

“Climate Fiction and the Ethics of Survival in Modern English Novels”

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Abstract: Climate change has been becoming a major theme of contemporary literary fantasy, with a growing literature emerging which is sometimes known as climate fiction. Modern English novels abound with ecological crisis, the fall of the environment, and the ethical issues of survival in a world that is in decline. This essay discusses how the ethics of surviving in the case of climate catastrophe is reflected in the chosen modern English novels. It explores the conflict of the survival instinct of individuals and their moral duty to the community, re-definition of human-nature relations, and the political commentary shaped in these stories. The analysis of selected climate fiction novels provides the research with a major argument that contemporary English fiction does not merely depict the destruction of the environment but also challenges ideologies of ethics that guide the human reaction to crisis. The above novels end up suggesting that what will prevail in survival should rest on empathetic, responsible and ecologically conscious as opposed to dominance and exploitation.

Keywords: Climate Fiction, Environmental Ethics, Survival Narrative, Ecocriticism, Anthropocene, Moral Responsibility, Dystopian Literature

Introduction:

The connection between the environmental awareness and literature has changed dramatically throughout the last 50 years. Though the issue of ecology was reflected in literary works as early as the nineteenth century, it was only in the 1970s that the systematic analysis of the environmental issue acquired an academic form in the wake of the emergence of the global environmental movements. Published in 1962, *Silent Spring* was a significant point of turning point among the general environmental awareness of the day, however, this was before the late twentieth century where climate change is now becoming a major global interest. In the 1980s and 1990s, the scientific debate on global warming, the greenhouse effect, carbon emissions, became part of the popular discussion, making it a topic of influence on the cultural production, including fiction.

Climate fiction or cli-fi is a term that has become more visible beginning in the early 2000s due to the growing exposure to climate change across the globe by global summits and the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The beginning of the 2000s was characterized by the observed change in literary imagination. Environmental crisis was no longer seen as something that was too far or symbolic but it became the center of narrative organization and theme development. Authors started to dream of a near-mindedness and post-apocalyptic future where the sea level is on the rise, resources are scarce, pandemics are eminent, and ecological disaster has elapsed.

Among the landmark achievements in climate fiction was the appearance of the work by Margaret Atwood known as *Oryx and Crake* in 2003 that introduced the image of a dystopian future built on the principles of corporate biotechnology and environmental destruction. This was succeeded by the literature which also depicted a desolated landscape devoid of the ecological life (Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 2006). Subsequently such novels as *Solar* by Ian McEwan (2010) and *The Stone Gods* by Jeanette Winterson (2007) pushed the genre by adding a touch of satire, speculative fiction and a philosophical question of how the environment is responsible.

By the 2010s, climate fiction had become a known genre of literature as the debate on global climate escalated due to the signing of initiatives like the Paris Climate Accord in 2015. Anthropocene, a notion of the middle of the 2000s, another influential concept came into play and influenced literary discourses by establishing humanity as a geological power that can change the systems of the planet. Novelists in turn reacted not only against destruction of the environment but also against the moral and ethical principles that govern human existence in a crisis.

Contemporary English novels addressing climate disaster are not like the previous dystopian books: they do not give survival as a simple physical attempt to overcome the hostile circumstances. This makes survival to be an ethical issue. Characters have to choose to either pursue self-preservation or community duty, use what is left or preserve it and balance technological progress against the moral responsibility. The crisis highlighted in these novels is hence issues about the environment and morals.

This paper contextualizes climate fiction in the context of its historical-intellectual antecedents, its development by environmental consciousness in the late twentieth century to stabilization in the twenty-first century. It claims that contemporary English novels are not just depictions of environmental breakdown; they are also less questioning good moral outcomes of human behavior and reconstruct how to survive as a challenge to moral virtue. Investigating the shifts in the relationship between climate crisis and contemporary fiction, this paper reviews the selected pieces of literature published in the early 2000s and further.

Review of Literature:

Climate fiction and environmental humanities in general have grown quite significantly in recent decades especially due to the emergence of Anthropocene studies and ecocriticism. The chosen research articles offer theoretical backgrounds of appreciating climate narratives, environmental ethics and survival discourse in the context of contemporary literary. All these studies bring out the moral, historical and ecological aspect of modern fiction.

Critical Inquiry (2009) by Dipesh Chakrabarty is where one finds a theoretical basis of the argument pointing to climate change claiming that climate change helps to break down the traditional divide between human history and natural history. The researcher insists that human has turned out to be a geological force that is capable of changing planetary systems. This rethought of history requires a redefinition of ethical practice where survival needs to be perceived more at a species level than a particular, individual human issue. The paper

proposes the Anthropocene as a paradigm that transforms the study of humanities and makes literary scholars analyze the narrative in the context of the planet.

Amitav Ghosh (2016) in *Economic and Political Weekly* is critical of the constraints of modern realist fiction to deal with climate change. The researcher notes that the traditional narrative paradigms tend to omit extreme or unlikely events in the environment and, thus, localize climate crisis in literature. These studies demand innovative creative categories that are able to fit ecological uncertainty and unpredictability. This reasoning substantiates the fact that climate fiction has emerged as a new form of literature whose implementing methods are speculative and dystopian in nature to express environmental anxiety and an ethical dilemma.

In *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Sahu (2018) analyzes the concept of environmental consciousness in the modern fiction. The scholar puts emphasis on the way in which the literary texts criticize industrialization, consumerism and environmental degradation. If the research highlights, fiction is used as a channel of developing eco-consciousness and promoting environmentally conscious interaction with nature. The discussion has proved that environmental discourses work in the development of moral sustainable and conservation orientations.

In *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Nayak (2017) concentrates on the issue of environmental ethics in the eco-conscious fiction. The researcher recognizes the change of anthropocentric world perceptions towards the eccentric value systems in the literary writings. Basing her argument on narratives, the study proposes that most narratives give conflict of the morality between development and environmental conservation. These ethical dilemmas are of especially high concern to the phenomenon of survival, in which the consequences of resource distribution and environmental conservation impact the community.

Behera (2019) wrote about the depiction of the Anthropocene in modern-day literature and published his article in the *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*. The researcher points out that the issue of environmental crisis is presented as a scientific, moral, and existential challenge. The paper exemplifies greater sensitivity of literary texts to show vulnerability, displacement and ecological unsteadiness, which are all interconnected to the overall survival of human beings and the stability of the environment.

In the *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, Mishra (2020) discusses the eco-dystopian fiction emergence. As the scholar notices, new dystopian texts are more about environmental decline than the political oppression. The paper concludes that eco-dystopian writing should be understood as a warning projection, exaggerating the butterfly effects of being environmentally careless, underlining the ethical ambiguity of how we can continue to live as we do in the face of scarcity.

Rout (2016), who has written in *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, is one of the authors who has written on ecocritical framework to analyse modern English fiction. The author of the research believes that environmental readings can suggest the implicit criticisms of technological growth and exploitation by capitalists. The paper affirms

the fact that survival discourse cannot exist without the discourse on unsustainable development patterns.

In the Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature, Pradhan (2021) deals with the mentioned issue of dystopian ethics of survival in particular. The scholar shows that between personal sense of self-preservation and the responsibility to the group, moral negotiation to survive is common. The questions developed in the study are in whether survival based on exclusion, violence, or resource monopolization can be morally justified, hence pre-empting the survival as a moral issue instead of being a biological instinct.

In the article published in Lang Lit: An International Open Access Peer-Reviewed Journal, Das (2018) explores the topic of environmental crisis as applied to the concept of moral responsibility. The author believes that the modern fiction depicts the climate changes as a result of a systematic negligence and moral inactivity. The paper stresses on the importance of literature as a factor in environmental awareness formation and the need to be accountable to the generations to come.

Research Gap

An overview of the studies suggests that the climate discourse has transformed literary analysis with the perspectives of the Anthropocene perspective, ecocriticism and environmental ethics. Scientists never cease to point out the ethical aspects of ecological crisis and the growing popularity of dystopian and speculative solutions to the expression of the ecological instability.

Nevertheless, even though there is substantial focus on climate change and environmental responsibility there is little work that explicitly looks at the ethical construction of survival as a concept of contemporary English climate fiction.

Climate Fiction

Climate fiction and, more frequently referred to as cli-fi, is a modern kind of literary genre where the emphasis lies on the climate change and its social, political, and psychological effects. Climate fiction, a new literary genre that emerged in the early twenty-first century, visualizes the possibilities of future worlds in which sea level is rising, extreme climate, food shortages, extinction, and environmental displacement take place. Climate fiction contrasts with traditional science fiction where, unlike there, it is based on a scientifically plausible environmental reality. It is a translation between scientific terminology and a fictional narrative that enables abstract climatic data to be displayed in a way that appeals to the feelings of the readers. Climate fiction inherently addresses the manner in which environmental destruction is transforming and molding human associations, political frameworks, and survival tactics through their speculative and realistic narratives.

Environmental Ethics

The environmental ethics is a section of philosophy that studies the moral association between human beings and the natural world. It also makes real the question of whether nature has a value independent of its utility to human beings and whether anthropocentric

world views that make human beings the focus of moral concern are true. Environmental ethics is also used in the study of literature to offer an approach toward the analysis of texts with a sense of responsibility to the ecosystem, animals, and others to come. In climate fiction, the importance of environmental ethics is especially high since characters have to solve moral predicaments around the distribution of resources, technology use, ecological and environmental restoration, and the relationship between generations. Such stories tend to imply that environmental crisis is scientific, political, and even a moral failure, which is based on greed, exploitation and neglect.

Survival Narrative

Using a story of survival as a genre of literature shows the characters in the story competing to survive in unrealistic circumstances: war, calamity, solitude, etc. Survival is repositioned in the ecological collapse in the context of climate fiction. Survival does not just mean survival through physical strength, it also stipulates moral stamina, emotive durability and also group cohesion. Survival stories that focus on climate have a tendency of asking, who is worthy enough to survive? In what price shall the survival be purchased? Is it possible to hold onto the ethical values in a desolated world? These stories change emphasis on heroic individualism to that of collective survival to emphasize cooperation, empathy and responsibility as key ingredients of survival in a world that is environmentally unstable.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism refers to a critical literature theory which examines the connection between environmental and literature. Ecocriticism as an academic focus began to develop in the 1990s and looks at the way in which literary works depict nature, ecological problems and human relationship with nature. It disputes anthropocentric interpretations and facilitates ecological consciousness of the study of literature. Some of the themes that ecocritical scholars examine are sustainability, environmental justice, biodiversity and climate change. Ecocriticism in the examination of the modern English novel assists in revealing how the novel is able to criticize the aspects of industrialization and capitalism and its dependence on technologies coupled with the promotion of ecological balance and ethical responsibility.

Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a geological epoch suggested that reflects the great role of human activity on the climate and the eco system of the planet. Even though the term is popularized since the beginning of 2000s, here it represents a decade of scientific worries concerning global warming, pollution, deforestation, and massive extinction. The idea is that humanity has been made a geological power that is able to make changes to planetary systems. The Anthropocene is a highly effective concept that literature can use to address the concepts of responsibility, vulnerability, and interconnectedness. Climate fiction also typically like to place their stories in the Anthropocene and describe worlds in which human activity has caused irreversible environmental changes. This idea enriches the moral aspect of telling stories because of accentuating responsibility towards the current generation and the future generation.

Moral Responsibility

Moral responsibility is the responsibility that individuals and societies have of what they are doing and their impacts. The concept of moral responsibility in climate centered stories is not just to individual actions but to the actions of communities, companies as well as policies of a government. The modern English novels often expose the characters to the result of the negligence of the previous generations towards nature. The concept of economic responsibility in climatic fiction triggers perplexing issues in terms of iniquity, guilt, responsibility, and restitution.

Dystopian Literature

The dystopian literature reflects communities where there is repression, pollution, technology, or societies that are dissolute. Whereas the dystopian literature of the past usually revolved around the theme of authority political systems or a police state, modern dystopian literature has turned into an ecological end. Dystopia of climate change shows disillusioned societies that have difficulties with scarcity, exile, and social disintegration. Nevertheless, these stories are not completely negative. In some dystopian climate scenarios, there is always some element of hope that climatic disaster may lead to the emergence of ethical renewal and collective responsibility. In such a way, the dystopian literature on the topic of climate turns into the sound of warning and the necessity to change.

Overall Conclusions:

The presents study aimed at investigating modern English novels and the ways of climate fiction to address the ethics of survival in the larger context of the Anthropocene and the environmental crisis. According to the discussion of the current literature and theoretical interpretations, it can be concluded that the current discourses of climate go beyond ecological disaster as a scenery; in other words, the ecological disaster is placed in the center of moral and philosophical dilemmas.

To start with, the study defines that climate fiction redefines the notion of survival as an act of ethical action as opposed to a biological or instinctive action. In most contemporary stories, the survival is introduced as something that cannot be discussed without references to the issues of responsibility, justice, and common good. The crisis that is demonstrated in these novels is not only the ecological but also the moral one. People and societies are forced to make tough choices on how to allocate and utilize resources, technological intervention, the restoration of the environment, and how to be accountable to the next generation. The life based on the survival at the cost of the moral principles is also demonstrated many times as continuing the further destruction but the relations based on cooperation and empathy provide the opportunities to the renewal.

Secondly, the paper confirms that the Anthropocene paradigm of interpretation has a great influence in transforming the literary interpretation. Although contemporary fiction places environmental crisis in the context of the planet, the human geologic force is identified. This transformation enlarges the moral responsibility scale that is usually restricted to the level of individual or nationality to the global and species-wide scope. Climate fiction thus is proving

to be an anthropocentric challenge and a claim in favor of reorganizing the human-nature relationship on the principle of interdependence and not domination.

Third, literature review demonstrates that the studies of ecocriticism and environmental ethics represent valuable instruments that are required to examine climate-focused stories. According to researchers, literature is always seen as a cultural tool and hopes through which societies argue and make deals on guilt, accountability and hope. The dystopian and speculative versions, especially, allow the authors to dramatize the effects of ecological negligence long-term and thus, to give an abstract climate information a human face.

In addition to this, the paper reveals that there is an important thematic trend in climate fiction: a conflict between personal survival versus community survival. The contemporary English novels often raise questions about the self-preservation in the absence of the community or environment can be right. As it has been created in these stories, the ethical survival requires collaboration, empathy, and sustainability. The change can be seen as an indication of wider agendas in the world regarding climate justice and the collective responsibility of the planet.

To sum up, climate fiction is an implicit admonition and conscience. It makes the reader to face some uncomfortable truths with regard to the degradation of the environment, and at the same time discusses the possibility of changes being moral. The ethics of survival as it is evolved in the contemporary English novels eventually hints that the future of mankind does not rest merely on the technological invention or political revolution, but on the development of ecological awareness, moral responsibility and collective action. When imaginative, literature has been found to be a crucial place of reconsidering the possibilities of surviving in an uncertain world of climate crisis.

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