

## Abstract

As recognition of the adverse impacts of climate change has grown, so too has the literature with a specific focus on the consequences of climate change. This thesis entitled “**Climate Change and Anthropocene: Reading Environmental Catastrophe in Select Fictions from South Asia**” is a study of the representation of climate change in select works of six contemporary novelists – Romesh Gunsekera, Amitav Ghosh, Shubhangi Swarup, Uzma Aslam Khan, Arif Anwar, and Minoli Salgado. The study will chart different consequences of climate change in their fictions and the idea of the Anthropocene they help to construct. This thesis engages with the Anthropocene from a literary point of view. The research is grounded in the premise that exploring the theme of climate change and its portrayal in literature will provide interesting perspectives, allowing readers to comprehend the far-reaching consequences of this pressing global issue on nations, society and culture.

The existing scholarly analysis of the selected novels is found to be lacking in terms of exploring the theme of climate change. Instead, scholars have predominantly focused on other topics related to political and other such concerns, thereby overlooking the possible significance of the climate change discourse inherent within these literary works. The study of the literary portrayal of climate change holds significant value as it provides insight into the author’s perspective on the scientific realities encircling this crisis. By exploring the writer’s cultural viewpoints, attitudes, ideologies, and skill in addressing this issue, we gain a deeper understanding of their artistic interpretation.

Numerous scholarly inquiries have been conducted to investigate the traces of the theme of climate change in literary works from various regions such as England, America, Latin America etc. However, it is noteworthy that there exists a significant research gap regarding the depiction of the climatic shifts specific to South Asia in contemporary English fiction authored by writers from the region. The growing concern about the issue of climate change necessitates undertaking such a study to initiate and introduce new topics for scholarly discussion. As discussed in the book edited by A. P. Mitra and C. Sharma, *Global Environmental Changes in South Asia: A Regional Perspective* (2010), that there is an increase of apprehension on a global scale which arises from the impact of human activities, which not only impede human progress

but also pose a significant threat to the planet earth as a whole. The radical development and the rise of high consumer aspirations in South Asian societies have spurred attention from scholars due to their rapid pace and global impact. This has led to a growing interest in understanding how these societies are addressing climate matters. In the realm of South Asian fiction, a burgeoning group of writers has begun to explore the concept of altered climatic conditions, incorporating it as a thematic element within their novels. These authors are engaging in experimental approaches, seeking to weave the effects of climate change into the narrative fabric of their works.

The study aims to explore the multifaceted intricacies associated with the concept of climate change, particularly within the context of South Asia. The primary focus of this research lies within the area of South Asian literature, with a specific emphasis on exploring the concept of climate change as it is portrayed within the cultural and societal context of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In this connection, this research is concerned with the study of various novels that explore the theme of climate change directly or obliquely, with a particular focus on works from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This study is also grounded on the premise that analysing the portrayal and a strong focus on the theme of climate disasters in literature can provide an itinerary for exploring the authors' efforts in moving beyond mere plot progression towards grappling with intricate issues of historical, societal and cultural significance. This research, thus, seeks to present a significant topic of academic discourse that has the potential to expand opportunities for future investigations into the distinctive challenges of the Anthropocene era. Additionally, it aims to lay the groundwork for contemplating adaptive strategies.

At the core of this analysis lies the author's deliberate utilisation of the perspective on ecological degradation as a means to carry forward their literary endeavours. This study analyses a set of novels such as Romesh Gunesequera's *Reef*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing*, Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing*, Arif Anwar's *The Storm* and Minoli Salgado's *A Little Dust on the Eyes*. These authors, through their literary endeavours have embarked upon a compelling exploration of the pervasive theme of climate change. Their purposeful intent lies in illuminating the plight of individuals and communities who find themselves subjected to adverse circumstances thereby evoking a sense of

loss, suffering and victimhood. In novels like Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, the consequences of climate change in the form of reef bleaching, coastal erosion and sea level rise have been represented respectively. Arif Anwar's *The Storm* vividly portrays the experiences of people preparing to face the worst kind of storm about to descend on Bangladesh – the Bhola Cyclone of 1970. Shubhangi Swarup's novel *Latitudes of Longing* explores the portrayal of nonhuman forces like tsunamis, earthquakes, cloud bursts, avalanches etc. as planetary agents that exert profound influence on the course of life on earth. Those forces play a pivotal role in shaping and ultimately dictating the trajectory of existence. Again, Minoli Salgado's *A Little Dust on the Eyes* is a haunting account about the Boxing Day Tsunami that hit Sri Lanka in the year 2004. Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* draws the reader's attention to the infringement of the habitats of indigenous Indus Valley fishermen by industrial corporate resulting in polluted and fissured landscapes.

The depiction of the experiences of fictional characters has provided authors with a scope to critique and interpret a range of more diverse themes such as transformation, migration, trauma etc. and through their critique they have contributed to a deeper understanding of the human condition. The manner in which these characters are subjected to calamitous circumstances serves as a poignant reflection on the human experience amidst environmental crisis, thereby eliciting a profound sense of empathy and fostering a heightened awareness that poses a considerable capacity to sway the readers. Despite some inherent constraints, the manner in which a protagonist perceives and articulates his/her encounters with climate-induced catastrophes offers novelists a unique opportunity to depict the conditions of crisis from a fresh perspective. This enables them to explore diverse viewpoints that contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of the ongoing struggle against nonhuman forces.

The central argument of this thesis posits that in the current era, there is a noticeable shift in literary practices towards a collective effort by authors to grapple with and come to terms with the endangered essence of the contemporary world. Fictional depiction of the theme of climate change serves as a response to the collective anxieties that permeate society regarding the uncertain future of our planet. Hence, this study draws on ecocriticism and other environmental theories to explore fictional expression of climatic concerns in a selection of novels. By examining the intricate relationship between human and natural systems, the study focuses on

specific environmentally destructive events depicted in these novels. Furthermore, it analyses how narratives surrounding climate change contribute to a deeper innovative understanding of the human condition in regions affected by these environmental changes. The identified key theme found in these selected novels exhibit a striking similarity, yet each individual work presents this theme in a distinct and unique manner.

The thesis begins with an introductory chapter that provides an overview of the prevailing genre of popular climate fiction. This introductory section aims to offer readers with a contextual understanding and broad outline of the existing literary landscape pertaining to novels based on the theme of climate change. In the second chapter, an analysis is conducted on a selection of seven novels that serve as the foundational basis for exploring the conceptual framework surrounding what is known as ecological and various other transformations within the context of climate change. In the third chapter of this research, the focus shifts towards the exploration of climate migration as a consequential manifestation of climate change. Through a meticulous examination of relevant literature and empirical evidence, this chapter seeks to deepen our understanding of the relationship between climate change and human migration. In the fourth chapter, a close reading of chosen novels has been undertaken to explore the portrayals of women victims and the challenges they encounter as a result of climate change and natural disasters. In the fifth chapter, it has been argued how psychological impacts of climate change affect the lives of individuals to a great extent. It is examined how South Asian novels have also dealt with the psychological concerns associated with climate change. In the concluding chapter, an attempt has been made to integrate together the diverse aspects that have been analysed in the previous chapters. The concluding chapter also discusses future possibilities of research taking into consideration the increasing manifestation of climatic events in the South Asian region.

Numerous scholarly studies have been done to explore the theme of climate change within the field of fictional literature, spanning various geographical locations and cultural contexts. However, it is worth noting that there exists a gap in the research concerning contemporary South Asian fiction and its exploration of this particular theme. This study not only provides a detailed critical analysis of how South Asian novelists have used the theme of climate change, but also highlights the catastrophic consequences and crises that have plagued the respective nations. While climate change undeniably exerts its influence on a global scale

and necessitates a fruitful response, it becomes imperative to emphasise the significance of the local context when exploring climate theme within the realm of fiction. The evocation of complexity, wonder, and the vast array of interconnections and diversity that arise from a specific location is essential in capturing the essence of a fictional work from that particular place. Thus, the study seeks to establish distinctive significance of analysing South Asian novels from the perspective of environmental issues, specifically climate change. This study is the result of the absence of extensive research in this area which adds to the importance of this research.