

**AN ECO - SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE ON NATURE, HEALING AND  
KINSHIP IN KIRAN MILLWOOD HARGRAVE'S *THE WOLF TRIALS***

Ms. Johana Miracline S S

PhD Research Scholar of English (F.T)

Nirmala College For Women (Autonomous)

Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641018.

&

Dr. Aarthi P

Assistant Professor of English

Nirmala College For Women (Autonomous)

Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore 641018.

johanamiracline@gmail.com

paarthi25@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:**

The relationship between human beings and the natural world has always shaped individuals perceive healing, connection, and belonging. In *The Wolf Trials*, Kiran Millwood Hargrave presents a world that does not thrive on the domination of nature but is instead rooted in ritual, memory, and kinship with animals and the elements. Through the lens of ecofeminism and Indian cultural frameworks, the novel transforms into an eco-literary space where healing is not symbolic alone but deeply embodied and spiritual. Queen Seren's relationship with her wolf, Tej, her herbal practices, and the recurring presence of the sea serve as powerful symbols of a worldview traditional trademark seen in humans and nature coexist harmoniously. The novel moves away from anthropocentrism, emphasizing sacred reciprocity between human and non human beings. This paper explores Hargrave's narrative intertwines traditional knowledge,

animal companionship, and natural symbolism to advocate for a deeper, more spiritual engagement with the environment.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecofeminism, Embodied Healing, Nature, Ritual, Sacred Reciprocity.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Indian civilization has long viewed the Earth not merely as an ecosystem, but as a living consciousness along with divine, maternal, and deeply medicinal. Within this tradition, plants, animals, and elements are regarded as sentient beings, carrying memory, agency, and emotion. Spices such as turmeric, ginger, cumin, coriander, cloves, cardamom, chili, ginger, and fenugreek hold significance not only in culinary practices but also in rituals, folk healing, and literary traditions. In *Staying Alive*, Vandana Shiva writes, “Healing in our traditions is not reductionist, but based on relationships—between plants, people, earth, and animals” (123). Nature and healing in India cultural is relational worldview in the forms basis for examining Indian poetry, drama, and fiction reflect the intimate connections between natural elements and living beings.

Emotional bonding leading ways to healing in Indian traditions and in *The Wolf Trials*, relationships with animals extend far beyond utilitarian or anthropocentric roles. Animals function as ritual kin, emotional mediators, and repositories of sensory memory. Like a faithful dog in the Mahabharata symbolizes unwavering Dharma refusing to abandon Yudhishtira even when faced with the promise of heaven. In the epic, Mahaprasthanika Parva (Book 17, Chapter 3), Yudhishtira declares that “This dog, O lord of the Past and the Present, is exceedingly devoted to me. He should go with me. My heart is full of compassion for him.”

Tej the wolf is not simply a pet or protector. He is a spirit co-journeyer, deeply aligned with Queen Seren’s destiny, elemental path, and emotional survival. In Kiran Millwood Hargrave’s *The Wolf Trials* State that “ Sand flew beneath mighty paws, cheers and howls filling the air, as Queen Seren rode out from her castle of broken boats on her wolf Tej”(1). the animal human bond is explicitly reciprocal, not hierarchical. Seren heeds Tej’s instincts with the attentiveness of a ritual practitioner reading natural omens. “An image of her mother came to her then, playfighting her wolf Tej. When she wanted him to stop, her mother rolled on to her back, signalling she was no threat”(46). In this shamanic dynamic, Tej becomes a living ritual instrument, with mind and memory guiding emotional restoration.

In South Asian literature, animals often serve as spiritual or symbolic agents. In Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*, the cobra transforms into a lover and protector, an embodiment of both mystical power and emotional solidarity with the heroine Rani. As Karnad writes in the play "If I lie, let the cobra bite me" ( 292). This cobra simultaneously represents sexual agency, divine protection, and feminine empowerment.

The healing language of spices in indian tradition spices are far more than culinary ingredients. They carry symbolic, medicinal, and ritualistic significance. These natural substances are intimately tied to both bodily care and emotional wellbeing. Among them, turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) known as haldi or haridra in Sanskrit holds a unique place. Its bright golden hue is not only associated with health and fertility but also with sacred transitions, ancestral lineage, and feminine energy. Revered in Ayurvedic texts, turmeric is described as a tridoshic herb, capable of balancing the body's three primary energies: vata, pitta, and kapha. Its anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, and detoxifying properties make it a staple in household remedies for ailments ranging from skin infections and digestive issues to joint pain. Yet, its power extends beyond physiology into the symbolic realm.

In Indian literature and culture, the kitchen is more than a domestic space it is a sacred site where memory, nourishment, and healing converge. Rooted in ecofeminist thought, food preparation becomes an act of care, resistance, and emotional continuity. In many literary narratives, spices are not merely culinary tools they are emotionally charged symbols of ancestral knowledge, ritual care, and everyday healing. These spices hold histories of love, loss, and resilience, passed down through maternal hands.

Hargrave's *The Wolf Trials* States that "Amma was staring into her face with hazy eyes. 'You look pale. I'll add some turmeric paste to your porridge. Turmeric paste was Amma's treatment for everything, from headaches and sore throats to nightmares and grumpiness.'"(4) reflects a very Indian ecological and cultural reality of spices that are not only helpful in cooking but also represent spiritual energy, memory, and healing. Turmeric places a important role in memory, protection and ritual.

In *The Wolf Trials*, this sentiment is mirrored when Queen Seren prepares a paste of turmeric and sea salt not only as a remedy for a wound, but as a ritual of inner healing "The yellow paste she made sizzled with memory and mercy." (6), reflects the deeply sensorial and spiritual power that food and natural elements carry in both Indian culture and the novel's

narrative. The act of blending turmeric becomes an echo of ancestral recipes, emotional resilience, and sacred ritual.

This ritual act mirrors symbolises turmeric is often applied to thresholds, cooking vessels, and the bodies of brides and babies spaces and bodies that represent transition, life, and renewal. This layered meaning is beautifully captured in A.K. Ramanujan's poem *A Hindu Woman's Ritual* "Turmeric on the threshold, turmeric in the rice. The bride glows with more than love — she carries her grandmother's cure." (Collected Poems, p. 177). In *The Wolf Trials*, Queen Seren uses a golden paste of earth and herb to heal a wound evoking the Indian tradition of haldi lep, where turmeric symbolizes both physical and emotional renewal. "She spread turmeric with seawater, binding old pain and new purpose" (50). Both moments portray turmeric as ancestral medicine, a substance that heals not only the body but also memory and spirit. Like Tej, the wolf, turmeric represents a protective, emotional force one that bridges nature, ritual, and inner restoration. In *The Wolf Trials*, this sentiment is mirrored when Queen Seren prepares a paste of turmeric and sea salt not only as a remedy for a wound, but as a ritual of inner healing "The yellow paste she made sizzled with memory and mercy." (6), reflects the deeply sensorial and spiritual power that food and natural elements carry in both Indian culture and the novel's narrative. The act of blending turmeric becomes an echo of ancestral recipes, emotional resilience, and sacred ritual.

Turmeric becomes a carrier of generational memory and feminine resilience. It's not just an herb or a ritual ingredient it is a form of inheritance, passed down from grandmother to granddaughter. The glowing bride, prepared with turmeric, is adorned not only for marriage but for continuity, protection, and healing. The phrase "grandmother's cure" ties turmeric to matrilineal knowledge and domestic ritual spaces traditionally occupied and safeguarded by women.

In Girish Karnad's play *Nagamandala*, turmeric appears again as a symbol of sensual solitude and emotional warmth. The protagonist, Rani, finds herself emotionally neglected and physically isolated in her marriage. In her moments of longing and inner emptiness, she turns to turmeric oil "She rubbed her legs with turmeric—its gold was the only warmth that she knew" (41). turmeric shifts from a social or ceremonial agent to an intimate act of self-healing. The "gold" is a metaphor for both its physical appearance and its emotional resonance it becomes a surrogate for affection, the only comfort available to Rani in a loveless marriage. The line

captures how Indian women, through ritual practices like oiling the body, reclaim agency and emotional nourishment even in the absence of relational intimacy.

The use of turmeric is not passive it is an act of reclaiming warmth, self-respect, and memory. In both literary instances, turmeric serves as a bridge between the body and the sacred, the individual and the collective, the now and the ancestral. It communicates a healing language that is sensory, ritualistic, and deeply embedded in Indian cultural consciousness. Whether used in ceremonial rites or personal care, turmeric's presence in literature reflects its multivalent role as medicine, memory, and meaning. The healing language of turmeric underscores the eco-spiritual perspective of Indian tradition, wherein plants are not passive substances but active participants in human wellbeing. In this worldview, healing is not only about curing disease but about preserving harmony between the self and the body, the body and nature, and the present and the past.

In *The Wolf Trials*, kinship extends beyond bloodlines to embrace bonds between humans, animals, and the elements. Queen Seren's relationship with her wolf, Tej, is not one of ownership but of deep, reciprocal trust a spiritual and emotional kinship. Tej senses Seren's pain, guards her silently, and becomes an extension of her inner world. Bonds echo indigenous and ecofeminist understandings of kinship, where animals are not lesser beings but companions in healing and survival. Tej is Seren's ritual partner, not just in battle, but in moments of vulnerability and grief. Their closeness embodies a non-anthropocentric kinship, rooted in empathy, instinct, and mutual recognition. In *The Wolf Trials*, by Kiran Millwood Hargraves states that "She leaned into his coat, and the grief began to loosen—like snow melting under fur-lined sun." (70). Tej the wolf performs a similar role he is not just Seren's companion, but a creature who senses her sorrow and steadies her spirit.

Hargrave's *The Wolf Trials* is not just a work of speculative fiction it offers a gentle yet powerful vision of eco-spiritual healing. In this novel, spices carry the memory of ancestors, and animals like Tej are not only protectors but also emotional and spiritual companions. Much like in Indian traditions where plants, animals, and natural elements are part of daily rituals and healing, *The Wolf Trials* presents the earth, herbs, and spirit animals as sources of comfort and balance in a world that is hurting. It reminds us that reconnecting with nature is essential not only for survival, but for inner peace and shared healing.

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