



## Finding the Place in a Society: Power Relations in Lowry's 'Gathering Blue'

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### **Abstract:**

Lois Lowry's dystopian novel 'Gathering Blue' portrays primitive society. The society is divided based on gender, social class. Deformed and crippled people are not allowed to live in village. Kira, who is crippled, allowed to live only because of her special gift of dying. While enjoying luxuries life at edifice, she knows harsh reality that all artists are in prison and council kills their parents. when she met her father, she takes bold decision despite the awareness that she is being held captive and knowing the fact that staying could affect her creative freedom. She takes decision though she knows that journey towards change will be slow and arduous. Lowry through her protagonist Kira inspires juvenile readers to stand up and fight for a better future.

**Keywords:** Dystopia, Gathering Blue, Artist,

In 2000, Lowry published 'Gathering Blue'. It is second book from quartet along with Messenger (2004) and Son (2012). As like the Giver, Gathering Blue also sets in future. The novel is a story of young girl Kira, who has deformed leg. The novel reveals her struggle to find place in society. Lowry Portrays both Societies i.e. of 'The Giver' and of 'Gathering Blue' in diverging way. Lowry portrays post disaster society, which has been survived 'the Ruin', the massive destruction caused by 'Fiery explosions of war' (186). The community in Gathering Blue is completely opposite from the community in the Giver. Lowry portrays scientifically advanced community in the Giver, whereas the community in Gathering Blue is a primitive state. Both societies are governed by local oligarchies. In Gathering Blue People are living with very low standards. There is no hygiene in society. People are depended mostly on hunting and foraging. Only physically fit people are allowed to live in the Village. Fear is become constant part of life.



Because of fear, they made shelter and found food and grew things. For the same reason, weapons were stored, waiting. There was fear of cold, of sickness and hunger. There was fear of beasts. (p. 3)

Children in the village have been taught to grab and shove to get what they want. Kira raised differently by her mother. She raised her with love and care, as she know Kira is with deformed legs. Lowry's Village structure is based on physical power, social status, age and gender. Lowry portrays village as very practical. Only powerful people qualified to be part of village, weak and crippled are thrown away for dying at field. They thought disable people are only burden. People, who become handicapped or children, who born deformed are taken to 'the Field' in the forest, where they leave to die. Kira also born with twisted legs. She was saved only because her grandfather was one of the chief guardian. When Kira's mother died villagers asked council for death of Kira as she is worthless. Jamison, who is one of the council member, is appointed to speak on her behalf. During the trial, he convince the Council that she has great skill of sewing and dyeing learned from her mother Katrina. Kira is assigned to be the Weaver, who is responsible for repairing the Singer's robe. Kira also allowed to live in Council Edifice.

The women are live in the village; they have to take care of children. Men used to stay in large old Edifice. Only men allowed to go on a hunt while women grow vegetables, take care of children and weave cloth.

People in the village are divided in three groups according to their social status namely the Elite, the Commoners and the inhabitants of the fen. The Elite group is on the top of society. They consist of the Council members and the artists. They live in edifice. The Commoner live in hut, which are full of dirt and without windows. The inhabitants of the swampy Fen are the lowest in the social structure. They are untouchables for the council. They are draggers and diggers. They live in the forest "with the trees thick overhead, and festering with dampness and an odor of ill health"(p. 173).

There is different naming system in village, which indicates the stages of the life and their social status. The newborn children don't have names; they are collectively called as tykes. The young infants have one syllable name. Kira's first name was "Kir".



(4), her mother's brother's children also named as 'Dan' and 'Mar' (15). Kira after becoming teenager got two-syllable name 'Thomas' also has two syllable names. The young singer 'Jo' has only single syllable name. Kira's mother has three syllable names. The old man who are considered as wise and the important people from councils have four syllable names Annabella and Kira's father Christopher has four syllable names. Lowry's future society has no official religion but they worship some mystery object. Lowry describes it.

Then, they had sat with the crowds on rows of benches, facing the stage that was furnished only with an altar table holding the Worship-object, the mysterious wooden construction of two sticks connected to form a cross. It was said to have had great power in the past, and the people always bowed briefly and humbly toward it in respect (27).

She describes mysterious object similar to the cross of Christianity. It has power in the past. Though this is community in future and cross does not have power, the people not dare to disrespect it. Without any meaning and knowledge, they bow to it. Lowry sarcastically shows the power of religion, how People follow it without understanding. Guardians have respect for it; therefore, other people also follow it. The building of Council Edifice contains many windows with colourful glasses, which is similar to windows of church. The life of village is scheduled by 'Bells' on tower of the Council's Edifice, similar as Bells on the church. Lowry compares Council Edifice with building of church from past and Council of Guardians to pope.

THE HUGE BELL in the tower of the Council Edifice began to ring. The bell governed the people's lives. It told them when to begin work and when to stop, when to gather for meetings, when to prepare for a hunt, celebrate an event, or arm for danger. Four bells- the third was resonating now- meant that the day's business could end (63).

Kira was very happy at the beginning as she get new luxurious life at edifice. Soon she realizes that she is in prison. She understands how the Council brought the artist together in Edifice. Everyone's parents died mysteriously. The children move into the Edifice and work exclusively for the state under the strict supervision of Jamison. Each of them is assigned different tasks in accordance with their gifts with common objective, to preserve a memory of the past and determine the future according to



Council's desires. Kira, who is expert in weaving, is assigned to repair the singer's robe, which contains crucial scenes from past and of the Ruin song. She is also expected to complete the robe with the visions of the future. All colours are available at the village but expect 'Blue'. Kira's hunt for Blue colour takes her to the forest, where she finds truth about beast. She found that there is no beast in jungle. It was fear created by council.

Thomas's job is to repair the carvings on the staff designed to help the Singer find his place and to remind him of the sections in the Song. Once he matures as an artist, the Council will tell him what to carve in the large empty space at the top of the staff. Jo is under training to be the Singer in the future. At the annual gathering, they are introduced to village, Jo as singer of future, Thomas as "Carver of future" (199), Kira as "the designer of the future" (199). Kira at first feels proud because of recognition she gets from the villagers. However, when she sees singer going back after the Ruin song, she finds that the singer is chained and bleeding. She finally realized the truth of being artist. At first, she thought that she will be free after repairing the robe but soon Jamison introduced her to harsh reality that she has to live whole life here working for council. Kira finds that she is trapped there. Matt who was on the quest to find blue colour, reappears with big surprises. First, he brings the plant of Woad for her, which is essential for colour blue. He also brings an old blind man named 'Christopher' Kira's father, who is believed to be dead. Kira comes to know, how the council and Guardians lie to society about beasts and how Jamison attacked her father due to envy and rivalry to be Guardian.

Though all the bad things happens, Kira realizes that she needs to decline her father's request to go back with him to his peaceful Village, a community where the healthy, the wounded, the crippled, and the persecuted live in a spirit of goodwill and sharing and where she would be welcomed. Now, she has blue threads and woad. She decides to stay behind and, through her art, create a better future for her community.

The Kira's decision indicates courage and perseverance. She takes bold decision despite the awareness that she is being held captive and knowing the fact that staying could affect her creative freedom. She takes decision though she knows that journey towards change will be slow and arduous. The last few lines of the novel indicates the birth of



hope in the form of the gathered blue thread quivering, “as if it had been given breath and was beginning to live” (p. 241). Lowry through her protagonist Kira inspires juvenile readers to stand up and fight for a better future.

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