

Nurturing Nature across Generations: An Exploration of Tim Winton's *Blueback*

Athira S. S.

Register Number – 241131802003, Full-Time Research Scholar,

Department of English and Research Centre, Sree Ayyappa College for Women, Chunkankadai, Nagercoil.

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India.)

Dr. N. U. Lekshmi

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor,

Department of English and Research Centre, Sree Ayyappa College for Women Chunkankadai, Nagercoil.

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India.)

ABSTRACT

Intergenerational environmentalism refers to the principle of environmental responsibility that is transmitted from one generation to another. This notion advocates a shared obligation to preserve environment. Intergenerational environmentalism is a part of the broader movement for environmental justice, and it stresses the need for a healthy environment for future generations. Many writers use literature as a tool to depict matters concerning environmental preservation and degradation. The concept of intergenerational environmentalism is manifested in literature through the portrayal of the transmission of environmental knowledge, values, and responsibility between older and younger generations. Tim Winton is a widely acclaimed Australian writer noted for the exploration of complex social issues through his writings. His novel *Blueback* is an environmental narrative that highlights human responsibility to care for

nature. The paper examines how *Blueback* exemplifies intergenerational environmentalism by depicting the transfer of environmental knowledge and ideals between the central characters Dora and Abel.

Keywords: Intergenerational Environmentalism, Responsibility, Environmental advocacy, Commitment.

The intricate relationship between man and nature is the most fundamental aspect of human existence. Humanity benefits greatly from nature and its resources. Man with his thoughtless activities causes severe environmental damage leading to issues such as climate change. The concept of intergenerational environmentalism attains significance in the present scenario of ecological crisis as it is the duty of the present generation to safeguard the environment for the betterment of the future generation. Intergenerational environmentalism is a principle of environmental philosophy concerned with the preservation of natural resources and the environment for the benefit of future generations. It is the founding principle within the international climate change regime. The principle of intergenerational environmentalism advocates the fair distribution of earth's resources for the survival of humanity.

Intergenerational justice is based on the idea that the current generation's pursuit of welfare should not affect the well-being of the future generations. Intergenerational equity is the core principle of climate justice, which emphasises the responsibility of present generations to ensure that future generations inherit a healthy and sustainable planet. It depends on the concepts of sustainability of natural resources and fairness across generations. Edith Brown Weiss formulated the concept of intergenerational equity based on the premise that the present generation is both entitled to benefit from the natural environment and is obliged to preserve it for future generations. In her work *In Fairness to Future Generations*, she says, "each generation receives a natural and cultural legacy in trust from previous generations and holds it in trust for future generations" (2). Brown Weiss elaborates three core principles of intergenerational equity:

First, each generation should be required to conserve the diversity of the natural and cultural resource base, so that it does not unduly restrict the options available to future generations in solving their problems and satisfying their own values, and should also be entitled to diversity comparable to that enjoyed by previous generations. This principle is called “conservation of options.” Second, each generation should be required to maintain the quality of the planet so that it is passed on in no worse condition than that in which it was received, and should also be entitled to planetary quality comparable to that enjoyed by previous generations. This is the principle of “conservation of quality.” Third, each generation should provide its members with equitable rights of access to the legacy of past generations and should conserve this access for future generations. This is the principle of “conservation of access” (38).

These principles form the basis of a set of intergenerational obligations and rights, planetary rights that are held by each generation. It emphasises the responsibility of the present generation to manage resources and environment without compromising the need for future generations to meet their needs.

Literature often reflects society by capturing the values, attitudes, and social dynamics of the era in which it is produced. Literature also acts as a critique of societal issues and raises awareness about problems like racism, gender and environmental destruction. Human interaction with the environment is a prominent theme in literature. Intergenerational environmentalism is the principle of environmental responsibility that is transmitted from one generation to another advocating the shared responsibility to care for the environment. This concept is manifested in literature through the portrayal of the transmission of environmental knowledge, value and responsibility between older and younger generations. Tim Winton’s *Blueback* is a beautiful tale that tells the story of Dora Jackson and Abel Jackson who share an immense love for the natural world around them. As Magdalena Ball says in *Compulsive Reader*, “*Blueback* is a story about love, loss, growing up and above all, living with respect for our beautiful and natural environment”

(Ball). The novel stresses the need to protect the natural environment for the betterment of future generations. It advocates a shared responsibility to safeguard nature.

Sustainable use of resources is an essential aspect of the well-being of the natural world. The present generation needs to be very careful in using natural resources such as water, minerals and forests in a sustainable manner to avoid causing depletion and environmental harm. Earth provides everything needed for the survival of humanity. It is the duty of every individual to use its resources carefully to safeguard it for the betterment of the coming generations. As Allen Habib states in *Sharing the Earth*, "Every generation is equally entitled to a fair share of the bounty of the natural environment. But since generations precede each other in time, it is the duty of earlier generations to ensure that later generations receive their fair share. Acting sustainably is the way of meeting this duty, since sustainable practices are those that (ideally) preserve the environment" (752). In *Blueback*, both Dora and Abel survive through fishing, but they are not greedy enough to destroy nature for their selfish needs. They are very much aware that a secure environment is needed for their survival too. Dora teaches Abel to live off the land and sea sustainably to maintain balance with nature. While fishing, they take only what they need and leave plenty of abalone behind to continue growing. Dora knows well that the sustainable use of the resources is essential for her survival, and she teaches this to her son also. As Abel says, "Everything he knew on land or under the sea he learned from her" (Winton 6).

Human beings have an obligation to take care of natural resources and ecology so that future generations have an equal chance to enjoy mother nature and the right to life. As Cheryll Glotfelty says in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, "We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse" (Glotfelty). Present generation is responsible for

maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity, ensuring that future generations inherit a healthy planet. In *Blueback*, Dora Jackson instills a love for nature in her son Abel and develops him as an ecologically responsible person. From early childhood itself, Dora teaches Abel the need to be in close connection with nature emphasising the inevitable bond between human world and natural world. Dora's strong belief is emphasised as she says, "we come from water, we belong to it, Abel" (Winton 145). Dora shows immense respect for the sea as she considers it as her ultimate home. Her entire life is around Longboat Bay, and she teaches her son Abel also to grow up respecting nature. Even as a child, Abel develops a sense of responsibility towards nature. It is Dora who teaches him the need to protect the environment from all harm. It is through Dora's love for nature that Abel realises the inherent value of every aspect of nature that leads him to befriend the large blue groper, which he names as "Blueback" (Winton 13). She transmits her environmental responsibility to her son that he also grows up recognising the inherent values and dignity of the natural world.

Ethical responsibility towards environment is another aspect of intergenerational environmental justice. It involves moral obligation to think beyond short-term gains and plan for the long-term welfare of the planet and its inhabitants. This ethical perspective is grounded in the belief that current actions should not harm future generations. Dora's love and respect for nature teaches Abel that individuals should protect the natural world around them. This love and respect for nature instills a sense of empathy in Abel towards the natural world. Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of someone else. It is the state of being sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and experiences of another person. It helps in creating a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the earth and future generations.

Empathy to nature indicates understanding the natural world and recognising the interconnectedness of all living things. Empathy towards nature encourages a deeper sensitivity to the ecosystems and all aspects of it. An empathetic attitude urges individuals to protect the planet for future

generations. In *Blueback*, empathy to nature is portrayed as a core value through the characters Dora and Abel. Both have deep emotional connection with the natural world. Rather than considering nature an object to be exploited they treat it with respect and understanding. Abel's bond with Blueback emphasises this emotional connection. The way Abel interacts with Blueback highlights the recognition that fish, like all creatures, deserve dignity and respect. The empathetic attitude of Abel towards the environment makes him very sensitive to its damage. When the ruthless fisherman Costello arrives at Longboat Bay, it disturbs Abel very much as he already knows about Costello's destructive behaviour.

The deck of Costello's boat was awash with blood. Abel had speared fish nearly everyday but he had never seen such slaughter as this. Fish lay in huge slippery mounds and so many of them were undersize. Abel saw blue morwong, trevally, sweep, boarfish, harlequins, breaksea cod, groper, jewfish and samsons stiffening in the sun or quivering slowly to death. Behind the steering console stood crates of writhing abalone and a box of illegal crayfish. (Winton 78)

Both Dora and Abel showcase an empathetic attitude towards nature. When Costello threatens the ecosystem and breaks laws that protect marine life, Abel is dissatisfied. While portraying the human value of empathy towards the environment through Dora and Abel, Tim Winton also showcases the negative side of human beings that results in destruction of the environment. The need to pass down environmental knowledge and values gain significance here as it is the duty of everyone to safeguard nature. The sense of empathy towards nature helps Dora and Abel to realise that there is something wrong with the sea due to the intervention of greedy human beings. This empathetic attitude to nature helps them to realise the responsibility they have towards the natural environment to which they belong.

Dora's strong belief that human beings belong to the natural world motivates her to care for it. When the greedy land developers arrive at Longboat Bay, it slowly starts to damage the ecosystem. For the developers, Longboat Bay is a goldmine from which they take out piles of money. The intervention of these

developers results in a disastrous effect on Longboat Bay. "Each year the weather grew more fierce and erratic. Strange things happened every season. One year a leopard seal arrived on the beach all the way from Antarctica. Another year the salmon didn't show at all. She found five dead dolphins snagged in the cliffs at Robbers Head" (Winton 123). When the sea becomes sick with the impact of human activities, Dora realises her responsibility towards nature. She decides: "now it was the time to help the sea live" (Winton 126). So, she starts writing letters to authorities regarding the condition of Longboat Bay and fights till Bay is announced as a Marine Park where every being is protected by law.

Abel chooses to become a marine biologist because of his immense love for the sea and fish. Through Dora's fight for the protection of Longboat Bay, Abel realises that true love for nature lies in the efforts taken for the protection of nature against all harm. He learns these important values from his mother. Dora passes on all her knowledge regarding the environment to her son Abel and this passing down of knowledge becomes more significant when Abel introduces the sea as well as Blueback to his little daughter. This symbolises the need to pass down environmental knowledge from one generation to another. Even though Abel becomes a great Marine Biologist exploring various seas all over the world, he believes that it is his mother who knows more about the sea than him. It is his mother who teaches him values such as environmental responsibility, empathy to nature and protection of the environment for the betterment of humans as well as the natural world. Abel, who gains environmental advocacy from his mother, passes on this knowledge to his daughter and it emphasises the need for transmitting knowledge from one generation to another for the betterment of coming generations.

In *Blueback* Dora not only practices environmental justice but also teaches Abel the need for environmental advocacy. She teaches him about man's responsibility towards nature and motivates him to reciprocate nature with his love. It is Dora who instills a deep love and respect for the natural world in Abel. Everything that Abel knows about the land and the sea is acquired from his mother. Dora acts as a bridge

that connects the old generation who lived in harmony with nature and the present generation whose actions can affect the future world. Through Dora's teachings Abel plays a great role in defending the marine ecosystem that forms a part of his life. Through Dora's character Winton also emphasises how the older generation's values, knowledge and actions influence the younger generation's sense of responsibility towards the environment.

Works Cited

- Ball, Magdalena. "A Review of Tim Winton's Blueback". *Compulsive Reader*. 2 April 2004, www.compulsivereader.com/2004/04/02/a-review-of-blueback-by-tim-winton/.
- Fromm, Harold, and Cheryll Glotfelty. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, Ga. Univ. Of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Habib, Allen. "Sharing the Earth: Sustainability and the Currency of Inter-Generational Environmental Justice." *Environmental Values*, vol. 22, no. 6, 2013, pp. 751–64, www.jstor.org/stable/43695107.
- More, Adv Hemant. "Intergenerational Equity Principle of Sustainable Development." *The Legal Quotient*, 14 Sept. 2024, www.thelegalquotient.com/social-laws/nvironmental-laws/intergenerational-equity-principle/4819. Accessed 23 Feb. 2025.
- Scott, Dayna, and Garance Malivel. "Intergenerational Environmental Justice and the Climate Crisis: Thinking with and beyond the Charter." *Osgoode Digital Commons*, 2021, digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/scholarly_works/2873. Accessed 23 Feb. 2025.
- Weiss, Edith Brown. *In Fairness to Future Generations*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1989.
- Winton, Tim. *Blueback*. Penguin Australia, 1997.