

Identity, Independence and Cherokee Nation in the selected novels of Barbara Kingsolver.

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Abstract- Literature is the body of written works of a language which reflects the society. Since American Literature reflects the life of Americans and their own culture. Now it becomes a notable point to discuss in the contemporary world. This paper, *Identity, Independence and Cherokee Nation in the selected novels of Barbara Kingsolver* delivers the interesting quest for identity and Cherokee culture. There are several writers who generally talk about the life of Americans. Barbara Kingsolver talks about the people who cross the borders in order to get some identity. It points out the condition of people who seek their identity. In *the Bean Trees*, Taylor Greer moves out of her hometown to lead an independent life. The difficult conditions of immigrants are portrayed through Estevan and Esperanza who crosses the borders of Guatemala due to Guatemalan civil war. They lose their own identity when they move out of their own country. The protagonist of the novel, Taylor Greer also portrayed as immigrants because she left her town in search of Identity. It also unveils the adoption of Indian child by white people. It is prohibited by Indian child welfare act in the USA. *Pigs in Heaven* clearly portrays the challenges in adoption of Indian child by white people. It creates a challenge in identity. The novel explores the change of cultural identity. It also *portrays* the strength of women through its female characters.

Keywords: Identity, Independence, Adoption, Crossing the Borders, Loss and Culture.

Literature is the body of written works of a language, period, or culture. A novel is the work of prose narrative with significant length and complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience. American literature is always affected by the physical, cultural, social, political, psychological and literary background of its country. Since American literature reflects the life of Americans and their own culture, Kingsolver portrays the life of indigenous people who lives in America. It becomes a notable point to discuss in the contemporary world. Generally, Identity is the concept that shows everyone particular or distinctive. One's identity is based on the intuition of one's self and success in the nation. The process of identity is based on gender or the values of culture which everyone follows in their life. Barbara Kingsolver was born on 8th April 1955 in Annapolis, Maryland, the USA. She is an American novelist, essayist and poet. As a writer and an activist in the Sanctuary movement for refugees in Central America, she creates a number of identities in the proportions of creating powerful and independent characters for her novels, *The Bean Trees* and its sequel *Pigs in Heaven*. Margaret Randall states, "*The Bean Trees* is a story propelled by a marvelous ear, a fast moving humor, and the powerful undercurrent of human struggle... There are surprises in the book. There is adventure and there is resolution, as believable as it is gratifying." (*Women's Review of Books* 1)

In *The Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven*, Kingsolver builds a moving story about a mother's fierce love for her daughter. She focuses on the theme of identity in these novels. The characters appear in these novels have their own identity. Taylor Greer, the protagonist of the novel resembles the own identity of the writer. Taylor Greer wants to make an independent life like Kingsolver. In *The Bean trees*, Taylor leaves Kentucky and reaches Taylorville in search of her identity. Kingsolver points out different identities in these novels such as gender identity, self identity, national identity and cultural identity.

Kingsolver designs the life of the common people, their life style and the conflicts in their day-to-day life. Taylor Greer leaves her hometown in order to avoid the same life which is involved by her contemporary women. She takes risk willingly to quench her thirst of getting her own identity. She wants to achieve something different when compared to other people in her native town.

Kingsolver throws the light of adoption and nurture in her novels. Taylor adopts a two year old child when she reaches the Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma. Before she leaves a Cherokee bar in Oklahoma, a pleading American Indian woman deposits a child in her front seat and drives off. Taylor takes the child and decides to tend it, because it has been abused fiercely. Taylor becomes a mother at the age of eighteen to the two years old Cherokee child and names her as Turtle though she avoided pregnancy so adroitly. This is proved by the lines; "This is not to say that I was unfamiliar with the back of a Chevrolet... but Mamma always said barefoot and pregnant was not my style..."(1)

In Tucson, Taylor gets a new job in Mattie's workshop; it is an air filling shop for tyre. She begins to work in the shop though she is afraid of tyres. She works there because she needs money for her everyday needs. She takes the job not only for food, shelter but also to nurture the child. In this point, Kingsolver describes the identity as a mother through Taylor who thinks more about the child than herself. She is considered to be a risk-taker whose physical and emotional courage strengthen her. Taylor faces the difficulties courageously to achieve something for herself.

In *The Bean Trees*, Kingsolver lights out the condition of the immigrants, their sufferings and struggles in the USA. It is a political novel which develops themes related to causes prominent in the 1970's and 1980's. The novel is based partly on the arrival of political refugees from Guatemala who are fleeing from persecution in their own country and who has entered the United States illegally. The existence of the Sanctuary movement which also helps illegally and hides those refugees comes at the center of the

plot of *The Bean Trees*. The immigrants are in awful condition. They are not allowed by the native people. The national identity of the immigrants is dispirited. Mattie's workshop 'Jesus Is Lord Used Tires' is a supportive place where Taylor works with Lou Ann and it is also a Sanctuary place for illegal central American refugees.

Estevan and Esperanza are the immigrants from Guatemala. As refugees they are not allowed to enter into the country. They are forced to hear many harsh words. Estevan struggles in Oklahoma; he does not get a proper job to work. The refugees are treated very low and they are in below standard. They have to work for low salary. Though they are intelligent, they are not recognized as a brilliant. This is the life of refugees during 1970's and 1980's in the USA. The reality is that the identity is marked on the race of a person. They lose their child and the pain of losing their child is heavy and visible in the lines; "The trauma of torture and the suffering" (Bolton 78). Taylor herself also is an immigrant who leaves her hometown to Tucson. It indicates that she has emigrated from her place. In general, people leave their place in order to earn money but Taylor moves from her hometown to acquire her identity. She wants to show her dignity and identity as an independent woman. Meanwhile, she does not want to lose her identity as a Mother.

In *Pigs in Heaven*, Kingsolver depicts the Cherokee Nations and their own identity. It is a complicated story of indigenous adoption in the USA. It is much like Australia, has a complicated past with its Cherokee populations. The U.S government allows white people to adopt indigenous children in order to remove the culture. It has been ended up by the installation of an act. In 1978, Indian child welfare act was instated. It has been considered as a measure to protect indigenous children from adoption and possibly being cut off from their cultural roots and families. The readers know that *Pigs in Heaven* is a sequel to *The Bean Trees*. The novel follows the story of Turtle and Taylor, Turtle's adoptive mother.

Kingsolver selects the topic that unveils the issues around cultural identity. It is the identity or feeling of belonging to a specific group. It is a part of a person's self-conception and self-perception, and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity. In the name of specific cultural depiction, Kingsolver includes the Cherokee practices of the stomp dance. When Alice and Cash attend the dance, Alice involves in the dance and performs wholeheartedly. She adapts to the culture of Cash. Because she is not new to this culture, her grandfather is a full blooded Cherokee. Once again she enters into the Cherokee Nation and regains her culture by marrying Cash Stillwater at the end. The readers also encounter spirit guides, ribbon shirts, a medicine man. Kingsolver uses these details to express indigenous culture and drives the readers into Indian County. She provides the readers an opportunity to do Indian disguises as they identify with Cherokee characters.

Pigs in Heaven discusses a debate between a young white adoptive mother of a native American girl and a young Cherokee attorney who advocates the tribal rights in adoption cases. Kingsolver deliberates the two women as antagonistic figures who debate over the child's best interest. The novel indicates the differences in mothering practices between native and non-native American women. Therefore, this novel interrogates Kingsolver's discussion on the various issues that arise in the context of illegal adoptions of native American children by white parents.

The novel concentrates on the adoption of a Cherokee child. It describes the raise of an issue in the identity. The problem arises because Turtle is a non-native American child who is adopted by a white lady, Taylor. According to Indian Child Welfare Act, the white people need to have legal permission to adopt an Indian child. Indian people don't want to separate their children from them because they follow their own culture strictly. They want to teach their kids about their cultures which are considered to be mandatory for them. Indian parents think that the identity of their children changes when they are adopted by white people. Kingsolver explains that the adoption of a non-native child through ICWA is difficult not only in the novel but also in the USA. Kingsolver lights out the loss in her novels. Estevan and Esperanza who have lost their own child during Guatemalan civil war. The Guatemalan government has snatched their child because they refuse to reveal the truth about the teacher's union. Annawake Fourkiller, a Cherokee attorney has a very real and painful origin. She can trace the disruption of her culture back to the trial of tears. And more personally she has lost her own family members to the assimilation sought by the dominant white culture in the United States. So, Annawake advocates for tribes. She tries to get back Turtle from Taylor and wants to handover her to her parents when she comes to know that Turtle is an Indian child. Annawake questions both Taylor's moral and legal claims to Turtle. But the adoption was carried out by necessity with fabricated information. Annawake worries about Turtle's forfeited heritage. When Annawake finds that adoption is fake, she attempts to discuss the falsified adoption to Taylor. Taylor tells her that she doesn't take Turtle from her family. This is proved in these lines; "I didn't take Turtle from her family, she was dumped on me. Dumped. She already lost her family, and she'd been hurt in ways. I can't even start to tell without even crying... And now that she is a cute little adorable child and gets famous and goes on television, now you want her back" (76). But Annawake tells Taylor that Turtle needs her own culture because she is an Indian child. She tells Taylor "needs her tribe too. There are a lot of things she will need growing up that you can't give her" (77).

Kingsolver points out culture identity through her characters. She describes Indian tribal culture through Annawake Fourkiller who insists that community is family for the Native American people, she also states, for Taylor family is made up of individuals which represents the western practice. Kingsolver explains Cherokee culture and western culture through Annawake Fourkiller and Taylor. When Annawake threatens Taylor to give Turtle to her, Taylor decides to leave the place. She realizes that without support and help she can't take care of Turtle. She hides with Turtle and starts to wander over the country. Taylor takes Turtle to Oklahoma in order to protect her child and also her identity as a mother. In Oklahoma, Taylor visits her mother, Alice and explains the consequences to her. Alice realizes that Taylor and Turtle have become so intertwined. She comes to know that it is difficult to think them as not being a family. So, she decides to go to Cherokee Nation to help Taylor who fights for Turtle. In Cherokee reservations, Alice learns that family is not just those people that have been adopted along the way. Family is a group of people who dependent upon everyone in the family for their basic needs as well as for enjoyment. Alice comes to know about her Cherokee roots through the Cherokee

nation. She insists Taylor that Turtle should know about her background. She teaches Taylor that it is too important for Turtle. She also tells Taylor that it won't affect Taylor's motherhood and her role as Turtle's mother.

Alice has a relationship with Cash Stillwater, a Native American. When Turtle meets Cash Stillwater, she remembers him and her tribal culture. As we know that Cash Stillwater has lost one of his daughters who has a baby. Annawake finds Taylor and informs her that Turtle is a grandchild of a non-native American, Cash Stillwater. Kingsolver throws a twist that Cash turns out to be Turtle's grandfather who proposes Alice and marries her. This tribal family Alice discovers is a clear parallel of Taylor's new extended family. When Annawake files a case on Turtle adoption through Indian child welfare act, the Cherokee tribal court concludes that Turtle will divide her time between Taylor in Arizona and Cash in Oklahoma. At the end of the play, Taylor has structured her new identity through her new family. She attains her own identity in the end and this is the reason that she has left her own hometown. Taylor gets an identity with her large family instead of getting money.

The novel is also filled with women on their own. Apart from identity, culture, and adoption Kingsolver describes feminine aspects and their quest for independence. Alice has gutsiness to get up and leave her husband and her home though she is in her forties; Taylor explicitly says that she doesn't need Jax and Annawake pursues her career over any men, even Turtle recognizes Barbie shallowness. The three older women show themselves gusty, strong, willed and independent.

Kingsolver has portrayed the different types of identities in these two novels through her characters. Taylor portrays the gender identity; national identity is given by some characters from Guatemala. She gives the glimpses of culture identity through the indigenous people. She also talks about immigration and some of her characters are migrated from one country to another country in order to protect themselves from death. Even though they escape from their own country to save their lives, they lack safety in neighboring countries and hide themselves. Thus, Kingsolver has portrayed the struggles of the characters who try to gain their new identity. Immigrants should get some kind of respects by native people. They migrate in order to get something good, so their opinions should be accepted and they should be treated as human beings.

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