

Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* (1990), A Fiction toward a More Feminist Ecofeminism

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Abstract

The beginning of feminism in the nineteenth century had in it the seeds of ecofeminism, which remained unnoticed till the end of the twentieth century. Barbara Kingsolver's protagonists in pursuit of justice have distinguished themselves as staunch characters who speak their minds, throughout the narrative. Kingsolver has been successful in amplifying the voices of female gardeners, botanists, farmers, and animal welfare advocates in *Animal Dreams* (1990). As active feminists, women characters in her fiction come out from their restrained environment of home and domestic life, to transform the economic, political, and institutional structures in their region. As feminists consider the body as a moral agent, ecofeminists perceive the ecology around them with a moral ethic. This article analyzes Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* from a feminist perspective in connection with ecofeminism. The sisters Codi and Hallie, as performative feminists stood for themselves with grit and determination to create a joint identity. Our argument brings out the feminist undertone of the characters combined with an ecofeminist perspective which calls not only to local communities but for the whole of humankind to contemplate nature and to act.

Keywords: feminism, gender, ecofeminism, ethics, feminist epistemology, animal studies

Introduction

Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* (1990) contains various dimensions of ecofeminist perspectives. Over the years, the study of feminism has evolved to encompass an interdisciplinary approach incorporating insights from nature, ecology, and environment. As a political and social movement, a discursive legacy of wave metaphor is being identified in the study of feminism. First wave feminists fought for universal suffrage. Second wave feminists aimed to redefine gendered power dynamics in relationships and communities. Third wave feminism which emerged in the mid-1990s and expanded till 2012, is not a monolithic movement. Embracing intersectionality, it created spaces for dialogue and collaboration among different feminist perspectives. Fourth wave feminism, which began in 2012, continues to shape contemporary activism, involving new media platforms and technology. In the past, the lack of equitable representation of women novelists within the literary landscape was a pressing concern that called for deeper analysis and proactive measures, but a profound evolution has taken place in the modern era as women writers have risen to prominence, enriching the literary canon with their diverse perspectives, evocative prose, and compelling storytelling. As Fernald accurately highlights "the archive of women's stories across the globe is an archive of how material circumstances collide with dreams. One of the most salient advantages of the historical turn have been renewed critical energy around the archive."¹ One of

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the main tenets of feminist and ecofeminist criticism, is to rediscover texts written by women. Kingsolver has earned widespread acclaim and established herself as a prominent writer in contemporary literature by fearlessly exploring women's issues. Her works are known for their lyrical prose, richly developed characters, and strong sense of place. In addition to fiction, she has also written poetry and nonfiction. All her works are esteemed and translated into many languages.

Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* is a gynocentric narrative that delves deep into the lives of women, capturing their struggles, resilience, and triumphs in the face of societal challenges and cultural expectations. It is a fictional story based on a true event which happened in Arizona. The non-fictionalized version of the event is recorded in *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*. The book brings to light the challenges faced by a community of women belonging to Clifton, Morenci and Ajo. It is understood that the literary endeavors of women writers including Kingsolver, manifested in their novels, have the potential to redefine history by shedding light on previously unexplored perspectives and narratives, thus enriching our understanding of the human experience. As Nick Dennis posits "The stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves, are incredibly powerful. They help to provide sure ground in uncertain situations, define boundaries for action, and inaction, while providing a guide for future achievements."² Considering women as the other, or nature as the other, may create a wider impact in the society. Val Plumwood has deeply examined the logic of domination and the deep structures of dualism, claiming that it creates 'blind spots' in the "dominant culture's understanding of its relationship to the biosphere, understandings which deny dependency and community to an even greater degree than in the case of human society."³ Women writers, feminists and ecofeminists work towards breaking down the dualisms to create healthy relationships.

Ecofeminism as a theory and movement has addressed many issues related to women and nature. It brings to the forefront complex perspectives on as yet unresolved issues, to create a better future. This study critically analyzes Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* in the context of feminist and ecofeminist theory, studying the novel's portrayal of female characters, ecofeminist ideologies, and the socio-political landscapes that influence and shape women's experiences. There is a paucity of empirical studies examining this topic and the topic requires more comprehensive analysis. This article endeavors to bridge an existing research gap and will contribute valuable insights by interpreting *Animal Dreams* from the theoretical perspective of ecofeminism.

The Enduring Significance of Theoretical Perspectives in *Animal Dreams*

Ecofeminism as a theory solicits "an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature."⁴ One of the key tenets of ecofeminism is to revise and re-envision the place of woman within the natural world she inhabits. Ecofeminists believe that in a patriarchal society, nature is oppressed, as women are oppressed and thereby draws connection between both nature and woman and aims at liberating them. In the first world countries, awareness towards ecofeminism came to

¹ Anne E. Fernald, "Women's Fiction, New Modernist Studies, and Feminism," *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 59, no. 2 (2013), p. 231.

² Nick Dennis, "The Stories We Tell Ourselves: History Teaching, Powerful Knowledge, and the Importance of Context," in *Knowing History in Schools: Powerful Knowledge and the Powers of Knowledge*, ed. Arthur Chapman (London: UCL Press, 2021), p. 216.

³ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), p. 194.

⁴ Greta Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature," in *Ecofeminism*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 1–12.

light, with the release of Rachel Carson's work *Silent Spring* (1962). It is an iconic work which raised concerns about the indiscriminate usage of pesticides, especially DDT which poses serious health hazard to people when consumed. It is a turning point in the history of ecofeminism and environmental activism. Another significant group named the 'Love Canal Movement' (1978), took place in New York under the leadership of Lois Gibbs. The movement started after their discovery that their residential area was built on a toxic dump site. *Animal Dreams* is the fictionalized version of the original mine strike which happened in Arizona. Karen Warren elucidates on different kinds of connection between women and nature. Feminism revalues women's experience and ecofeminism focuses on their relationship with nature. Kingsolver's female characters in *Animal Dreams* can be studied in connection with Warren's philosophy on ecofeminism which relates women to nature at various levels, including the empirical, experiential, epistemological, ethical, and political. Kingsolver's novel brings in a more pronounced feminist dimension through intersectionality of various issues between women and nature.

In the realm of fiction, certain elements possess the ability to transcend the boundaries of imagination and resonate on both empirical and experiential levels. Codi's empirical and experiential understanding of nature makes us rethink and re-envision the way we perceive nature. The novel highlights the reasons for twenty-first century environmental crises by tracing back the relationship of an individual with nature from past to present. By researching the historical usage of land, ecofeminist Warren finds out the background for exploitation of land by humans. By using Carolyn Merchant's perspective, she succinctly defines the paradigm shift in the 'model of usage' of land from organic to mechanistic. The organic model treats nature as vibrant and lively whereas mechanistic model treats nature as inert and materialistic, which in turn justifies exploitation. Merchant argues in *Death of Nature* that earth was viewed as a living organism and nurturing mother before the industrial revolution. This collective consciousness of people, "served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body. . . as long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it."⁵ The emergence of capitalist society lacks cultural constraint that restricts them from exploiting nature. However, the novel depicts this shift, from the perspective of Codi. Codi recalls her childhood memories and shares that Grace is endowed with rich resources which includes red granite, canyon walls and fruit orchards. She describes the sky as "shamelessly unpolluted" and the bountiful land remained pure and fertile, when she was a child. The lucrative land is rich in minerals and the people of Grace depend on the river for irrigation of their croplands. It is full of pecan, plum and apple, "The highway ran along the river dividing the orchards like a long, crooked part in a leafy scalp."⁶ Everything was organic and fertile until the Black Mountain company started to use the land for corporate greed.

Socio-economic conditions play a major role in the mechanistic model. Men all over the world dominate women, in the field of market and production, with their ownership. Warren sheds light on Mellor's argument against "capitalist patriarchy"⁷ which needs both means (land, raw materials, and energy resources) and forces (factories, machinery, technology, and skilled workers) of production to function smoothly. This puts women in a position where they are socially and

⁵ "Focus on Ecocritical Approaches - Ecofeminism and Darwinian Literary Criticism," *Libre Texts Humanities*. At: <https://human.libretexts.org>.

⁶ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (London: Harper Collins, 2013), p. 8.

⁷ Karen J. Warren, "Feminist Environmental Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 27 April (2015). At: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/feminism-environmental>.

economically exploited. Codi was deeply saddened to see the unfortunate state of Grace after fourteen years. The Black Mountain Company, due to leaching operations, has been poisoning the river with sulfuric acid. In a meeting organized by Emelina, Codi heard a man speaking about fruit drop and “poison ground.”⁸ He told other men that the company is “not going to stop leaching operation on account of our pecan trees”⁹ and “It’s going to kill every damn tree in this canyon”¹⁰ Codi mentions that the pristine fields are contaminated with hazardous waste and people have started to abandon the place. She affirms that the harmful industrial waste in the water as spoiled the fertile ground and it has been “salted to death by years of bad irrigation.”¹¹ Additionally, the land has also been mined savagely for pumice, to manufacture denim jeans. Codi condemns exploitation of land and strongly denounces the capitalistic mindset of industrialists. She rails against them, stating, “to people who think of themselves as God’s houseguests, American enterprise must seem arrogant beyond belief. Or stupid. A nation of amnesiacs, proceeding as if there were no other day but today. Assuming the land could also forget what had been done to it.”¹²

Anthropocentrism views land from a mechanistic perspective. The shift in the perspective towards usage of land shows clearly the hazardous threat posed to the people living in Grace. The mechanistic model of usage of land has ruined the health of both women and nature. Ecofeminists believe in taking neutral stand where nature and/as women should not be exploited and aims to create a sustainable environment where man, women and nature coexist by complementing each other. Codi, along with a community of women, take steps to rectify the misdeeds done by the company. Codi’s ideologies resonate with the ideologies of ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, as both try to create a sustainable environment by protecting the biodiversity in local communities. As an ecofeminist, Codi questions the power relations between man and nature. She tries to bring in a change in the minds of the young generation. Codi questions the ideology of viewing nature as “the other.” She, as a biology teacher, insists the students to take responsibility for their actions. With vigor, she expresses her concern regarding environment to her students and questions the attitude of young generation towards environment, “You kids think this pollution 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.”¹³ Codi does not stop with preaching. She collects evidence to fight back against the company. Women in Grace, pitch in to create a club named ‘the stitch and bitch club’ to protest injustice against nature. They succeed in their endeavor by winning the case against the company. By liberating nature, the women of Grace as a community feel liberated which in turn justifies Gaard’s definition of ecofeminism. The protest which takes place against the Black Mountain Company resonates with the real event named the Chipko movement (1974) which took place in northern India. The rural women of north India, as a community, protested in a non-violent way aiming to protect the trees and forests slated for the government backed logging. They hugged the trees to impede loggers. This shows that women all over the world stay more connected to nature. The socio-economic subjugation of women and nature have made women stand up for themselves through various epistemological tactics.

According to ecofeminist philosophy, women are situated in nature. The gendered, cultural, concrete and daily experiences they undergo contribute to the vast knowledge they have about

⁸ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 64.

⁹ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 65.

¹⁰ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 65.

¹¹ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, pp. 50-51.

¹² Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 248.

¹³ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 260.

nature. The epistemological knowledge of women about the environment is necessary because failure to notice the changes will make them invisible. As Elizabeth Anderson states, "Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science studies the ways in which gender does and ought to influence our conceptions of knowledge, knowers, and practices of inquiry and justification."¹⁴ Women have always been thought to nurture the environment. In a way, it puts women in a position of the disadvantage where male biased stories denigrate their cognitive capacity by denying women their epistemic authority. This makes women's activities and interests invisible in certain stories. Feminist epistemologists have traced these failures and flawed conceptions. Stories written by Barbara Kingsolver have overcome these flaws to make a standpoint that feminist epistemology can transform the world for better. Female characters in *Animal Dreams* are not invisible, they speak their mind. Codi and Hallie are educated women who are experts in their field of study.

Hallie, Codi's sister, who has a postgraduation in integrated pest management, wants to be productive and purposeful in life. She dreams big and will not settle for the restrictions posed by culture and society. The narrator describes Hallie as a resilient woman who travelled south with her "pickup truck and her crop-disease books and her heart set on a new world."¹⁵ The novel brings out the epistemic side of female characters. At the age of nineteen, after watching the documentary on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Hallie cried. She cried not because of the tragedy which she saw, but because she thought there might not be anything worthy of taking a chance in her lifetime. This shows her yearning to live for a purpose in life. Gendered notions that women have limited potential are not appropriate in the case of Hallie. When Hallie got an opportunity to work in Nicaragua, she took up the challenge. Codi reminisces and shares, "she was off to Nicaragua, a revolution of Co-op farms and literacy crusades - and so I guess she was lucky. Few people know so clearly what they want."¹⁶ In Nicaragua, she teaches farmers to grow crops without wrecking the soil. Even though Codi and Hallie are sisters, they have different perspectives towards nature and Kingsolver has juxtaposed them effectively. Codi reminisces and shares her nostalgic moments with her sister. Codi with her inclination toward immediate indulgence, catches butterflies and preserves them in a mason jar, affixing labels containing their Latin names whereas, "Hallie's tastes were quieter; she had time to watch things grow. She transplanted wildflowers and showed an aptitude for gardening. At age ten she took over the responsibility of the Burpee's catalogue."¹⁷ As adults, Codi as an ecofeminist, takes action to solve environmental degradation in Grace whereas Hallie takes up the challenge of teaching farmers the proper method of farming without disturbing the biodiversity of the area.

According to feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, there is a difference in the way men and women perceive nature. In the novel, women characters nurture and appreciate nature whereas male characters view nature from materialistic perspective. Warren explains how differently men and women perceive trees. She expresses her view that "many foresters (men) literally do not see the enormous variety in use of trees, they frequently do not see the vast number of species that are useful ... that men and women may have very different uses for the same tree or may use different trees for different purposes."¹⁸ Similarly, Emelina's husband, J.T's attitude towards his land brings out the patriarchal mindset in him, which is in a way gender specific.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 13 February (2020). At: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-epistemology>.

¹⁵ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 111.

¹⁸ Sally K. Fairfax and Louise Fortmann, "American Forestry Professionalism in the Third World: Some Preliminary Observations on Effects," *Population and Environment*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1990), pp. 259-272.

Emelina's husband is not happy with the land he inherited from his father. The property has been with them for the past sixty years. He with despair utters "They don't produce worth a damn anymore."¹⁹ He wants to cut them down and use them for firewood. As Lydia Rose states, "The domination of nature and the domination of women have a shared history with hegemonic masculinity."²⁰ The social structure complies with it and makes oppression normative. Ecofeminists focus on identifying and dismantling these established inequalities.

There is also an intersectionality between feminism, ecofeminism and animal studies brought out elaborately in *Animal Dreams*. As Lesley Kordecki states, "The paradigm of female/male correlating with animal/human often, but not always, leads to assertions about the oppression of the female and the animal, and correspondingly, the powerfulness of the male and the human. Many ecofeminist tales can present animals in this pattern."²¹ Kingsolver has used this pattern in her narrative. Loyd, Codi's beloved, is a native American with mixed Apache, Pueblo, and Navajo ancestry. Loyd's father was a hero in the sport of rooster fighting and was called a legend in cockfighting in Apache. Hence, Loyd continues to follow his father's tradition in cockfighting. Loyd takes Codi to the rooster garden where birds are kept for cockfighting. Codi, looking through the wire mesh fence, notices the pathetic condition of the roosters, which were kept in "small cubicles laid out in neat rows, one bird per cage. They strutted and turned in circles, eyeing each other as if each moment were new."²² As Lesley Kordecki rightly points out "we (human) more readily perceive the strength of the animal as an essence of its own"²³ and forget to empathize with them as life. Loyd and Codi's conversation regarding animal dreams sarcastically makes clear the struggles and challenges animals face in the world due to humans. Loyd was curious to know Codi's opinion about the dreams of animals. She responded telling him that they will visualize being in an animal heaven as they suffer terribly in this world. Codi, a student of biology, on viewing the rooster fight, quickly realized that the territorial impulse of roosters is being misused. She reveals, "No animal has reason to fight its own kind to the death. A rooster will defend his ground, but once that's established, he's done."²⁴ But, something else happens during the fight. Codi, disapproving of the actions of handlers, discloses that the birds are handled harshly by their masters. The birds are forced to confront their opponent and fight. "She saw little boys doing it. . . Take some pitiful animal and tease it and drag it back by the legs over and over again, trying to make it fight."²⁵ In a broader perspective, ecofeminism considers animals as part of nature. Ecofeminists challenge the notions of animal exploitation and believe in creating an amicable relationship between humans, nature, and the animal world.

Codi urged Loyd to support the liberation of roosters, as the sport kills too many roosters. Loyd, responding to her views, told her that animals die. They suffer everywhere around the world. "It's not like people. They weren't meant to live a good life and then go to heaven, or wherever we go."²⁶ This shows the lack of empathy and androcentrism. Codi, through her logical intelligence and caring nature, makes Loyd understand the misdeeds that are being done to the speechless

¹⁹ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 105.

²⁰ Lydia Rose, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Ecofeminist Literature," in *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), pp. 321-330.

²¹ Lesley Kordecki, "Animal Studies and Ecofeminist Literature," in *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), pp. 282-289.

²² Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 127.

²³ Kordecki, "Animal Studies and Ecofeminist Literature," p. 284.

²⁴ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 193.

²⁵ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 193.

²⁶ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 196.

creatures. She exhorts human beings to be more compassionate towards animals. She strongly dissents with people who make “a spectator sport out of puncture wounds and internal hemorrhage.”²⁷ At last, she was successful in making him quit the sport. This shows Codi as an emotionally intelligent woman. Kingsolver, through her narrative, stresses the need for emotional intelligence. As Karen Warren suggests, the ability to care and sympathize is essential “for ethical reasoning or practice; a failure to care about others is a moral wrong. Humans are beings who can and must learn to care about the health or wellbeing of others, including animals and nature.”²⁸

Parallel Analysis of Symbolic Gender Patterns in *Animal Dreams*

Feminist criticism questions the cultural ‘mindset’ in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. Roosters are inadvertently agents of human sexism. Due to confusion between sex (physical fact) and gender (social construct), people tend to think that assertive girls and nurturing boys are abnormal. As Lesley Kordecki states, “The mixture of feminism and animalism, two frameworks seemingly at variance, ignites a companionship of perspectives, sympathies, antagonisms, and insights.”²⁹ Naturally, roosters are sentinels and protectors of their flock. This natural mechanism in roosters is misused in cockfighting. Basically, in the patriarchal framework, roosters are seen as embodiments of masculinity. As Patrice Jones states, international studies of cockfighters show that men and boys see fighting roosters “as expressions of their own masculinity, and they feel shame if one of their roosters behaves normally, fleeing from an aggressor or declining to attack a retreating bird. In contrast, unnaturally aggressive birds are accorded an almost totemic respect.”³⁰ Cockfighters have very strong ideas about what they believe to be natural behavior for roosters, and they fail to recognize how their interventions create unnatural fights where roosters kill one another.

Loyd explains to Codi the difference between gaff and knife fights. Codi discovers about the gaff tournament, where a little steel spur is attached to the back of each leg of the bird during the fight. During knife fights, blades are attached to their legs. Comparatively, a gaff fight is better than a knife fight, as the spectators get to see what a bird could do. “The real game birds are gaff birds.”³¹ Loyd has been culturally trained to look at the roosters as he does, as his father was a legend in rooster fighting. Jones asserts that “roosters fight from fear, not aggression.”³² It is true that roosters try to establish territorial dominance, but they do not injure each other. Through training and through isolation roosters are kept in a constant state of frustrated excitement. The novel explores the dominant ideology of patriarchy and their embodiments of masculinity over nature. Symbolically, roosters are considered as embodiments of masculinity hence they are made to fight. By analysing cockfighting, in the broader spectrum of ecofeminist ideology one could clearly notice the power dynamics between men in society. The fight between the gaff and knife bird symbolizes the power and dominance of one male over the other to gain territorial control. Kingsolver, through the narrative makes a clear point that winning or losing a cockfight does not validate masculinity, but instead it’s a cruelty against roosters.

²⁷ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 196.

²⁸ Warren, “Feminist Environmental Philosophy.”

²⁹ Kordecki, “Animal Studies and Ecofeminist Literature,” p. 282.

³⁰ Patrice Jones, “Fighting cocks: Ecofeminism versus sexualized violence,” in *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. Lisa A. Kemmerer (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), p. 54.

³¹ Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 191.

³² Jones, “Fighting cocks: Ecofeminism versus sexualized violence,” p. 55.

Apart from roosters, the novel also explores another symbolic pattern of gender in connection with the piñata, a brightly decorated container or figurine filled with candies and gifts, which is broke open by being hit with a stick by someone who has their eyes covered. It is broken as part of a celebration. Having a Spanish and Mexican origin it is also popular in America. The piñata, as a cultural symbol, is used in the novel to fight against the Black Mountain Company in a non-violent way by the women's club of Grace. The club members of Grace can be perceived as cultural ecofeminists as they use the piñata to fight for their cause. Ecofeminists who embrace or challenge culture to achieve their goals are considered cultural ecofeminists. As Nicole Anae cites, cultural ecofeminism aims at promoting principles like equality, nonviolence, cultural diversity, participatory, collaborative forms of organization and decision making.³³ Codi with her club has planned to design a piñata that would carry the information of Grace. In a way, the peacock piñata made by the club stands for the pent-up feelings of women in Grace. It gets liberated when it is broken. Instead of filling the piñata with candies and gifts, it has been filled with information about the misdeeds done to Grace. Interpreting it theoretically, "cultural ecofeminists view the dismantling of prevailing patriarchal structures and practices threatening the natural environment and the status and conditions of women as fundamental in inhibiting social and cultural inequalities."³⁴ The piñata has been used tactfully to make their protest against the company more successful. The piñata, in spite of being as a fun event, serves a purpose in the narrative. Culture, instead of oppressing women, has brought women together as a community in *Animal Dreams*.

Conclusion

To sum up, Western culture has witnessed so many nature stories. As Plumwood asserts, Western stories have "spoken mainly of conquest and control, of capture and use, of destruction and incorporation. Such stories are currently considered to be disabling story. Unless we can change it, some of those now young may know what it is to live amid the ruins of a civilization on a ruined planet."³⁵ Kingsolver in *Animal Dreams* has endeavored to dismantle the previous misconceived notions of both women and nature. The novelist, apart from seeing women as a housewife or domestic servant, has voiced out the epistemological aspect of women. Kingsolver has made a strong statement through Codi and Hallie that women are not sexual beings to be objectified and exploited. They are human beings who have equal privilege in the society to live, to achieve and fulfill their dreams. Instead of complaining and repenting for the challenges and struggles the protagonists undergo, they delve into productive action to bring in a change for themselves as well as the society. The novel challenges a few positions and perspectives we are accustomed to and encourages us to find solutions through varied perspectives. The novel explores Codi's character from various dimensions. Codi has taken an ethical stand in all the roles which she has been endowed with as an environmental activist, biology teacher, an advocate of animal welfare, and a feminist. By being a staunch feminist and ecofeminist, she has converted all her challenges and traumatic childhood experiences into a fruitful and purposeful life.

However, to elaborate on the ethical stand, *Animal Dreams* has both feminist and ecofeministic aspects to it. The ecofeminist aspect of the fiction transforms it into a more socio-political novel where women as a community in Grace fight for environmental justice. This article,

³³ Nicole Anae, "Cultural Studies and Ecofeminist Literature", *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), pp. 290-300.

³⁴ Anae, "Cultural Studies and Ecofeminist Literature", pp. 295-296.

³⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 196.

through comprehensive analysis has brought out the feminist undertones and ecofeminist themes. As cited in *Feminist Environmental Philosophy*, “Traditionally, women are ‘the environment’—they provide the environment and conditions against which male ‘achievement’ takes place, but what they do is not itself accounted as achievement.”³⁶ But Kingsolver has re-written the above statement in *Animal Dreams* through her narrative style. As Warren claims, the ethics of ecofeminism resonates with feminist ethics. At any occurrence, it engages in a twofold commitment to analyze male bias in ethics. It strives to develop ethics that are not male-biased. As a feminist ethic, it also involves vocalization “of values (for example, the values of care, empathy, and friendship) often lost or underplayed in mainstream Western ethics.”³⁷

Ecofeminist and feminist ethics take up three positions in addressing ethics: 1) care focused ethics; 2) environmental virtue ethics; and 3) environmental justice focused ethics. Feminist ethics overlaps with the first position predominantly. Firstly, the care focused ethics takes into account the work of Carol Gilligan, which revolves around two perspectives, namely justice (universalizable rules) and care (emphasizes care and empathy).³⁸ In relation to the novel, Codi seeks to liberate the roosters and empathize with them. She shows empathy and care towards the environment around her. Secondly, environmental virtue ethics takes a moral stand of a virtuous person. Kingsolver focuses on the virtue-based “ethic of flourishing”, where the sisters strive to nurture and enhance the health and well-being of individuals in the biosphere inclusive of all species and communities.³⁹ In relation to the novel, Hallie takes this ethical stand by challenging the idea of usage of pesticide while farming. She tries to create awareness on proper farming methods thereby nurturing and enhancing the health and well-being of individuals in the biosphere. Thirdly, environmental justice-focused ethics focuses on the social and environmental injustice undergone by a particular group of people or community. They focus on the environmental problems like unhygienic water, toxic dump sites, environmental toxins, and pollution, which cause serious health hazards to the people living in and around the area. In relation to the novel, Codi along with the community of women in Grace fight in a nonviolent way to seek justice from the Black Mountain company who has been poisoning the river of Grace with toxic waste. Thus, *Animal Dreams* on highlighting feminist characters like Codi and Hallie adheres to ecofeminist ideologies at various levels (empirical, experiential, epistemological, ethical, and political) promoting peace and harmony between human and nature.

³⁶ Warren, “Feminist Environmental Philosophy.”

³⁷ Warren, “Feminist Environmental Philosophy.”

³⁸ Carol Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development,” in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 30.

³⁹ Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, “Virtue Ethics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023), Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (eds.). At: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/ethics-virtue/>.