



Emergence of Climate Fiction and its Implications in Contemporary World

Mathew M. J.^{*} and Meghana Raikar

St. Paul Institute of Professional Studies, Indore, MP, India
mathewmjmahi@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 24th March 2025, revised 24th April 2025, accepted 18th May 2025

Abstract

Climate Fiction is an emerging rapid growing genre of literature exploring the far reaching consequences of one of the global concerns i.e. climate change. It has developed in the context of the long-term change in weather patterns which affect the regional, national and global life. Climate change is a great concern world-wide owing to its magnitude and intensity. Climate and ecology has been a subject matter of many works since ancient times in the forms of myths and legends. However, the concept of climate change began to appear in writings after the industrial revolution from 18th Century. Therefore, climate change began to be seen as Anthropocene (human influence on the planet) that affects the life all across the globe. Though, climate change has been a serious matter of discussion in public domain, it has much smaller presence in the contemporary literary fiction. It is the need of the hour to promote the writing and reading of climate fiction literature in order to create awareness in basic and higher education. Hence to make people sensitive and to take pragmatic measures for curtailing the gravity of this global issue.

Keywords: Emergence, Climate Fiction, Anthropocene, weather patterns, curtail, pragmatic.

Introduction

Climate Fiction is a fast growing field of Literature exploring the drastic consequences of Climate Change. Though, nature had been a subject matter of many myths, legends, stories and other writings, Climate Fiction as a new genre is a recent development. Industrial Revolution and subsequent decades have made us realize about the human influence on planet and its gravity on the very existence of life. Since, this particular genre deals with the existential crisis, it needs a wide coverage and must be part of our lower and higher education system to make the public sensitive towards the issue in order to take corrective measures in all the aspects of life.

Research objectives: i. The research is aimed to explore the emergence and evolution of climate fiction as a literary genre and its growing popularity in contemporary literature. ii. The study delves deep into the major themes and narratives employed in climate fiction to understand how they reflect and shape public perceptions of climate change. iii. The research will discuss the implications of climate fiction on readers, society and the environment, including its potential to raise awareness, inspire action and influence policy. iv. Finally, the critical evaluation and the intersection with other disciplines such as Environmental Science, Sociology and Political Science will be analyzed and followed by its broader significance.

Methodology

The entire research work is based on textual analysis to identify common themes, narratives, and storytelling strategies. The

information is gathered on the basis of interviews and surveys with authors, readers or experts who have contributed magnificently in the genre of climate fiction.

Discussion based on nine well known Climate Fiction books

Emergence of Climate Fiction: When we look into the trajectory of the development of the writings on climate, it clearly indicates that Climate Fiction as a new genre is a recent development in Literature and its development can be traced in the following order:

Pre-Modern Period: The Pre-Modern Period had less scientific advancement and technological development unlike the later periods. The society in those days were mainly agrarian and the life of the people were much connected to nature. In most of the cultures nature worship had have been existed and human beings feared the forces of nature. This very idea is present in many ancient texts in the forms of myths, legends, folklore and so on. The creation stories and flood narratives in the religious scriptures, the concept of ‘Sacred Groves’ (areas that are protected from hunting and revered with religious and cultural significance) among tribal and animistic religion are a few references in this reference. These ideas in the mythologies also feature the themes of punishment and redemption.

Modern Period: Modern Period witnessed the development of science and technology in an unprecedented manner and it ensued in Industrial Revolution and furthering the growth of capitalism and its new form.

The problem of climate change was relatively faced at this age owing to deforestation and the exploitation of the natural resources as an indispensable part of the procurement of raw materials for various industries. Yet, people were unsure about the causes of the changes in climate. Nevertheless, the Romantic Poets of Europe including William Wordsworth and the American transcendental poets like Emerson were the critics of this new way of life. As Nick Demott mentions, "On the British side of things, Eco-criticism emerged through critical Jonathan Bate's Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition; and similar to Silent Springs, many British critics have drawn inspiration from Raymond Williams' book *The Country and the City*"¹.

In the Post War Period: Climate Fictions were scarce in this period and the writers focused mainly on the pressing needs of the nuclear threats with the impact of World War II and in the contemporary scenario of Cold War. However, the great plains of the USA and Canada experienced Dust Bowl in this period.

After 1960s: Man-made climate changes found place in the writings after 1960s. Some of the early writers discarded the notion of human influence on climate change. However, this concept was demonstrated with ever less doubt terming it as Anthropocene aspects or the collective human influence on the planet. In the subsequent years many literatures began to appear dealing in this concern. As Carson says in the work *The Silent Spring* "The earth's vegetation is a part of the web of life. Sometimes we have no choice but to disturb these relationships, but we should do so thoughtfully, with full awareness"².

Settings of Climate Fiction: The setting of Climate Fiction are present, past and future. But majority of the climate writings are set largely in the unrecognizable future like the novel *Drowned World* "The birth of a child had become a comparative rarity, and only one marriage in ten yielded any offspring. As Kerans sometimes reminded himself the genealogical tree of mankind was systematically pruning itself, apparently moving backwards in time, and a point might ultimately be reached where second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden"³. Most of the authors favor a setting in distant future with a dystopian world after a global disaster.

Themes of Climate Fiction: The recurring themes of the climate writings are climate change, global warming, rising of sea levels, storms, scarcity of water, extinction of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources and related concerns. Majority of the writings are dystopic in style. The writings also deal with the problems of the environmental degradation that humans today are handling down to the coming generations.

Global Warming: It is a phenomenon that began to occur since the Industrial Revolution and it occurs due to the excessive accumulation of the CO₂ and other pollutants in the atmosphere and absorb sunlight and heat that hit on the surface of the earth.

These pollutants cause green house effect and how it makes life worst is the theme of the *Carbon Diaries* by Lloyd. "Even highly visible ones such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, are also part of our accepted way of life – our status quo – in ways that can lead us to accept rather than resist them"⁴.

Climate Change: It means the change in the average weather patterns in the long run and affect the climate at the local, regional and global level. For example: increased prevalence of droughts, heat waves, floods, etc. Climate Change is not new but its rapid rate and magnitude is a great concern world wide.

As T.C. Boyle explores the devastating impact of environmental degradation and climate change owing to human greed and inaction of the governments make our planet's life miserable. "It is not even nature, just something we created out of a witches' brew of fossil-fuel emissions and deforestation"⁵.

Human Involvement: The writers of the earlier periods did not recognize much about the human involvement in climate change. However, it was only after the Industrial Revolution, people began to experience the ramifications of the deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources and its effect on climate and how it has affected the cycle of life on the earth as mentioned in the famous book *Flight Behaviour*. "The presence of the college made them prickly, as if the whole town were given over to the mischief of the privileged"⁶.

Natural Disasters: Unprecedented and the repeated natural disasters like flood, failure of Monsoon, Cloud burst, landslides, submerging of lands, and so on are cautioned in many of the Climate Fictions and is a reason for the tragic end of the plot as well as the life,

Depletion of Resources: Modern commercial and the profit motif driven world economies add more fuel to the fire for exploiting the natural resources in the form of modern farming and the use of pesticides and fertilizers, deforestation, mining, over fishing etc. Thus, it leads to the depletion of the natural resources. It is mentioned in *Silent Spring*, it concerned the perils of excessive use of pesticides at a time when pesticides were widely believed to be part of the progress of civilization².

Dystopian Future: Most of the writings are futuristic and it is dystopian in nature owing to the seriousness of the problem. The novels like *We Are Unprepared* written by Reilly "We all knew these storms were coming eventually, and now they're here—not that they would ever admit the real cause"⁷.

The *New York 2041* by Kim Stanley Robinson reveals the undesirable aspects of climate change cause to the future world. The real locals were like fish in water, unaware and unimpressed⁸.

The unfavorable climate, increase in temperature, depletion of natural resources, submerging of lands, disturbance in the food chain and destruction of biodiversity would lead to the impending doom. It is well portrayed by Amitav Ghosh in the novel *the Hungry Tide*, "As Sea levels rose and the flow of fresh water diminished, salt water had begun to intrude deeper upstream, making certain stretches too saline for the dolphins. Some had been ensnared by the fishermen's nets and had been hit by motorboats and steamers"⁹.

Implications: The Climate Fiction did not get the due coverage in the contemporary world like the Science Fiction and other sorts of entertainment writings. It is considered as the literature of twenty first century and aim to save the planet from the destruction by connecting with the environment. Given the gravity of the subject matter of this genre, there is a dire need of the propagation of Climate Fiction since it addresses the issues of existential crisis. This literature has a definite role of creating awareness all across the world. Therefore, it should be the part of school and college curriculum so that the present and future citizens should be aware about the seriousness of the problem and to take corrective measures.

Conclusion

Climate Fiction has enormous scope in the days to come and it takes a serious note on the existential and pragmatic aspects of

life. This genre envisages creating a healthy society that ensures eco-friendly measures and green practices in the course of human life. Thus, to create a stewardship attitude towards environment.

References

1. DeMott, Nick. (2023). A Brief History of Eco-criticism: Where Literature and the Environment Cross Paths.
2. Carson, R. (2015). Silent spring. In *Thinking about the environment* (pp. 150-155). Routledge.
3. Ballard, J. G. (2005). The Drowned World. Fourth Estate.
4. Coats, K. (2009). The Carbon Diaries 2015. *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, 62(10), 407-408.
5. Boyle, T. C. (2001). A Friend of the Earth. Penguin.
6. Kingsolver, B. (2013). Flight Behavior, Reprint.
7. Reilly, M. L. (2016). We are Unprepared: A Novel. MIRA.
8. Robinson, K. S. (2017). New York 2140. Hachette Book Group.
9. Ghosh, A. (2005). The hungry tide. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.