

A Call to Save the Earth: A Study of the Phenomenon of Climate Change through the Anthology *Dhara: A Paradise Worth Fighting For*

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the phenomenon of climate change that's occurring all over the world through the short stories and poems presented in the anthology called "Dhara: A Paradise Worth Fighting For". It chooses to focus specifically on some of the works to illustrate how our planet is on the brink of destruction, and if man does not see the error of his ways soon, a terrible storm awaits on the horizon that will show no mercy when it arrives. The paper discusses the multifaceted ways in which climate change affects us. It not only affects people on a biological level but also on a societal and economic basis. The paper also sheds light on how vulnerable communities are disproportionately affected by climate change and are at a much higher risk of falling victim to injustice. Through a close examination of the book, placing special emphasis on certain pieces, it attempts to bring attention to the fact that the future of the planet, as well as humanity, is at stake.

Keywords: Climate change, global warming, Earth, environment, eco-criticism, eco-feminism.

Introduction

“Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns”, which can be both natural and man-made, but the unprecedented rate and magnitude at which the planet is warming up can only be attributed to human activities, as natural processes alone do not explain recent climate changes. The Industrial Revolution was the event that set the ball rolling for ecological degradation. Large-scale burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas has been the primary cause, as it generates greenhouse gases like CO₂ and methane that trap the sun’s heat in the Earth’s atmosphere, leading to rapidly rising temperatures. According to the UN, “the average temperature of the Earth’s surface is now about 1.2°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s (before the industrial revolution) and warmer than at any time in the last 100,000 years. The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record, and each of the last four decades has been warmer than any previous decade since 1850.” Climate change is at present a glaring issue for countries all over the globe. It affects all life on Earth indiscriminately. The existence of every person is influenced by the way our environment is changing. These changes send ripples across various aspects of one’s life, affecting their livelihoods and lifestyles.

It is a highly focused area in the field of eco-criticism, which deals with the relationship of humans with nature and how our actions are behind the deterioration of the environment. Considering that the majority of contributors to this book are women, it can lend itself to ecofeminist interpretations, a sub-field of eco-criticism, which integrates feminism with ecology. Ecofeminism believes that both the system of patriarchy and of capitalism operate under the same principles of exploitation and subjugation. Patriarchal culture views women and nature as subordinate to men, existing solely to serve their needs. So, the oppression of

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women run parallel to the abuse of the natural world. Climate crisis exacerbates the existing inequalities in a hierarchical society and increases the struggles of marginalized groups like women, the disabled, ethnic minorities and other socio-economically disadvantaged populations.

This anthology has come into existence owing to the two brilliant women – Mubida Rohman, a poetographer and storyteller, and Shyamolima Saikia, a poet and author – who ventured on a quest to gather the voices of climate-conscious individuals from around the globe. The river Brahmaputra took the form of their muse and led them forward on this noble journey. This collection, thus created, is a homage to the river. In the introduction to the book, they discuss about the interconnectedness of all life on Earth and the interdependence of one thing upon another. They stress the fact that we are part of the ecosystem and our survival is dependent upon its proper functioning. We cannot detach ourselves from it, we cannot hope to thrive while the planet withers away. They insist that the duty falls upon us to ensure that we leave a better planet for the generations to come.

This book is an amalgamation of voices from all over the world that share immense love and concern alike for Mother Earth. These two elements run like a thread through each of these individuals and connect them all together in an unwavering determination to save the planet. This anthology was put together in the hopes that it would inspire change. "What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make" –this quotation at the end of the introduction by Dr. Jane Goodall, scientist and activist, perfectly encapsulates the message they wish to send to the world. The foreword, written by Reema Ahmad, carries the sentiment that every single move we make has an effect. No act or deed exists in a vacuum. If we are to ensure a better future for the upcoming generation, we must look into our past and learn from our mistakes lest we repeat them, be mindful of our actions at present, and hold onto the vision of a future where the Earth is starting to bloom again. So, we must all come together to protect our beloved Dhara, our one and only home.

Discussion

The initial piece is a poem titled “The Story of Many Lands”, by Alshaad Kara, which brings to our attention how each person leaves a carbon footprint during their stay on Earth. The higher the amount, the bigger its impact on the environment. It will significantly affect future generations as they will be left to clean up the mess that we’ve made. The poet tells us that with time her homeland turned into an island as part of it got submerged due to the rise in sea level. She witnessed it become a wasteland.

The second poem, "No Earth" by the same poet, begins with an accusatory tone, pointing a finger at the selfish nature of human beings. It cautions us about the repercussions we may face if we continue to ignore the Earth’s pleas.

The first story of the book, *The Seventh Sky* by Bhaswati Ghosh, sheds light on the dangers of unchecked urbanization. In the name of civilization, humans are razing our planet to the ground. Some are ignorant fools or blind to the truth, while others choose to cause harm to feed their own greed, despite being aware of the truth, and that is a thousand-fold worse. Urbanization is one of the major man-made causes of landslides. Landslides don’t only cause property damage, financial loss, and fatalities, but also long-lasting psychological and physical trauma, the latter of which could render one disabled and needing more help and

support than before. They intensify the vulnerabilities of certain societal groups. Urbanization, being one of the causes of climate change, leads to displacement, which in turn could cause the erasure of culture. Local traditions can slowly disappear with time due to displacement. The narrator gives a beautiful description of the natural landscape of their town, which comprises mountains, greenery, and the river Alaknanda. But with time, the town grew denser due to overcrowding and the construction of too many hotels, guest houses and restaurants. Wealthy people from the cities started to shift there. They say, "Live in the now, forget about tomorrow". This shows how they want to live their lives recklessly without a care for other people or the planet. They don't spare a second thought to whether their actions would cause harm. The day after the second crack appeared in the narrator's house, the school building was found to have several cracks all over, and after that, the cracks just kept appearing and appearing until they consumed the whole town. The narrator learned from her father that "a report by a commission that enquired into the very first instances of the cracks way back in the 70s of the last century,..., had recommended stopping all construction in the town." She found this funny, considering how many buildings had popped up since then. It was clear to her that the city folks would never care if the town collapsed. What appalled her was the way the people of the town had forgotten that it "already stood on shaky grounds — the remnants of landslides and glaciers." Her father's health began declining and one can interpret it as the impact ecological disasters have on our health. They couldn't sleep at night in fear they would be woken up by "yet another cracking invasion". The ground was literally sinking due to over-construction. As the news reached the government, they gave orders to put a halt to the hydroelectric project that had been going on in the town and which had done the most damage in recent months. But as soon as people started to relax, the work began once more. The cracks returned, and everything came crumbling down. They had to leave their own hometown and shift to a city elsewhere. People of the town were forced to move. This underscores how human activities are the reason for natural disasters like landslides. The survivors of such disasters experience an abrupt change in lifestyle due to displacement.

"Genealogy of Ruin", a poem by Debarati Sen, paints an accurate picture of the condition of the Earth at present. She uses the literary device, personification, in the title to tell the dark tale of ruin that human beings have left in their wake. Vehicle exhausts, industrial and factory emissions and the burning of wood and leaves are polluting the air and contributing to global warming, consequently causing glaciers and ice caps to melt. The phrase "Frozen tears" refers to this melting of glaciers, which is causing the river Brahmaputra to overflow. The process of melting is occurring at an alarming rate and raising sea levels globally. Moreover, fissures are forming on the Earth's surface due to excessive withdrawal of groundwater and extraction of natural resources. The poem also brings up the issue of inaccessibility to clean water and grieves the children suffering from arsenic poisoning and blue baby syndrome as a result of exposure to contaminated water, which can occur because of activities like mining, industrial processes, use of chemicals in agriculture, etc. The air is so polluted at certain places that it reminds one of "The Great Smog of 1952", a severe air pollution event wherein the people of London, England, started to suffer from respiratory illnesses after breathing in the thick smog. The poem accuses us of turning a blind eye to the state of the world and continuing to put our comfort first before anything else ~ "We are back in our homes, Switching on the ac".

Also, cigarettes are a major contributor to air pollution. They do not only damage our lungs they destroy the ecosystem. The dumping of cigarette butts in the soil and waters pollutes soil and waterways, exposing fish and land to dangerous situations.

It is weird how air-, branded sponsorship and fantasy-treated advertisements make smoking appear to be cool. We should remember that this smoke pollutes the air in disproportionate amounts on children, pregnant mothers, the elderly, and people with asthma or bronchitis.

So, without any further delay, we, as a society, must come together to repair and restore what has been lost for both our sake and the planet's. Similarly, the poem, "Healing nature's wounds" by Duane Anderson, conveys the message of striving for the Earth "until she is all right" once more.

Next in order, the poem "Finding the old river" by Hong Ngoc Chau talks about how the water bodies have lost their once innate purity due to an utter lack of care for the well-being of the Earth. The river in the poem has lost its beauty due to pollution, and no one wants to take responsibility for cleaning it, just like in the real world. The poem ends by telling the reader that the task falls upon them to make sure the beauty of nature is preserved.

Embodying a similar concern, Mark Saba's poem "High Tide" portrays how natural habitats that once offered a safe haven to animals and humans alike are now getting destroyed due to climate change. Irregular and heavy rainfall is causing water bodies to overflow and affect the local ecosystem in various ways. The lake in the poem once used to house ducks and turtles, but now the water has spilled into the surrounding area to the point that even the little bridge is submerged. The last sentence holds an ominous note as the poem expresses fear and uncertainty about how long people can stay "before the lake consumes everything". This shows how excessive rainfall not only affects the environment but also humans, as floods can have a devastating impact on their lives.

Now, this story, "Escape from the dark tunnel" by Mary Anne Zammit, starkly presents ecofeminist concerns. It details the heart-wrenching journey of an asylum seeker and depicts how climate change affects vulnerable sections, like women, more severely. It should be noted that climate change has disproportionately affected Africa. The continent is warming faster than the global average. It is experiencing deadly heatwaves, floods, and tropical cyclones, leading to loss of lives, property damage and displacement. Rise in sea level and acidic waters are affecting marine life and making it immensely difficult for people who rely on these water bodies as the only source of income. Selima, the central character of the story, was a resident of an African village who had to travel long distances on foot to acquire water and fuel for her household, like many other women. But due to extreme weather events, floods began to destroy several villages, including hers. After that, every day her difficulties only kept getting worse. Her situation exemplifies the challenges women face as a result of climate change in a patriarchal society. Since women are usually the ones tasked with the management of household duties, irregularities in weather and the effects of climate change considerably increase their burdens. Not to mention, the inability to follow through with the demands or expectations could render them victims of domestic violence. Further scarcity of resources could also aggravate gender-based violence. Faced with the dilemma of leaving her mother for a better future, Selima finally took the opportunity to leave Somalia and go to Europe, where she assumed she would have a safe and comfortable life. Like her, many other Somalis chose to go on this journey as there was no other option left for them. During the trip, Selima

was confronted by some men who claimed that she couldn't leave Libya without the proper documents, which they knew she lacked. The only way out, they said, was to use her body to pay, and when she refused, she was brutally assaulted. She says to the narrator that this was the price she paid for her freedom just like the other girls who were with her on this journey. Afterwards, they were taken to the port and shoved in a boat like animals, despite it not having enough space for all of them. They went hungry and thirsty for days. "But the scars of their journey ran deep, an enduring testament to the cruelty faced by climate refugees like Selima." From an ecofeminist perspective, this shows how climate change affects both nature and women as they are exploited by the hierarchies present in patriarchal society. Displacement also exposes women to human trafficking. The case of Selima demonstrates what we get to know of climate injustice. It is simply an indication of the common fight of those who have been displaced to other countries due to the change in climate, particularly to the socio-economically underprivileged groups. Women who belong to low-income families are the most vulnerable because the climate change only intensifies the existing social and gender disparities. She is one of the brightest representatives of the millions of women who have to face the challenge of climate-related misery.

Furthermore, the upper echelons of society are the least affected by climate change while being the biggest contributors to it. On the other hand, the vulnerable and marginalized communities bear the brunt of the climate crisis despite contributing the least to the phenomenon. These communities suffer due to factors like poverty, lack of access to resources like healthcare, adequate clean drinking water and food, etc. Indigenous communities that actively work to protect native plants and animals are profoundly affected by climate change, as their livelihoods and culture are dependent upon these natural resources.

Wars have continued to wound the planet for centuries. In the poem "Mega-lo-man-ic", Meher Pestonji spotlights man's craze for power. The poem says that political leaders wage wars to expand boundaries. "A bullet on the heart of our planet" refers to the long-term, sometimes irreversible effects of war on the environment. The old adage "history repeats itself" holds true to this day. "Megalomania of scientists" who conduct experiments without taking into account the impacts these would have on the environment, all in the name of progress. Corporations exploit natural resources for mass production, leading to huge amounts of waste generation and putting stress on non-renewable resources. Mass production for profit and capital accumulation is the basis of the economic system of capitalism, which significantly contributes to climate change. Capitalism heavily encourages the culture of consumerism to sustain itself. One can say that they are two sides of the same coin. For instance, fast fashion, a product of the capitalist economy, is both an example and a key component of consumerism. Additionally, the manufacturing process and the energy consumption are major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of global warming. Needless to say, mindless consumption drastically pollutes the environment. This poem brings to mind Ursula K. Le Guin's story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", which mirrors contemporary society's attitude towards the environment. The little child can stand as a metaphor for the Earth – pure and vulnerable. Like the residents of Omelas, whose survival depends upon the suffering of the child, humans flourish on the suffering of the Earth. We see only ourselves and nothing else. It is not even that we see the gradual extinction of the bees and the fireflies, nobody is really complaining.

Seasons are no longer keeping to their own natural rhythm. They simply come and leave whenever they please without paying attention to how farmers or people in drought-stricken regions are faring. Seasons have become unfamiliar and strange. The irregularity and rapid, drastic changes in the weather are causing natural disasters like floods, wildfires, droughts, which in turn cause crises like a shortage of food and water. Monsoon does not come anymore when the field has been ploughed and seeds sown. It arrives at its own convenience and wreaks havoc on the crops that “farmers [had] raised despite untimely rains”, causing their months of hard work to go in vain. This erratic behaviour of the weather is solely due to “Climate Change” - the title of the final poem of the book. Political leaders ignore the warnings of nature and turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the masses. The world can burn for all they care as long as their treasure-filled chests are intact.

It is widely known that deforestation is a key driver of environmental change. It leads to habitat loss for a plethora of living organisms. The poem “Fleeting Magic” by Mubida Rohman focuses on the disappearance of fireflies. Light pollution, a side effect of modernization, disrupts the natural mating process of fireflies, ultimately leading to population decline. A variety of insect species are either endangered or on the verge of extinction. Even if a single species goes extinct, it will disrupt the food chain and, in turn, negatively affect the ecosystem. Due to the interconnectedness of all biotic and abiotic components of nature, if a single element is affected, it will send ripples across the whole of the natural world. Her other poem, “A symphony of water, air, soil and life, a love song called – Dhara”, rightly says in the last line that the Earth is our shared sanctuary. So we must tend to it and protect it from anything that might cause harm.

Another poem of the anthology, “If only we had Plan/Earth B” by Psalmuel Benjamin Oluwasheun, bears a striking line, “But what do we tell the judge/After the murder of our mother?”, which implies that we are killing the Earth, the ultimate nurturer and provider. Children “drag their buckets across plains” for a drop of water. The poem “Too little too late” by Richard Rose asserts that whatever work is being done or whatever effort is being put in to combat climate change, it is too little, not even nearly enough, and with the repetition of the phrase “too late”, he means to say that we have been neglectful for far too long as nature will no longer hold back her fury.

In keeping with social evolution, dams came into existence. However, modern scientific research confirms that dams disrupt the aquatic ecosystem. They impede water flow and hamper fish migration, leading to population declines. These affect the biodiversity of not only the river or the lake but also the surrounding area. Moreover, decomposing organic matter in reservoirs produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. Dams are also responsible for floods that destroy the natural environment surrounding them and cause the displacement of communities. In the same vein, the process of mining profoundly impacts planetary health. It causes erosion, water and air pollution, sinkholes, habitat destruction and aggravates climate change due to carbon emissions during the process. The act of mining is closely tied to our consumerist society. According to The World Counts page, “We are already extracting 75 percent more than Earth can sustain in the long run.” The poem, “Event Horizon” by Samit Roy, warns us of the retribution awaiting us for the kind of treatment we meted out to the Earth. In consequence of our actions, we will face ‘Event Horizon’, i.e., a point of no return.

There is a common theme running through the pieces in the book that is the impact of construction on the environment. We are damaging this planet with the excuse of modernization. Due to the global rise in population and a need for urbanization, more buildings are being raised on the same grounds that once housed thousands of trees and a myriad of creatures. We lack a sense of responsibility not only towards the Earth but also towards our fellow humans. The story, “Lost Paradise” by Shrey Verma Rodricks, addresses this issue. The narrator’s mother says that one must be responsible while using natural resources, especially those that are finite like water, and also be aware of the needs of others. The narrator informs us that the Ganga, which was once the lifeblood of the area where she lived, has suffered significant water depletion and a reduction in water flow. The Ganges river dolphin has become an endangered species due to reasons like habitat loss caused by dam construction, river pollution, etc. The narrator also points out how garbage is just scattered everywhere nowadays. It reminds us to educate our children about the current state of the Earth and teach them to “reinvent, reuse, renew, and recycle.” Viewing this story from an ecofeminist lens, it can be inferred that women are the agents of change. According to the UN, since women are typically the ones on the frontlines of the climate crisis, they have learned how to adapt to its impacts. They hold a lot of knowledge regarding sustainable living, sustainable agriculture, making conscious use of resources, etc. The women in this story exemplify this notion. The narrator taught her children about the mindful use of natural resources. From the narrator’s mother to the narrator herself, they both had a great contribution in imparting knowledge to their children about how to navigate life in a world impacted by climate change, demonstrating the critical role women play in the fight against the climate crisis.

“A Townscape” by Shyamolima Saikia is “a satire on the effects of urbanization”. There are over-filled garbage dumps and surface drains everywhere, which are breeding grounds for disease-causing pests that pose a threat to the health of both humans and animals. A madman is introduced in the middle of the story who built a home on a heap of garbage alongside the footpath. But despite his perceived craziness, “he seemed to mock the insane ways of the so-called ‘sane’ people of the town as if criticizing their unmindful, materialistic, inhuman, and reckless attitude towards life.” Urbanization causes the number of vehicles in an area to increase, thus affecting air quality. It can lead to over-crowding and create resource scarcity, pollution, and improper waste management. Urbanization and consumerism are two of the leading causes of excess amount of waste generation. So, given the current trends, it won’t be too far-fetched to say that humans are treating Earth as one big dumpster.

The wealthy and the powerful, in a relentless pursuit of profit and gain, take the lives that once thrived. They don’t bother to look at their bloodied hands. There is an old Cree Indian proverb which acts as a warning to our highly materialistic society—“Only when the last tree has been cut down, the last fish been caught, and the last stream poisoned, will we realize we cannot eat money.” Humans are trying to turn this heavenly abode into the pits of hell, reap all the benefits and leave a dying Earth for the future generations. It is the need of the hour to instill climate consciousness into every individual.

Conclusion

So, this anthology *Dhara: A Paradise Worth Fighting For* seeks to raise awareness about the current climate crisis that is looming over us like a dark cloud of misfortune. By focusing on select pieces of writing within the book, this paper shows how climate change is a highly

concerning global issue in the present times and has multifaceted effects. This paper studied the variety of human activities that are the major causes behind environmental degradation and global warming, as presented in the anthology. The environmental as well as the socio-economic impacts of climate change have been discussed in this paper. It attempts to bring notice to how the vulnerable and marginalized communities of society are unfairly and disproportionately affected by climate change, raising concerns about climate injustice. Through these works, the book intends to send the message of sustainable living, urging us to rise to the occasion and fight for a green future, as there is no second Earth and ensuring that the future generation does not have to suffer for the choices we made.

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