society. This society is difficult to imagine because the intricate web of laws

relating to water rights and the vision of proper water usage in the dry lands of southwestern United States. *Animal Dreams* features many of the characters, the plot devices, and the setting of the Western, but each element challenges the tradition and breaks down the categories.

Codi, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, enters the town as the lone person from the traditional Western, where she finds herself forced to oppose the evil planning of the black hat bad guys who work for the Black Mountain Mining Company. The categories, though, break down. Codi is not really an outsider, but is returning to and discovering her roots. The confrontation with the mining company is not easy struggle for her, so she involves the community women rallying to save the town. The ecofeminist categories become unstable as Codi must navigate both the matriarchal and patriarchal power structures to arrive at her understanding of home and environment.

Codi's path to understanding the environment demolishes the simplistic matriarchal/patriarchal categories as she pursues spiritual guidance from her old boyfriend, Loyd. As Codi is teaching in Arizona, her sister, Hallie, is teaching in Nicaragua, and Codi wonders at her sister's ability to put her life in danger for something she believes in. She asks Loyd what he would be willing to die for, and he says, the land. Codi misunderstands him, and thinks he means the reservation his family lives on, but he corrects her with disgust, saying he is not talking about property. Codi performs a rain dance, when she meets Loyd's family members. Loyd explains that the dance is more of an offering, and he uses the analogy of a houseguest leaving a note thanking the host to keep things in balance. Codi is taken by this idea and feels guilty for the anglo culture that fails to see the spiritual dimensions of the land, but can only see the resources to be taken. Western

society consistently sees nature and people primarily as the commodities. Codi attempts to reject the materialistic thinking that makes nature a commodity by her spiritual move.

Loyd is a man, but he shows an interest in understanding the land more than Codi does. He is associated with both wild nature and domesticity. He clearly demonstrates feminine attributes. His name and tradition undermine the categories. From his father, Loyd gets his name, Peregriha, the significance of which becomes clear when he notes that on his father's side, he is Navajo and Apache. Both claim that they are wanderers, people fond of journey. On his mother's side he is a Pueblo, which means natives. He carries the name of the wanderers, yet he identifies with the stability of the home loving people of his mother. In this own way, Loyd embodies both masculine and feminine traits and ideals, and his understanding of the landscape is both masculine and feminine. With Loyd's guidance, Codi ponders the notion that all humans are God's houseguests, and catalogs more of the environmental destructions in and around Grace. The Black Mountain mine was poisoning the water, and it was also leaving behind huge contaminated piles of mine tailings.

Another mining concern was destroying another mountain to obtain pumice to be used to manufacture stonewashed denim jeans. "To people who think of themselves as God's houseguests," she thinks, "American enterprise must look arrogant beyond belief."(AD 25). Codi's epiphany signals an important turning point in the novel. Before this, her feelings for the environmental degradation had been characterized by an angry resentment that the scientific evidence was ignored, but her spiritual understanding provides her with a more powerful linguistic tool to use. Ironically, her hard part of masculine and scientific approach is transformed into the soft, feminine, emotional

approach only after Loyd teaches her. Codi's activism pulls her toward ecofeminism, as it involves a group of the women of Grace known as the Stitch and Bitch club. Kingsolver challenges the traditional gender roles. The strong matriarchal flavor of the group pervades all of their activities and informs the strategies they use to gain justice from the mining company that has been poisoning their water. The group discusses all the possible actions to take, including using dynamite to blow up the mine or the proposed dam, but this woman points out that they do not know how to use dynamite while the men do. When the women ponder explosive action, they are bending gender rules and acting more masculine.

The men would be scared to use such extreme means, or would not see the need to resort to them. This shows their passivity, traditionally a feminine trait, dramatically demonstrates the limitations of traditional gender labels. The women fears over the men's incompetence emphasize the central issue that has roused the Stitch and Bitch club. Although the men cannot take action, the women are risking doing it. 'The Stitch and Bitch club' sets out to call attention to the plight of Grace, hoping to gain wider attention and thereby forcing the mining company to make reparations.

Barbara Kingsolver's ecofeminist narratives are firmly rooted in the earth. The arid desert of Grace and the forested mountains of Zebulon are both, in some senses, marginal communities. Grace maintains a fragile hold on life by clinging to the river that runs through the community, even if that river has been poisoned by the neglect and outright criminal behavior of outsiders. Zebulon, on the other hand, seems almost overwhelmed by nature's richness, and the lush Appalachian forests are far, both metaphorically and in actual miles from Grace. But the land nevertheless is equally poor and socially marginal to the larger moneyed concerns. It is in Grace, though, that Kingsolver's environmental vision projects most clearly.

Though she does not make direct reference to *Holding the Line* , the actual crises can be seen through her work. Women in isolated mining communities are struggling hard against the corporate and environmental oppression. *Animal Dreams* fictionalises elements of the female strikers' stories in *Holding the Line* and showcases other actual crises that fit within Kingsolver's chosen responsibility of issues in a global context, such as the destruction of agricultural communities in Nicaragua, Native American reservation environments and local water supplies being affected by mining pollution.

In *Animal Dreams* , female characters are significant in saving the town from the poisoned water, just as the women keep the Phelps Dodge strike going in *Holding the Line* . It is rather political than solely a gender issue which characterizes the struggle of a small town against a politically powerful bureaucratic corporation. Through familiar female voices such as *Animal Dreams* ' matriarch Doña Althea, with her call for less television and more family time, Kingsolver's women challenge political and social hierarchies, fighting injustice in their local communities. In *Holding the Line* , striker Diane McCormick emphasizes the powerful effect of familiar female voices, describing the achievements of the Women's Auxiliary as those of "just a bunch of ladies" (HTL 174). Women offer alternative ways of approaching old problems, often through seemingly small actions such as crafting a traditional piñata. Female characters such as Doña Althea and Diane brave their past in order to construct hopeful futures on both a personal and a broader political level. Diane admits that in the past, the best thing they could do for their children was to get them a job with the company but she is resolute with newly found confidence when she states, " *We don't do that anymore. Instead, union*

wives look forward to a future in which companies like Phelps Dodge will be “on their way out and formerly alienated groups of people will be on their way in” (HTL 174).

The experiences of female protagonists as depicted in *Holding the Line* underpin both the structure and theme of *Animal Dreams* . Both books alternate between different people’s stories according to chapter, on the central theme of families struggling to survive. Details from the non-fiction book that reappear in its companion novel include the official street names which are “totally ignored” (AD 65) and never called by their “actual name” (HTL 18). Instead of naming their streets in a normal way the communities of Grace and Clifton identify their environment in relation to landmarks, suggesting an environmentally grounded sense of identity. Kingsolver describes how “whole lives” in Clifton “are lived in relation to these things,” to “dry stream beds” and “bends in the road” (HTL 22). The exploitation of the environments of Grace and Clifton is all the more tragic in the context of such grounded communities. In *Holding the Line* , Kingsolver notes that cemeteries were buried as Phelps Dodge “rearranged the earth in search of copper” (HTL 69), while in *Animal Dreams* , Codi describes settlements “torn up when [fictional mining company] Black Mountain chased a vein of copper,” and claims

that “not even the graveyards were sacred” (AD 161). *Holding the Line* details pollution from the mine’s leaching process that created mounds of waste, “saturated with a sulphuric acid solution,” which were then dumped in the river (HTL 69), while in *Animal Dreams* the old men discuss the pollution of Grace’s orchards by the mine’s “leaching operation” (AD 63). It is not only the tropes of environmental damage and isolated communities that are shared by the novel and its non-fictional counterpart, but also the international web of connections. The exploration of identity, values and relative

concepts of freedom highlighted by the refugees' presence recurs in *Pigs in Heaven* and *Prodigal Summer*.

Loyd, suggests that an alternative model for a relationship with the environment does not rely on gender distinction. Both Loyd and Codi cast off their inheritance from their fathers with Loyd giving up cockfighting, despite the fact that his "*old man didn't have one damn thing to give him but cockfighting*" (AD 103), and Codi shrugging off her father's insistence that she is "*an outsider not only by belief but by flesh and bone*" (AD 291).

This discarding of paternal legacies mirrors Kingsolver's larger symbolic rejection of patriarchal environmental domination in favour of a balanced gendered vision. For Loyd, the land offers a sense of belonging. Loyd would die for the land but not property, and in this way is made representative of a male relationship with the environment that does not conform to the usual exploitative aspects of patriarchal ownership and mastery.

Loyd contrasts the Pueblo commitment to keep things in balance and trying to be good guests, with the Anglo belief that "*God put the earth here for us to use, westward-ho. Like a special little playground*" (AD 240). This idea of the local environment as a playground to be used by Anglo communities mirrors the global political influence of imperialism and secret colonialism. While the US extends its sphere of authority in a modern political attitude of Manifest Destiny shaped by the pioneers' domination of the land, Phelps Dodge and even the people of Grace use their land without thinking that its natural resources could one day run out. The political imperative of interrelatedness is further exemplified by Codi's anger. She rails furiously against her students' belief that "*if all the trees die and this land goes to hell,*" they can "*just go somewhere else*" (AD 255). In trying to make the teenagers realize that "*the wilderness is used up*" (AD 255), Codi's impassioned lesson is

made to correlate with Kingsolver's own politicization of environmental awareness. In her first essay collection, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays From Now or Never*, Kingsolver describes her move from downtown Tucson to a rural desert home as part of her desire, inspired by Thoreau, to live deliberately. Codi's attractive descriptions of the Santa Rosalia Pueblo as a village "built on a mesa and blended perfectly with the landscape" (AD 227), privilege Native American harmony with the land. They also represent Kingsolver's sense of what a community should be and highlight factors which differentiate such communities from mainstream American societies. By blending with the landscape, a Pueblo village can be oppressed or ignored in the same way that nature has been, either under the guise of civilizing paternalism or with the expectation that it can and will tolerate abuse.

Throughout *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver blurs rigid distinctions between land and humanity, and civilization and environment, and highlights the importance of respecting their interrelatedness. Codi describes how Grace is "*made of things that erode too slowly to be noticed*" (AD 8). The houses are part of the landscape and nature is humanized through descriptions of "*arthritic mesquite trees*" and *lonely carob trees searching for a mate* (AD 8). Kingsolver undermines the binaries which limit perceptions of the environment but in so doing, worsens those binaries which underpin perceptions of cultural difference. Codi describes Pueblo architecture as organic, "*like something alive that just grew here*" rather than *something planned and built by man* (AD 129). In a sentiment suggestive of arguments for colonial settlement of native lands, Codi repeatedly parallels Native American culture and architecture with nature. In the rhetoric of the manifest destiny of a pioneering civilization, nature is to be tamed, controlled and

used. Codi describes how there is something familiar in the arrangement of the stones of the houses, and realises that they look “*just like cells under the microscope*” (AD 129). While this example praises the Pueblo architecture for its adaptive fitness it also draws uncomfortably close to polarizing nature and civilization.

Ecofeminists argue that the ideology which sanctions the oppression based on race, class and gender is the same as that which authorizes the oppression of nature. In exploring gender difference in relation to nature, *Prodigal Summer* exposes the dichotomy of nature vs. civilization in which nature is coded nonwhite and female civilization denotes white and male, recognizing the origins of this duality and exploring its historical usefulness in explaining human/nature relationships.

Kingsolver links other books to her narratives to illuminate her characters and the reasons for their relationships. The things that attach people are embedded in her themes and narrative choices. In *Prodigal Summer*, Lusa’s book about moths offers shorthand for her education in biology and its description of moth love is a metaphor for her impulsive, primal love for Cole. This intertext emphasizes the ecological webs that attach people. The Bible is deployed by various characters in *The Poisonwood Bible* emphasizing its role as the text that can both unite and divide, and even Nathan’s destructive use of verses to justify his behaviour offers points of intersection for other characters. His daughters, wife, and the villagers form relationships in reaction to Nathan’s developing madness, which is offered as a morality tale as is the consequence of civil war which drives people apart. Some of Kingsolver’s themes and most contentious issues seem, at first sight, to engage with the things that drive people apart rather than bring them together.

Nature and Culture are both categories of human thoughts. The actual boundary between these two categories could not be clearly found, because women are also a part of culture and society. Men also play their role in nature. Culture is not only clearly distinct from nature, but its ability to transform nature makes it superior. Since culture is identified with men everywhere, it is seen as culture dominating over nature. Men occupy higher positions to perform the tasks and rituals to create and sustain culture. And since women are directly connected to nature biologically, they are seen as opponents to culture or men.

At the end of her essay Ortner makes known her own views how women should be viewed in the nature/culture divide. She writes that both man and woman are seen as active members of culture. According to Ortner, *“men and women can, and must, be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women easily be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectic with nature.”* (28)

Biodiversity and climate change guidelines help to construct nature and culture and give rise to the notion that a natural state is worth protecting from human intrusion. In biodiversity and climate change regulation, the concept of nature portrays the idea of untouched nature as desirable, whereas human activity is questionable, representing both destruction and restoration. Human action threatens the desirable state, for example by interfering with the climate system, intentionally or unintentionally introducing alien invasive species, and destroying the habitat. The notion of human activity is deeply vague, because humans have the power and skill to protect and even recreate nature. They can restore or create wetlands and so-called wildlife corridors, and establish protected areas. Humans are both destroyers and rescuers. Eco-feminist analysis show

how sex/gender inequality has been used to create the destructive nature/socio-cultural divide. Ending sex/gender inequality is essential to end up this divide of nature/ culture.

In all these novels of Kingsolver, men are mostly seen as dominant characters over nature and they fail to see the destruction that they cause out of their activities. But women are keen at noticing them as they are closely related to nature. Also they cannot be entirely divorced from culture. Women are the initial indicators of natural calamities. Women are interconnected with men, culture and mainly with Nature. Both men and women should be seen as active members of culture. These interconnections must be analyzed by the men too. To live in a peaceful and good environmental world, Nature and women have to be treated well, which would make a good cultural harmonious society.

The next chapter attempts to bring out the essential space that man should provide for women and for the eco-system as expressed through Kingsolver's novels. The interconnections of Nature, Women, Men and Society are also to be explored. The circle of life has to be maintained, or else there would be the imbalance of life cycle, which could cause great disasters for the entire eco system.