

The Psychic Impact of Climatic Imbalance: An Insight into Michael Crichton's *State of Fear*.

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Abstract

Literature is often a reflection of the human psyche. It divulges the untold psychological elements like, happiness, sorrows and feelings of people through the protagonists. The impact of Freudian psychology on modern literature is far reaching. Trauma is a major psychological issue, if not diagnosed in the beginning, will create incurable health issues. Trauma will affect both the mind and the body. Men and women are equally affected by trauma. Psychological trauma is a reaction to an incident where a person finds himself highly stressed. The conditions include war, natural disaster, accident or the loss of close ones. Michael Crichton in his cli-fi, State of Fear adopts a different approach on climate change. The psychological trauma discussed in the novel is a sense of fear caused by artificial environmental degradation. Though fear is normally a common

issue, when out of control, it turns to be a psychological problem. Along with other reasons, environmental degradation caused by climate change is a reason behind people's mental imbalance.

Key Words: *Cli-fi, Trauma, Fear, Eco Psychology, Eco anxiety, Eco terrorism, Environmentalism.*

Michael Crichton, an American writer of science fiction narratives, techno-thrillers and medical narratives, is famous for his speculative fiction. He talks about reality, nature and the universe through his works. His novels explore new inventions about climatic errors and the hidden consequences of the same. Michael Crichton published *State of Fear* in 2004, which is ostensibly about global warming with a deep sense of message and warning, in the contemporary scenario. *State of Fear* is a techno-thriller which is speculative in its treatment and highly futuristic. The novel is about the plot of eco-terrorists to publicize the perils of global warming. The novel is a warning against eco-terrorism and a battle by environmentalists to destroy the eco terrorists. The life threatening fear caused by the eco terrorists, creates an emotional and psychological impact on people who are destined to face it. Bio terrorism is a major focus in the novel. Bio terrorism is the deliberate release of viruses, bacteria or other germs that can sicken or kill humans and non human entities. *State of Fear* is primarily about climatic disorders connected to global warming and it also discusses the inner fear of the people. The psychological elements find a significant space in the novel. *State of Fear* narrates all the emotional and sentimental realities of climate troubles in a fictional ambience.

Fear is a natural and primitive human emotion that arises due to the bio chemical as well as emotional responses of the individual. Fear is a physical and psychological response

to dangers in varied forms. Eleonora Gullone in her article ‘The Development of Normal Fear: A Century of Research’ comments that: “The most consistently documented findings include that fear decreases in prevalence and intensity with age and that specific fears are transitory in nature” (n. p). *State of Fear* focuses on the eco and bio terrorist activities of a group of people and the mental fear they have given to other living entities in the entire planet. The novel is divided into seven parts with seven distinct incidents. All of them are entangled with the same theme of eco terrorism. The novel raises a war against terror caused by eco terrorists which is potentially endless. The central characters in the novel try their best to stop eco terrorism. The first part Akamai presents a series of mysterious events which are fear generating and psychologically tormenting.

A work of psychoanalysis can perhaps best be summarized in one of Freud’s own slogan: where id was, there shall ego be. Where men and women were in the paralyzing grip of forces which they could not comprehend, their reason and self-mastery shall reign. (139)

State of Fear emphasises that some relationships between men and women are toxic. When it is connected to eco terrorism, the after effect is more pitiful. The story of Jonathan Marshall, a graduate student in Physics, who works in a wave mechanics laboratory narrates his experience to a member in the eco terrorist group during his summer holidays which is really pathetic. A member of the group, Marisa traps him and visits his laboratory even though she is not interested in it. Marisa invites Marshall to her apartment and seduces him. He is shattered as a victim of betrayal and falls into depression. The trauma, that he experiences at that time is greater than what he feels physically. “She put her hand on his shoulder again. Then the American glanced back, and gave her a dirty look. She jerked her

chin in the air, defiant. But when he looked back at the tank, she took her hand away” (9). Eco terrorists play with the minds of people before destroying them completely. Their core agenda is to destroy the environment though along with it, they torment the inner psyche of the people.

Psychological concerns are a part of speculative fiction. It can be read from different points of view. Peter Suedfeld analyses ecopsychology in his article ‘Dark Trends: Psychology, Science Fiction and the Ominous Consensus’ as: “Psychologists and writers of fiction both appear to be in general agreement that such an environment will result in an information overload and intolerable time pressures” (n. p). *State of Fear* holds the readers with a willing suspension of disbelief until the actual reasons are revealed. Psychological impacts of the eco terrorists on the humanity are more than what they do to harm the planet. Their first aim is to induce fear in the people before destroying the green planet. The machines they employ for heavy rock destruction are not for simple economic use, but for varied purposes. Their plans spread all over the world. Lorraine Elliot writes on eco terrorism as: “Eco terrorism or ecological terrorism or environmental terrorism is the destruction of the environment by states, groups or individuals in order to intimidate or to coerce governments or civilians” (n. p).

Significant psychological elements are explored in the novel *State of Fear*. Sigmund Freud’s structural theory of personality gains implication with reference to the conflicts among the areas of mind that are unconscious. “Because the unconscious is precisely that, the unconscious, direct access to it and its contents is impossible” (67). In the internal psychological conflict, activities of eco terrorists are mainly psychological that the victims are often unconscious. Eco terrorists create mental anxiety in the common people. *State of*

Fear brings out different scenarios to educate the readers about artificial climatic and environmental disasters.

The activities of human beings are the reasons behind the fast environmental degradation. “Human activities are the main cause of climate change. People burn fossil fuels and convert land from forests to agriculture. Carbon dioxide is the main cause of human-induced climate change” (n. p). Compared to the other six parts, the first part of Akamai brings more incidents connected to the human psyche. An event that happened in Tokyo, in the International Data Environmental Consortium (IDEC), presents the latest result of their new research to the environmentalists, John Kenner and Sanjong Thapa. The IDEC is the major sector in collecting and manipulating electronic data. Hitomi presents the data collected during twenty one days. According to the report, there is high cellular traffic, that devastates human existence. They are really terrific enough to destroy the inner peace of human beings.

We added each of these topics into the honeynet with increasing stickiness, finally including hints of forthcoming research data, which we exposed as e-mail exchanges among scientists in Australia, Germany, Canada and Russia. We drew a crowd and watched the traffic. We eventually sorted a complex nodal North America- Tornado, Chicago, Ann Arbor, Montreal- with spines to both American coasts as well as England, France and Germany. (38)

Michael Crichton makes an incredible effort to present *State of Fear* as an authentic portrayal of human existence. For that, he has done many scientific researches and has provided data regarding the artificial climate change and environmental degradation. In an event in Vancouver, Nat Damon, an employee at Canada Marine R. S. Technologies, signs

one non-disclosure agreement with Seismic Services who is their new client. Damon's company used to hire researchers from remote submarines to other energy companies. The answers of the clients are vague for the questions asked by Damon. The questions are confusing and mentally disturbing. Thus, the answers are also misleading. Their need is also different because they want to place the instrument on the sea floor. All these make Damon suspicious about them. The narrative discusses forced environmental degradation by artificial methods. It also focuses on the eco terrorists, who create an imbalanced generation by creating trauma and confusions. "Uh sir, one said, with all due respect, it is really accurate that abrupt climate change will lead to catastrophe?" (184).

Conflict between science and beliefs that affects the psyche is explored in detail in *State of Fear*. "Right now, scientists are exactly the same position as Renaissance painters, commissioned to make the portrait the patron wants done. And if they are smart, they'll sure their work subtly flatters the patron. Not overtly" (124). Philanthropist George Morton, Nicholas Drake, the Director of National Environmental Research Fund (NERF) and a lawyer Peter Evans are driven to a glacial research site in Reykjavik. Morton is personally interested in the glacial research and the group has come to evaluate the progress. As they come to know about the hidden intention, Thapa and Kenner advice Morton to hold off any new contribution with NERF, especially with Drake. By Morton's advice, Evans visits NERF's office at Vanuatu in Australia. They expose their new plan which is to sue America on rising sea levels caused by global warming. The hilarious anti-environmental activities of the terrorists in creating artificial global warming and the connected issues are unpredictable to the common people. Here it rises above the sea level. Evans meets the litigator John Balder and his assistant Jennifer Haynes. The people involved in these

activities, make the situation suitable to them by misleading the common people. They act as good citizens which infact is a psychological move. The cruelties of eco terrorists are evident in these incidents. After the incident Evan and others of NERF, encounter many unpredictable attacks. They find out a list of coordinators who coordinate geological locations like Mount Terror in Antarctica. They select this place not only because it is a place in Antarctica but also the name creates a sense of terror. The main aim of the eco terrorists is to upset the mindset of common people by confusing them in the fear of global warming.

It was bit complicated. In one paper, it was clear that even though the authors gave lip service to the threat of global warming, their data seemed to suggest the opposite of what they were saying in the text. But, that apparent confusion, Evans suspected, was probably just the result of drawing up a paper with half a dozen authors. (236)

State of Fear is a continuous journey of new findings to save the planet. In the second part, the readers experience a war between eco terrorists and the environmentalists. The environmentalists Kenner, Evans, Sarah Jones and Thapa go to Antarctica to stop the artificial rise of sea level. Though it is a troublesome journey, they take this effort to avoid a huge disaster. *State of Fear* is more scientific in analysing the human psyche. On one side, a group of people plan to destroy the planet and on the other side another group try to save the planet. Kenner emerges as the leader of environmentalists whose courage, sets the movements against terrorism. He conveys the information about the members of ELF (Environmental Liberation Front) and the aim of their flight to find more about the plans of ELF members. The ELF members choose the place, as Antarctica is more fragile than any other continent. So, an issue that happens in Antarctica will cause more unpredictability

to the people around there. “In a matter of minutes, they had moved several hundred yards from the road. The ice there was bare and hard, the treads of the snow tracks and squeaking as they crossed it” (254). The paper authenticates the pathetic condition of many under developed countries.

State of Fear is bound with anxiety and fear. Anxiety is also an emotional change, which is characterized by the feelings of tension, worried thoughts and uncomfortable environment. Eco anxiety is evident in the novel. “Eco anxiety is the distress caused by climate change where people are becoming anxious about their future” (n. p). Michael Crichton gives a detailed and terrific explanation of events that happen in Antarctica. The team members share eco anxiety when they reach the Marso del Mar airport and to the Mount Terror. James Brewster helps them though he is an eco terrorist who has come in disguise. They experience a sequence of dangerous incidents. There are many Precisions Timed Blast (PTB) at regular intervals. The impostor Brewster plans to break the biggest ice berg in the planet. The team undergo high anxiety, that can destroy the mental equilibrium. Kenner helps them stay balanced by his intelligent actions. They later realize that, their guide Bolden is actually an ELF operator. In the attempts to escape, Evan and Jones fall into a deep crack along with their vehicle. It is a great shock to the team members and their mental condition is shattered. They think that they will never escape from this terror. The situation of a common man is more pathetic if he faces such a situation. This is the main terrorist activity which creates intense fear in the people along with artificial climatic disorders. Climatic disorders itself cause mental anxiety, fear, insecurity and trauma. A well-known literary technique which is propounded mainly by Harold Pinter is the Comedy of Menace, where a calm and funny atmosphere is followed by an impending

disaster. *State of Fear* with several terrific incidents is a smooth running novel that gets distracted by heavy environmental disasters. The novel carries everywhere a kind of menace created by the eco terrorists. However, the environmentalists adopt tremendous efforts to put an end to the terrorist activities. Their motto is: “False fear are a plague, a modern plague” (244). Even though they escape from the situation, the fear and the mental insecurity they encounter are beyond the expectations.

All right, then. Evans turned left, walking toward the picture windows. Still the fingers did not move. There was only one direction remaining: he moved behind the investigator, heading toward the door. Since the man could not see him, Evans said, Now I am walking away from you, toward the front door. (344)

Flash, the fourth part, brings in more dangerous situations with respect to bio terrorism planned by ELF and NERF. Evans and the intelligence team identified that, NERF operatives planned to launch more than one hundred rockets to an altitude of thousand feet to destroy the particular area. Their main agenda is to manipulate the mindset of the people through artificial climate change. People usually fail to realize the actual reason behind the artificially created environmental hazards. “Nothing is so firmly believed as that which is least known” (298).

States of Fear, moves to more fearful episodes in the following chapters. “Expectation works in mysterious ways and totally unconsciously” (456). The fifth chapter, Flood, as the title indicates, labels a huge flood created by the eco terrorists. It is created by shooting rockets into a widening thunderstorm. It creates a disastrous flood which is able to engulf the campers near national and state parks. The fear and trauma caused by flood is pathetic. In *State of Fear*, these disastrous incidents are mainly narrated through

the experiences of the environmentalists. The readers thus get a first hand knowledge of the terrific situation. Evan and Jones are attacked by the terrorists by their artificial lightning, when they drive to the McKinley State Park. The park suddenly floods and Jones and Evan sweep away in the flood in the vehicle. With a tedious effort, they jump out of the vehicle and get into the vehicle of Kenner and Thapa. The artificially created flood is highly disastrous like the natural flood.

State of Fear carries scientific data to explain the realities behind artificial climate change. The researcher Jennifer Haynes shows Evan many environmental and temperature data to demonstrate the complexities of Vanuatu (a country in Oceania) litigation. The plans of NERF are revealed through these scientific data. Jennifer also studies on how the abrupt climatic disorders affect people. She says, “But expectation works in mysterious ways-and totally unconsciously” (456). The geographical and climatic changes create countless psychological issues to those who fall victims to it. When these changes come suddenly though naturally, it is predictable. It gives an emotional break down to the affected.

Eco terrorism and bio terrorism are closely connected as both exploit the ecological and the biological elements. Crichton brings out more dangerous activities of both bio and eco terrorists. Evan becomes unconscious and is shifted to a hospital. He is attacked by a blue ringed octopus. It is deadly poisonous and there is no antidote for it. It is an attack made by the bio terrorists. It proves that eco terrorists, use highly poisonous elements in order reach their goals. It is a part of bio terrorism that attacks treacherously with the help of dangerous animals. The victim faces an unexplainable mental trauma during this situation. This act is capable of declining all the physical, nervous and mental functions of the victim.

Hapalochlaena fasciata, the deadliest of the three species of blue-ringed octopus. So named because when it is threatened it changes colour and produces bright blue rings on its skin. It's found everywhere in the coastal waters of Australia. The animal is very tiny, the bite is small and almost undetectable and envenomation is often deadly. (525)

When Evan overcomes the critical situation, he starts to research more on bio and eco terrorist activities and finds many events that are shocking. The plan of NERF operatives is to create massive tsunami in Solomon Islands. With their intelligence the environmentalists damage the tsunami and save many people from terrible attacks.

Cli-fi narratives are mostly optimistic in its nature. After many pessimistic incidents, the cli-fi leads the readers to the path of optimism. "Hope is eternal and cannot be diminished by one event or circumstances" (n. p). Cli-fi gives an emotional and psychological support to those who follow it. Michael Crichton's *State of Fear* is a dissimilar movement on ecoterrorism. It is shocking to know that certain people create artificial climate alteration that create havoc to the green planet. Attempts are made by another group to protect and safeguard the planet. The war between these two sectors forms the main focus of the novel. The novel brings out authentic scientific data to prove the issues. Michael Crichton gives a pulse-pounding experience to the readers through *State of Fear* in order to fetch new hope to restore the greenery and a peaceful existence.

David B. Sandalow's "Michael Crichton and Global Warming" is about the treatment of global warming issues in the novels of Michael Crichton. K. Y. Kondratyev's "Global Warming and Fiction: *State of Fear*" is also a study based on the innovative narration of Michael Crichton about global warming. Sophia David's "Eco-Fiction: Bringing Climate

Change into the Imagination” is about the imaginative and didactic narration of Michael Crichton with reference to his novels.

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