

# VOICE TO THE VOICELESS: A RESISTANCE STUDY IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BARBARA KINGSOLVER

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## ABSTRACT

Resistance encompasses each and every action of opposition, defiance, and protest for reclaiming justice. Power, resistance and justice are tangled in the life of common people. This paper aims to focus on the resisting power of people, especially women against the tyrannical power structure in order to protect their land, environment and livelihoods which are under the verge of exploitation. By introspecting the selected novels, *Animal Dreams*, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behaviour*, this study explores the voice of resistance echoing behind the narratives of Barbara Kingsolver. The voices of suppressed may not be heard often, but that doesn't mean they are voiceless. They speak at the right platform of protest through necessary actions.

**Keywords:** Environment, Exploitation, Planetary Crisis, Resistance, Justice



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental exploitation has become a crucial threat to the planet in recent times. The overuse of natural resources in the form of mining, logging and hunting lead to land desertification, deforestation, species extinction and unpredictable climate changes. Patriarchal power system continues to exploit the nature and its resources for economic gain. The environment and its living beings get suppressed and become voiceless to claim the justice. Literature here plays a great role in unveiling the cruelties faced by the environment and acts as a voice of resistance. The study accentuates that, the voices of the green world can resist, and their voice echoed in reclaiming their equality and justice through literary fiction. Barbara Kingsolver is an American writer and environmental activist; through her writings she claims eco justice by resisting the anthropocentric activities. This study explores Kingsolver's voice of resistance in her novels *Animal Dreams* (1990), *Prodigal Summer* (2000) and *Flight Behaviour* (2012).

Michel Foucault defines power as a set of net or chain system of relation which is widely spread throughout the society and there be an oppressor and oppressed. He points out that an individual should not be in the place as a recipient of power, but as the place where power is enacted and also be in the place to resist. Michel Foucault states, "Where there

is power there is resistance" (95) in his *The History of Sexuality*, he points out that where there is power exercised, and there must be someone who resists. Resistance itself is an internal property of power. Gramsci stresses the two forms of resistance, which are passive resistance and active resistance. Passive resistance involves spontaneous and often silence form of resistance which is not enough to bring changes in the society. Whereas active resistance is a collective and continuous struggle and it helps in transform the society.

## 2. PATRIARCHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION

The patriarchal power system deeply rooted in the ideologies of dominating the weaker and the voiceless and justified it. From the early period itself they started to dominate women and nature and treating them as their slaves. With their tyrant dominating power they exploit the nature and its resources for sole purpose of gaining wealth. Kingsolver's narratives express that; patriarchal activities of mankind degrade the sustainability of environment and results in ecological loss. Over exploitation of natural resources in the forms of soil mining, dumping toxic effluents, logging, hunting, and usage of chemical pesticides lead to great threat for the planet. These activities result in landslides, contamination of water bodies, species extinction, global warming and unresolved climate changes.

The novel *Animal Dreams* deeply interpret the role of industrialisation behind environmental degradation. The plot set in a town called Grace and explore the aridity of Grace due to the blooming of a Black Mountain Company, and the cruelties of industrialisation exposed by the protagonist Codi. The lush environment and its resources slowly get destroyed by the effluents from the mining company and it was unnoticed by the people. The mining company used to dump the toxic effluents near the major pond in the town, which provide water for the entire community. The toxic contaminated the land and water bodies, and gradually the agricultural land and its vegetation. As Aldo Leopold states: "The distinctiveness of the land was generally identified by feature of the men who lived on it" (*A Sand County Almanac* 203). Because the patriarchal man regards land as a commodity purpose and they can extract all its resources.

Kingsolver in her novel *Prodigal Summer* details the need of each living species in the environment. Her narratives emphasise the balanced biodiversity and also detail the causes behind species extinction. This novel tangled with three characters and visualise the practice of hunting, usage of chemical pesticides and inorganic farming. In the Zebulon Mountain region, the predators Coyotes species are in the verge of extinction due to the cruel activities of mankind. The people hunt the Coyotes for meat purpose and also to safeguard their cattle. In recent days most of animal species are under the list of endangered animals and initiates steps to conserve them. In the same way, to earn more the greed people used to cultivate cash crops and letting the land barren. In the modern contemporary world farmers used neglect the organic farming practices and use chemical fertilisers and pesticides to yield more, and they rarely consider the impacts of such harmful fertilizers. The pesticides sometimes affect the small insects like beetles which are helps in pollination. Victor Wallis claims that, "In Principle, natural balance and human needs are complementary, in the sense that if the human species violates ecological criteria of sustainability, it will only be undermining the conditions of its well-being" ("*Towards Ecological Socialism*"). People are not trying to realise the need of each single species from a small insect to predators in the biodiversity.

Kingsolver validates, Barry Commoner's first law of ecology that "everything is connected with everything else" (49) through her writings in the novel *Flight Behaviour*. Human beings' every action in the environment leads to strange and harmful reaction. This novel intricates the action of logging ends in landslides and other devastation through the story of Dellarobia. Here, the dominant family members of Dellarobia decides to clear off the trees for logging purpose in order to earn more without Knowing its impacts. Deforestation and ore mining is a random thing in the Appalachian Mountain region and its consequences reflected in the form of heavy flood and landslides. Plundering the trees from the soil makes way to soil erosion and easily tend to massive landslides and habitat loss. As a native of Appalachia, Kingsolver has witnessed all these things, and she penned it to seek awariness among the readers.

## 3. RESISTANCE AND REFORMATION

People register their resistance against environmental exploitation through writing in order to bring about change and inspire better action. Literary works also serve as a form of resistance aiming to evoke consciousness and promote positive outcomes in response to ongoing societal issues. From early indigenous people to the contemporary society resist the environmental degradation. The silenced voice of the environment starts to hear from the early nineteenth century and witnessed in many reforms. The most notable movements such as Silent valley and Plachimada hailed as

successful movements handled by the indigenous people of the community. When the power politics deeply exploit the environment of the marginalised, they start to resist the intrusion of power in various forms. The environmental justice movement that gained mass attention is Silent Valley in Kerala's Palakkad district. It was a remarkable people's movement that stopped a hydroelectric power plant project across the Kunthipuzha River. Even though there was no human habitation in that place the people of nearby tribal community want to protect the forest land of the Western Ghats from the verge of degradation because the silent valley is one of India's rainforests. After ten years of long struggles and thousands of peoples' resistance put an end to the project and in 1986, the Silent Valley was declared as National Park and in 2007 it was recognised as heritage site by UNESCO.

The year 2000 witnessed another great resistance reform the tribal community of Plachimada village in Kerala and it seeks the attention of whole world. The movement carried out to shut down the Coca Cola bottling plant which situated in the village and cause severe impacts to the people and their land. The plant used up nearly one million of water per day and it worsen the ground water level of the village. The first resistance voice given by Mayillama, a woman of tribal community and she was directly affected by the impacts of Coca Cola plant. When power starts to play the affected people starts to question back there begins the resistance. In the year 2004 the coca cola plant was closed and not, yet the company paid compensation for the whole tribal community completely for causing great impact on their lives.

Similarly, many authors express their resistance to eco degradation through their narrations. Barbara Kingsolver is one among them, from her childhood she witnesses the terrible impacts of environmental degradation carried by industrialisation and other activities. Rather than a writer, Kingsolver is an eco-activist and also her writing insists the need of eco conservation. Through her characters she gives voice to the voiceless living beings and the environment. The characters in her novels echoed the voice of green world and claims eco justice.

The selected novels for the study centred women characters, depicts their resistance and reformation. In her novel *Animal Dreams*, Codi begins to resist the action of the Black mining company on knowing the impacts of the effluents from the company. At first, she protests alone, later she evokes awareness among the people and started a women group named *Stitch and Bitch club*. Women together in the club made handcrafted piñatas with a message carrying the situation of Grace town. Later they get attention from nearby towns, and it becomes a great protest. Finally, the Environmental Protection Agency along with the government closed the black mining company. Thus, they protect their town from the verge of extinction.

Likewise, in her novel *Prodigal Summer* the women characters resist all the cruel anthropocentric attitudes towards nature and its living beings. Deanna Wolf a forest Ranger in the Zebulon ask the native not to kill the Coyotes and she taught them about the importance of predators in the wildlife ecosystem. The character Lusa raises her voice against cash crop cultivation by her dominant family members. She insists the need of organic farming practices and finally she made them to adopt it. Nannie Rowley, an old woman acts as a voice of each tiny species like beetles. She strongly resists the usage of chemical pesticides which would affect the essential insects in the environment. Here these three-woman characters strongly resist the anthropogenic activities and becomes the voices of the silenced.

In the novel *Flight Behaviour*, Dellarobia resist the action of her own family members. As a normal family woman, Dellarobia doesn't show any interest in the illegal logging activities done by her family members, later after realising the impacts of logging and its consequences she stood against logging. Dellarobia comes to know the aftereffects of logging through the migration of monarch butterflies and a family displaced from Mexico due to landslides. After all, knowing about this she strictly resists through protest and seek media attention. Thus, the logging and illegal activities in the nearby forest was ended. Thus, Kingsolver connects all her characters in a unique sense of resistance in order to conserve the environment from exploitation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research finds out that resistance encompasses in everyday acts of human beings. They have their own distinct consciousness which is shaped by their political and economic condition, and it enables them to resist the harmful actions. Human beings should have some ethical concern towards their living place, because every single creature in nature is interrelated with one another. By involve in micro resistance an individual can shaped the space of their own and also attain their justice and equality.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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