

**AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL
DEGRADATION IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S ANIMAL
DREAMS**

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyse the ecological crisis in the novel *Animal Dreams*. Barbara Kingsolver illustrates how the notable country Grace, Arizona struggles against the Black Mountain Mining Company (it is a fictional company) and how it affects the living trees, land, river and the lives of the people. This company digs and dumps the chemical into the river so, therefore all the affluent land and water gets devastated. Codi the protagonist of the novel teaches biology to the students simultaneously she educates her students about the seriousness of the ecological crisis. She collects samples of the river water and examines them to witness the teeming microscopic germs inside the dirty water. Codi finds out the truth how the acid mixes with the river water and creates a biotic death and oxygen load. The valley of Grace, Arizona slowly perishes due the leaching operation in the mining companies. Codi gives awareness to Grace people regarding the importance of preserving nature and mother earth from eradication. However, she succeeds in protecting the country from hazardous situation with the help of Stitch and Bitch Club members. So, therefore modernization and industrialization brings the greater effects to the environment.

Keywords: Ecological Crises, Black Mountain Mining Company, Land, River, Leaching Operation, Stitch and Bitch Club and Modernization.

In *Literature and Ecology* William Rueckert states “Any living thing that hopes to live on earth must fit into the ecosphere or perish” (105).

Modernization is a specific kind of social change which is the result of industrialization. The shift to an industrialization society can bring both advantage and disadvantage to the society. In one way industrialization helps in developing the nation in several ways especially in economical and political state. In the other way, because of modern companies the land, water and lives of the people get affected in this development process. In the book *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard explains, “the trope of ‘pollution’ is historically implicated as both environmental destruction and salvation . . . From the ecocritical perspective this reflects the ambivalent role of science as both a procedure of environmental hazards and a critical analyst of them” (9). This study exhibits how the impact of modernization and industrialization brings destruction to Grace, Arizona because of the Black Mountain Mining Companies.

In *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver illustrates how the historically notable country struggles against the Black Mountain Mining Companies (it is a fictional company) and how it affects the living trees, land, river and the lives of the people in Grace, Arizona. Kingsolver uses Codi as a mouthpiece to explain about how industrialization creates unhealthy conditions and dreadful ambience to the Mother Earth. In this novel writer tries to bring out the ecological crisis due to Modernization and its consequences in the country Grace. Codi is surprised to see the Orchards and the fertile land in the country Grace, Arizona. She stays with Emelina her school friend, who lives a very simple life with her husband John Tucker a Railroad Engineer. Codi and John Tucker goes for a walk beside the Orchards Codi is shocked to see the Pecan orchard because the ground is filled with the tiny immature nuts. Codi asks “So what’s happening with these orchards?” John Tucker replies “Fruit drop.” it seems to

represent the environmental destruction in Grace, Arizona.

The predominant character in the novel Codi, learns how the sulfuric acid from the Mining Companies gradually destroys the land, river and orchards thereby the fertile ground turns into a poisonous ground. People talk about how the leaching operation by the Mining Companies creates an ecological side effects in the country Grace. People discusses the issue, “Do you know how much sulfuric they put in the river ? He said the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) give Black Mountain thirty days to shut down that leaching operation.” (AD 63). Codi teaches Biology to the high school classes. She uses her scientific and literary skills to educate students in their studies simultaneously she also provides awareness about their environment. She collects samples of the river water and examines them to witness the teeming microscopic germs inside the dirty water.

Codi is stunned to see the river because there are no microorganisms like fishes and frogs under the powerful river in the Grace. She thinks “It gave me a strange panic to see that stillness under powerful magnification. Our water was dead.” and wonders “. . . what the hell was going on with this river.” (AD 110). Codi is furious in seeing the PH (Potential of Hydrogen) level of the river water as it is higher than battery acid.

Codi finds out the truth that the Mining Company produces plenty of sulfuric acid as a result, the acid mixes with the river water and it creates a biotic death and oxygen load. The Mining Companies in the Grace, Arizona has affected the land, water and orchards that have been the precious treasure of the town for centuries. The lives of the people get affected because of the acidic water. In the journal “Environmental Advocacy in Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*”, Beulah says it is worth recalling Abbey’s (1968:202) significant statement that “when a man must be afraid to drink

freely from his countries rivers to live in". The mining authorities have long back bought the water rights from the native people they think "We all thought we were getting money for nothing" (AD 111). The river water of Grace severely affects the Orchards "But then there would be *no* water for the orchards. That would be worse than the way it is now" (AD 111). There is no water if the leaching operation continues in the Grace because the acidic water will destroy all the fruitful Orchards.

The salty irrigation of the mines due to the leaching operation turns the productive land into unproductive land. "Beyond them lay more fallow alfalfa fields, their soil crusted white from all the years of slightly salty irrigation water" (AD 122). This irrigated water is absorbed by the productive land, slowly the land losses its fertility as result fruitful trees in the Orchard dies. In the biology lab Codi looks at her water project it reveals about the dangerous pollution caused in Grace. In the book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty explains,

. . . You would learn of oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer, predictions of global warming, acid rain . . . The Endangered Earth (xvi).

The same destruction occurs in the land Aathi in *Gift in Green* written by Sarah Joseph. Sarah Joseph claims due to destruction the land and water loses its sacredness. The land named Aathi gets destructed due to the poisonous chemical called Endosulfan which mixes with the land and water consequently destroys its purity. People are worried because of the dangerous poison mixed in the river. Kingsolver stresses upon the fact that trees are symbol of hope to the people. The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) warns the Mining Company to shut down the

leaching operation because it is a great threat for the people and land.

Codi also addresses to the villagers about the extent of pollution in the town, it shocks the members, “But your trees knew all this way before we did. Watering them from the river is just like acid rain falling on them, if you’ve heard of that. The acid-rain problem here in the West comes mostly from mine smelters. It’s the same acid, one way or the other. Sulfuric acid” (AD 176). Codi as a teacher feels a lot about the devastation that takes place in the country. Due to this fact she screams at the students and tells, “I knew that, but still I screamed at them because Black Mountain was poisoning their mother’s milk and all they cared about was sex and a passing grade” (AD 253). She talks about the need for evapotranspiration, rain forests and oxygen in the biosphere, how everything is connected to each other. She instigates students to think about the future if the leaching operation is going to continue for several years. Codi’s concern for future is expressed in her classes,

. . . If I can’t teach you something you’ll remember, then I haven’t even been here this year . . . You kids think this pollution shit is not your problem, right? Somebody will clean up the mess. It’s not your fault. Well, your attitude stinks. You’re as guilty as anybody. Do you, or do you not, think the world was put here for you to use?. (AD 254)

Codi demonstrates about the human being’s indifferent attitude towards nature. She even explains about the significant nature of trees and its importance in the modern world. Codi’s lecture makes students to think serious about the ecological damage. Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader* recommends that “revaluing nature-oriented literature can help redirect us from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness” (xxx). Codi tells that Grace is rich in greenery, valleys, fruits, gardening's flowers and so on. In the journal Jiannan Tang says, “Ceri Gorton, points

out that Codi's reengagement with the people of Grace and connection with her ancestry has provided her with the "ground orientation" that "grounds her life in Grace". Codi tells,

If Grace gets poisoned, if all these trees die and this land goes to hell . . .

People can forget, and forget, and forget, but the land has a memory. The lakes and the rivers are still hanging on to the DDT . . . The fish have cancer. (AD 255)

The mining operation distracts Nature's order. The absence of microorganisms in the living river, loss of fertility, acidic water and unproductive land, all these represent the ecological destruction. The river has become dead. In *Silent Spring* Rachel Carson claims "Without soil, land plants as we know them could not grow, and without plants no animals could survive" (53). Kingsolver effectively explains, "Nothing to do with nature, unless you count human nature" (AD 13). One must consider nature as alive and understand its importance.

Codi gets attention from the media to inform about the Grace's polluted river and its origin. Mr. Rideheart who pays a visit to Grace as the guest speaker declares that Grace country is a historical place and hence it must be included in the National Register of Historic Places. "Mr. Rideheart suggested . . . that it could, and *should* be declared a historic preserve" (AD 277). Therefore Codi succeeds in saving Grace from the destruction, meanwhile EPA announces to shut down the mining companies. "The women of the Stitch and Bitch had won back the river . . ." (AD 313). In *Animal Dreams* Kingsolver effectively portrays how modernization disturbs the lives of the people and their surroundings. Even today it happens in the society, in one way writer advises the readers to protect nature from the modern conventions.

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