

An Insight into Climate Change Writings and its Theoretical Framework

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1. Introduction:

The Literature of environmental crisis and climate change is often reckoned as one of the emerging and significant one in literary studies. As Pramod K Nayar notes, its origins can be traced back to centuries, both in the form of fictional and non-fictional writings. Often termed as ‘Nature Writing’, it comprises of pieces of natural history, field notes or guides and scientific and philosophical works. A few examples of these include Gilbert White’s *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, which covers local and topographical history of a place; the works of Richard Jeffries who was an English naturalist and whose work combines fictional invention with expert observation of the natural world. Some of his works include *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), *Bevis: The Story of a Boy* (1882), *After London* (1885) and so on. JJ Audubon’s work *The Birds of America*, written in the nineteenth century is still considered as one of the finest ornithological works. Field notes comprise of travel guides and diary entries such as accounts of wildlife and fauna. A classic example for this is Salim Ali’s *The Book of Indian Birds* (1941) and the works of Sir Joseph Hooker. Charles Darwin’s account of his journey to the Galapagos islands can be categorized as a piece of scientific writing in this genre. Other forms of nature writing include travel writings, adventure and exploration works such as *Travels in Alaska* (1915) by John Muir. One can trace numerous travel writings to the period of imperialism and colonial expansion wherein adventures to the ‘new found land’ is described and the land and its vegetation is often described as ‘virgin’ or ‘untouched’ and one which is suitable for exploitation as far as the power structures were concerned.

The twentieth century showcased a rise of advocacy and activist accounts such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), thanks to the systematic devastation and degradation of the environment due to man made agencies and interferences. Autobiographies such as Wangari Mathai’s *Unbowed* (2006) and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) talks about environmental devastations and the crisis and disasters associated with it.

According to the renowned critic Pramod K Nayar, “Nature writing embodies ecological consciousness in various forms. Its primary function is to approach and present the landscape with its non-living materials and its lifeforms with a specific set of attitudes. The values and attitudes associated with nature writings include viewing the ecosystem as a common heritage, invoking a sense of wonder at the various components of nature, demonstrating a sense of dependence of human life on nature and seeking to inculcate a responsible attitude towards our environment, involving compassion, care and incorporating

ethical principles. Currently, nature writing also draws the readers attention to the crisis in the biosphere like climate change, animal extinction, species death, pollution and so on”.

Western civilization is mainly utilitarian and sought to exploit the potential of nature for the betterment of man regardless of other species in the environment. This pragmatic approach, fueled by Enlightenment philosophy which prioritizes man and his wellbeing is often reflected in Western Literature, especially by English writers who echoed colonial sentiments and viewpoints. A major shift one witnesses in recent times, especially this being the time of climate emergency is the concept of bioregionalism. A. R. Ammons poem “Garbage” is a classic example for this.

The study of climate change and its ramifications have been a subject of the hard sciences till recently. It has now been pondered over by literature. This is because all forms of literature not only documents the world, but it gives an imaginative angle to it by imagining how it could be and how it ought to be. It is capable of giving imaginative dimensions to past disasters and predict future ones with a view to modifying or altering the way in which we live currently. Literature with its imaginative prowess is capable of creating utopias and dystopias, thereby suggesting ethical practices which addresses the vulnerabilities of our planet and ecosystem.

The literature of Climate Crisis can take various tones like elegiac, apocalyptic and realist- the elegiac mourns the collapse of Nature or the extinction or extermination of species; the apocalyptic goes a step further to discuss the collapse of the ecosystem and deals with the idea of a planet beyond discovery; and the realist captures the slow process of environmental catastrophe like industrial pollution and so on. According to McFarland the eco- apocalyptic novels has been the most significant ones which deals with the literature of climate crisis. Examples include Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, Margret Atwood’s *MaddAdam* trilogy, Cormac MacCarthy’s *The Road*, Nevil Shute’s *On The Beach*, J C Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy, N K Jemisin’s *Broken Eath* trilogy and Stephen Baxter’s *The Flood*; all of which addresses the urgency with which the topic is to be approached. The literature of climate crisis enlightens the readers about the precariousness of lives and it documents how ecosystems have become fragile due to anthropogenic activities. It showcases how the degradation and destruction of habitats, animal populations and climate have transformed the planet from a home that sustained life to one that threatens life. Human interventions which assumes exploitative proportions have long histories and its contemporary manifestations continue even in the 21st century. Climate change literature focus on alternate lifestyles, and approaches to Nature and the non-human, and bring into mainstream the Indigenous tradition of Africa, the Native Americas other non-European cultures. A classic example for this is the poem “Praise Song for Oceania” by Craig Santos Perez in which he talks about the exploitation of water bodies especially the Atlantic over centuries. Intially started in the name of slave trade, it grew into a site of geographical mapping and conquest especially during the time of imperial voyages and then finally turning into a space for exploitation of resources. Thus, the literature of climate crisis connects environmental injustice with social injustice, that is, the violence perpetuated towards environment is reflected in the exploitation and subjugation of the have nots by people in power.

Isabelle Allende, a Chilean author demonstrates how environmental and social injustices are inseparable through her work *Island Beneath the Sea* in which she documents as to how in order to exploit the land’s resources, European colonizers exploit the people as well. An emerging genre connected to this area is the toxic body memoir which has established itself as a powerful genre recently. Examples include *Living*

Downstream: An Ecologists Personal Investigation of Cancer and The Environment by Sandra Steingraber, Body Toxic by Susanne Antonetta, Silent Snow by Marla Cone and so on. When one looks at the literary lineage, it is evident that the concerns over the degradation of landscapes and social communities have varied from the romantic age till now. We have arrived at an age where literature voices concerns about landscapes devastated by war to the fear of nuclear holocaust, an awareness of anthropogenic climate change; far removed from the kind of idealism of the romantic age. Novels like Isabel Allende's "Island Beneath the Sea" show the link between land exploitation and human suffering. Yaa Gyasi's "Homegoing" highlights the impact of invasive species on local communities and economies. The genre environmental literature reflects concerns over natural and social degradation since the Industrial Revolution, evolving from Romantic idealism to modernist despair. Key themes include the shift from rural to urban landscapes, the effects of mechanization, and the awareness of climate change's catastrophic potential. Jay Parini's poem "Some Effects of Global Warming in Lackawanna County" illustrates climate change as a lived experience, emphasizing temporal and spatial disorientation. It contrasts everyday life with the risks of disruption, using familiar settings to highlight environmental fragility and the ironic implications of climate change. Carl Dennis's work "The Greenhouse Effect" reimagines the world map, depicting the transformation of landscapes and geopolitical structures due to climate change. It explores the inversion of familiar concepts of safety and danger, necessitating changes in urban landscapes and public policy. Molly Fisk's poem "Particulate Matter" presents a post-catastrophe landscape, cataloging remnants of civilization as signs of damage and dissolution. It highlights the irony of human-made devices contributing to environmental ruin, merging the manufactured with the natural and emphasizing the estrangement of familiar objects in a devastated world.

The poetry which showcases climate change serves as a medium for evidentiary reflection on natural disasters and governmental inaction, while also expressing personal feelings of guilt and despair. The speaker often acts as an observer, with the reader engaging as a co-respondent, creating a shared act of witnessing. Jamaal May's "Water Devil" illustrates climate change's catastrophic effects from a non-human perspective, invoking natural forces as witnesses to human actions. The poem contrasts human vulnerability with the fragility of built structures, using binaries to depict the catastrophic outcomes of climate change. Brian Bilston's "Today's Climate Forecast" employs a journalistic style to critique governmental apathy towards climate change, using satire to highlight the disconnect between reality and state discourse. The poem reflects on the lack of response to climate change as a significant aspect of witnessing. Matthew Olzmann's "Letter to Someone Living Fifty Years from Now" serves as a testimonial to future generations, blending anticipation and retrospection to address the history of climate catastrophe. W.S. Merwin's "For a Coming Extinction" focuses on non-human victims of climate change, advocating for the voiceless and shifting the narrative away from human-centric perspectives. The poem underscores the ethical responsibility to recognize shared vulnerabilities across species, emphasizing the urgency of acknowledging impending extinction.

Postcolonial environmental novels address ecological concerns through the lens of colonialism and its impact on indigenous practices. These works critique environmental degradation and highlight themes of displacement, climate change, and environmental justice. Colonial practices led to resource depletion and biodiversity loss. Traditional ecological practices were disrupted, and exploitative agricultural methods were introduced. These novels examine landscapes and explore themes of change and indigenous knowledge. They challenge Western-centric views of environmentalism by incorporating diverse

perspectives. Environmental degradation is linked to colonial extractive economies, causing deforestation and biodiversity loss. Indigenous ecological knowledge contrasts with Western models, emphasizing local practices. Ecofeminism highlights the intersection of gender and environmental issues, particularly for marginalized communities. Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, revealing social injustices. Postcolonial environmental novels examine ecological concerns through the lens of colonial legacies, critiquing environmental degradation, indigenous struggles, and capitalist exploitation. They intersect environmental justice with postcolonial studies to highlight the uneven effects of environmental crises. This genre critiques how colonialism reshaped landscapes and disrupted indigenous environmental practices. Authors from the Indian subcontinent engage with themes of displacement, climate change, and environmental justice. Colonial resource extraction led to deforestation, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss, displacement of indigenous communities and disruption of traditional ecological knowledge, Introduction of cash crops and exploitative agricultural practices. Colonial extractive economies caused severe deforestation, soil depletion, and biodiversity loss. Women, especially in postcolonial spaces, bear the brunt of environmental crises and lead ecological movements. Rising sea levels and extreme weather disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Literature explores how landscapes embody colonial histories and cultural memory. Amitav Ghosh is one of the most influential postcolonial writers engaging with environmental crises. His works explore colonialism's impact on ecology, climate change, and displacement. *The Great Derangement* (2016) - Climate Change and Literature is a non-fiction work critiquing how literature and politics have ignored climate change and it argues that colonialism and capitalism have shaped the modern environmental crisis. The work explores how storytelling needs to evolve to represent the urgency of climate catastrophe. It challenges the Western-centric climate discourse by incorporating postcolonial perspectives. *Gun Island* (2019) - Climate Change and Migration is a contemporary novel linking climate change to historical migration patterns. It explores how extreme weather events and rising sea levels force marginalized communities to migrate. The work blends myth, history, and science to highlight humanity's role in ecological destruction. Rob Nixon's 'Slow Violence' theory contextualizes Ghosh's portrayal of gradual ecological destruction while Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism provides insight into gendered environmental struggles. Dipesh Chakrabarty's climate history aligns with Ghosh's

investigation of the Anthropocene. Writing about a section of America, Carson's part-personal, part-scientific narrative was also a pioneer in the genre of the environmental memoir.

Today, this genre's texts document individual and community cases of toxins in their homes and bodies, bring scientific data and knowledge to the non-specialist reader, foreground the effects of these toxins on human bodies, non-human bodies and the non-living material world of oceans, soil and water bodies, discuss measures and policies, and function as advocacy tracts for the environmental movement. The environmental memoir brings hard scientific data and even explanations to the non-specialist reader. This may be supplied in the form of summaries of lab reports, breaking down the content into understandable terms. Power relations determine degrees and kinds of precarity within the ecosystem. Ecosystems are disturbed, their lifeforms exploited or erased through human intervention. Ecoprecarity for many lifeforms is the direct result of human actions. The wild here has been conquered, at great cost to the non-human inhabitants. Carnal geographies here are also violent spaces: but the violence is perpetrated by humans upon the rest. By showing humanity's return to a state of primordial behaviour (rape, violence, killing) in the aftermath of civilizational collapse, these authors depict humanity turning feral. The history of a town

and its river is synecdochic of a larger history of settlement and its attendant violence. Locating the river's condition in a specific historical moment, a dry river is the logical outcome of a certain kind of human settlement.

The need of the hour is restoring species and, more important, ecological processes that are absent from contemporary landscapes – especially predation, grazing, succession, dispersion, and decomposition - a desire to shift the target baseline for conservation away from premodern agricultural archetypes toward the pre- historical ecological conditions that

characterized the northern hemi-sphere at the end of the Pleistocene. The aim is to create analogs of what emerged after the retreat of the glaciers and before agriculture,

forestry, and animal domestication. Anthropocentrism is a worldview that assumes that the human is the centre of the world. This automatically leads to a species hierarchy where all other life forms, and the nonliving components of the earth, are rendered subservient to the human. This leads to the further assumption that other life forms exist to serve human needs. Finally, the assumption of a greater intrinsic value of the human allows humanity to actively discriminate against other species – whether this is in the form of exploitation for labour or extermination which has been termed 'speciesism'.

For the environmental humanities, this set of assumptions enables it to draw two conclusions: Humanity only survives with the cooperation and assimilation of other living and non-living forms on earth; Humanity, in terms of its practices, from agriculture to globalization, has been responsible for the drastic and deleterious effects on geology, climate and Nature, dating back to the industrial revolution – a geological timeframe termed the Anthropocene. The relationship between and among human and other life/non-life forms is constantly edging towards the precarious often resulting in species death, with a concomitant attention to the 'wasting' of other life forms at the altar of human development and modernity Mary Shelley postulated an earth without humans in *The Last Man* (1826), the first book to do so.

In the 20th century, fiction and non-fiction speculating on the subject of human extinction have been plenty. Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) envisioned a nuclear disaster that wipes out the race. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) also implied the end of humanity although a group of survivors remain. Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* (2007) is a thought experiment. Brian Vaughan and Pia Guerra's *Y: The Last Man* (2002–2008) is a graphic novel on the extinction of man, although women survive. 'Disanthropy' (Garrard) is the representation/speculation on the disappearance of humanity. The loss of biodiversity is often projected as a socio-economic tragedy, the effect of 'ecological modernity' (Gustafsson).

We need to begin instead by acknowledging that human beings are in fact freaks of nature: constitutively divided speaking beings; subjects of the unconscious and the death drive; and beings who are dialectical contradictions – on the one hand, part of nature (emerging immanently out of it) and, on the other hand, standing apart from this very nature (acquiring a degree of independence and autonomy from it). Rewilding means helping nature heal. Rewilding means giving space back to wildlife and returning wildlife back to the land, as well as to the seas. Rewilding means the mass recovery of ecosystems and the life-supporting functions they provide. Rewilding means restoring and protecting specific places—on land and in the ocean—where nature is free to direct the ebb and flow of life. Rewilding is about allowing natural processes to shape whole ecosystems so that they work in all their colorful complexity to give life



to the land and the seas. Such wild lands and waters are critical to sustain ecological vitality by supporting intact food webs and natural processes. Rewilding and de-extinction are not attempts to simply revive lost animals: they are projected here as attempts to save the earth itself.

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