

Socio-Ecological Issues in Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered*

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Abstract: *The eco fiction as opposed to the traditional novel prioritizes its purpose -- to promote change, bring about engagement with a global issue -- over other considerations. These fictions require a novel norm for how we rate and judge their merits, moving beyond only fictional and aesthetic criteria. Barbara Kingsolver is an American social activist. She is a feminist and an environmentalist. All her novels depict the rural women in America struggling against injustice- environmental and political. Unsheltered (2018), Barbara Kingsolver's novel is an eloquent exploration of societies in crisis.*

Keywords: Socio-ecological issues, environmental degradation, *Unsheltered*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many eco fictions do not mention either environmental degradation or global warming directly. Kingsolver's novel, *Unsheltered* is more concerned with the immediate environment and power structures that impact upon the communities within the story. It presents more symbiotic and holistic relationship structures between society and the environment.

1.1 Significance of the Research Paper:

- The climate change challenges the imagination. It is a global concern but experienced locally. It is trans-spatial and trans-temporal.
- Climate change therefore is particularly difficult to cognize.
- However, the paper suggests that Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Unsheltered*, by creatively recasting the issue, can bring it into the imagination.
- The paper examines and compares with recognized norms of the genre.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine climate change through current modes of scientific understanding and discourse in Barbara's novel, *Unsheltered*.
- To reflect on ecological issues in order to understand climate novel.
- To identify major themes of environmental issues in Barbara's novel, *unsheltered* pointing out the literary and cultural relevance.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Too many authors are left unnoticed by the academic and research world because they fall into the sub-genre of eco fiction writers. Barbara Kingsolver explores many of the important contemporary issues - the quest to define home, family, and self, while at the same time exploring the necessity of preserving environmental resources and the need to respect all life forms. The purpose of this study is to highlight Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Unsheltered as an eco-fiction*.

1.4 Rationale behind the choice of the Subject

- No concrete and notable critical work is available on Barbara's novel, *Unsheltered*.

- No analytical work is done keeping in view the ecological, historical, social and cultural approaches of Barbara's eco-novel.
- Need to study as her work is distinctive—she deals with different themes, characters, settings, stories and style of environmental issues.

1.5 Hypothesis:

- It is assumed that the novel selected for the study offer different themes and narratives of environmental and historical settings.
- The study also shows Barbara's journey from **local to global issues**.
- It presupposes Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Unsheltered* as an eco fiction.

1.6 Research Work Method:

- An Analytical Technique presents nature and background of Barbara Kingsolver's novel and explores different features of her craft.
- An Interpretative Technique verifies the major ecological, historical, social and cultural themes.
- An Evaluative Technique compares and contrasts Barbara's treatment to the environmental issues through historical, social and cultural themes.

Eco-fiction

Dwyer Jim explains eco-fiction as nature-oriented fiction that is non-human oriented. (Dwyer Jim, 2010). Dwyer was not exclusive with genre when describing eco-fiction:

[Eco-fiction is] made up of many styles, primarily modernism, post-modernism, realism, and magical realism and can be found in many genres, primarily mainstream, westerns, mystery, romance, and speculative fiction. . . (Dwyer Jim's, 2010)

Eco-fiction intersects natural landscape, environmental issues, and wilderness—and human connection with nature. Dwyer said that eco-fiction “might be simply described as a critical perspective on the relationship between literature and the natural world, and the place of humanity within.” Source: Chico News & Review.

About the Author

Barbara Kingsolver is multifaceted American writer. Her writing frequently focuses on the themes such as biodiversity, socio-ecological issues, injustice, and the interface between man and ecosystem. Kingsolver is the recipient of numerous awards, like the UK's Orange Prize for Fiction 2010, for *The Lacuna* and the National Humanities Medal.

Socio-ecological Issues in Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered*

Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* is the story of Willa, a middle aged woman who, in a attempt to get funding to fix up her shoddy old home. She realizes the history of her town - especially about Thatcher Greenwood. The story moves back and forth between Willa and Thatcher, depicting similarities of two places in their respective times. Kingsolver's hope in *Unsheltered* was to explore “paradigm shift”.

Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* is the narrative of two families of two different centuries. The settings are different corners of Sixth and Plum. These families face the challenges of surviving as they confront the cultural shifts. Willa and Thatcher realize that the future is uncertain but shelter can be set up with the union of family members and in the strength of the human spirit.

In the year, 1870, Thatcher, the science teacher fights back with fulfilling the whims of his determined wife. Hence he develops a connection with his next-door neighbor, naturalist Mary Treat. Willa tries to enfold four generations that are living in a house but falling down. They members are struggling with day-today conflicts. In the old setting, Thatcher is facing the issues with other characters. Kingsolver uncovers similarities depicting the disturbances and depressions of members.

The main story moves around Willa and Iano. Both find themselves middle-aged and jobless. As Willa learns about Thatcher Greenwood, a science teacher whose enthusiasm for Charles Darwin's controversial new theory of evolution endangers his livelihood and reputation.

Willa Knox with her companion followed all the norms as sensible parents and experts in professions. They have only debts and a hereditary house that is also falling apart. Thatcher discovers himself under siege. His employer prohibits him to tell of the thrilling efforts published by Charles Darwin. Kingsolver celebrates life's adaptability and resilience, which includes humankind's capacity for learning, courage, change, and progress.

II. CONCLUSION

Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* is not typical of climate fiction since the environmental concerns are more related to eco-socio issues, exploitation and environmental justice. There is no direct examination of environmental issues; rather, the environmental disasters serve simply as backdrops to explore human experience in extreme situations. In the novel, environmentalism is a means of examining the characters, but is not otherwise essential to the narrative. The novel creates an ecological consciousness.

Several environmental issues are embedded in the narratives of Barbara Kingsolver. This includes the issues such as extreme weather conditions, global warming, food shortage, environmental diseases, and climate change in general. The novel also depicted how exploited and damaged environment becomes the main motivational factor for a character's decision. The roots of the characters are deep into the countryside places where they born and brought up. The novel acts as a transformative cultural agency that doubles as an ecological dimension of discourse.

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