

**Beyond the Frame: A Portrayal of Characters in the Selected Novels
of Barbara Kingsolver**

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Abstract

This paper “Beyond the Frame: A Portrayal of Characters in the selected Novels of Barbara Kingsolver” deals with the characters’ and their search for identity. It delineates the pitiable condition of immigrants and their loss of identity when they move out of their native country. The adoption of Indian children by white families creates a challenge in their identity. It also deals about the change in cultural identity when a person starts to follow the culture of the other. The achievements of identity by the characters play a vital role.

Key Words: Identity, immigrants, culture.

Identity is the idea that makes the person peculiar or distinctive. An identity of a person is based on the understanding of his self and his achievement in the society. The process of identity is based on the values of culture or gender. Identity is an important aspect and the writer creates several identities in the frame of creating powerful and independent characters.

In *The Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven*, Kingsolver focuses on the theme of identity. All the characters in these novels have their own identity. Some of the

characters are in search of their new identity. Identity differs as the characters travel to different places and they acquire their new identity. Barbara Kingsolver concentrates on different identities such as gender identity, national identity and cultural identity. The writings of Barbara Kingsolver focus only on the ordinary human life and the conflicts in their daily life.

In these novels Kingsolver depicts, the mindset of women and young people at the time of sixties where people search for their new identities. Taylor moves out of her hometown in search of her new identity. In order to avoid the same cycle which is involved by women, she goes out of her native. She finds a substitute for this life so she decides to leave her hometown. She takes risk inspite of being in the despairing situation. She craves to achieve something different when compared to other women in her native hometown.

Though Taylor is afraid of tyres, she works in the shop of Mattie which is an air filling shop for tyres. She begins to work in the shop because to earn for her everyday needs like food, clothing and shelter. She takes that hard job for her identity as a mother. She thinks more about the child than herself. When she wants to achieve something for herself she would face it courageously. This is proved by the lines, “Taylor is the risk-taker, whose physical and emotional courage strengthen and enrich her community” (Durst 252).

Kingsolver throws light on the condition of immigrants and their struggles in U.S. Estevan and Esperanza are the immigrants from Guatemala. They are compelled to move out of their country because of political oppression. She gives the idea about the struggles faced by the Guatemalans at the time of Guatemalan civil war. The immigrants from other countries are not allowed to live in any country because the

people are unwilling to allow them into their country. They are forced to hear many harsh words by the people of native country. The pitiable condition of the immigrants is that they are considered mean by the native people. The national identity of the immigrants is in shattered condition. The few words about political oppression in the novels of Kingsolver,

...Kingsolver expresses her own political critique of American foreign policy, immigration law, and the United States' involvement in human rights abuses committed during the years of the Guatemalan civil war. (Robinson 1)

Estevan struggles without having a proper job to work. Even, if he gets a job it is not based on his educational qualification. The immigrants are treated very cheap and considered as below the standard. They are experiencing physical and mental torture. Though they are intelligent and brave, they are not evaluated as brilliant. Though they are well educated, they have to work for minimum salary. This is the poor plight of the refugees which is experienced by the readers while reading these novels. Taylor disrespects the law when she helps the refugees but she undertakes risk because of owing a good heart.

The reality is that identity is based on the ethnicity and race of a person. The political authorities have removed the child from Estevan and Esperanza because they are asked to reveal the names of the members who belong to teacher's union and they refused to reveal it. On account of this, their child is taken away by the government. The consequences lead due to the loss of their child is greater on Esperanza than Estevan and it is undoubted when she attempts suicide to escape from the depression. The sufferings of losing their child are heavy and visible in the lines, "The trauma of

torture and the suffering caused by the loss of her child are so great that Esperanza eventually tries to kill herself” (Bolton 78).

Taylor is also an immigrant, she moves from her own hometown to Tucson which indicates that she has emigrated from her place. People usually move from the native place to some other town because in search of a new job. Taylor has immigrated because in search of her identity as an independent woman but she ends up as a dependent woman. She is very stubborn that she is unwilling to lose her identity as a mother therefore she performs hard for that.

In *Pigs in Heaven*, Taylor has structured her new identity through her new family. She attains identity in the end and this is the primary reason that she has left her place, Kentucky. Finally they fit inside the large family which is the major luck for both Taylor and Turtle and which could be their identity. Their luck rests in the gaining of large family instead of gaining huge amount of money.

When at first Cash Stillwater and Alice attend the stomp dance, Alice fully involves herself in the dance and performs heartfully. She adapts to the culture of Cash. Her cultural identity changes when she starts to become a part of the other culture. She is not new to this culture but her grandfather is a full-blooded Cherokee. Once again she regains her culture by entering into the Cherokee Nation and marries Cash Stillwater. The lines of Sugar give the idea about Alice, “You’re as Indian as I am. Daddy was white and Mama too except for what come down through the Stamper side” (PH 270).

Pigs in Heaven mainly concentrates on the adoption of an Indian Cherokee child. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) challenges the mandate and myth and raises an issue in the identity. The issue arises because Turtle is an Indian child who is

adopted by a non Indian person called Taylor. Indian parents do not want to separate their children from them because those parents want their children to learn the culture and are necessary to maintain the connection with them. The identity of children changes when they move from Indian to Non Indian family. It performs a change in the identity. The truth is that both in the novel and in the real life, the American Indian child's adoption with the help of ICWA becomes a challenge over identity. The novel ends in a positive note with the result that Turtle should be in custody with both of her original grandfather and Taylor. In this case, Taylor has never lost her identity as a mother.

Kingsolver has portrayed the different identities and how the characters attain their identities in these novels. She has explained all these experiences with the help of her own experience. She gives her idea about the loss of national identity in some characters. The migration of the characters from their own country helps them to save their lives from death. They lack safety in their neighbouring country too. In order to safeguard their lives, they move towards the hiding place.

Thus the struggles and achievement of the characters to gain their identity is clearly portrayed by Kingsolver. People should give some kind of respect to immigrants. Their opinions should be valued and they should be treated as human beings. The identity of children should be considered before the adoption of those children.

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