CHAPTER FOUR

Micro-Narratives of Climate Catastrophe: Locating Experiences of Women Victims

This chapter adopts a multifaceted and cross-disciplinary lens to examine the portrayal of female characters as victims of the climate crisis in the novels by Shubhangi Swarup, Amitav Ghosh, Uzma Aslam Khan, Arif Anwar and Minoli Salgado. In order to attain this nuanced multifaceted perspective, the present chapter directs its attention towards specific social/physical/economic/ temporal environmental context. From the discussion in the previous chapter it is clearly understood that there is no discrete period or place at which a certain group will feel the consequences of changing climate patterns. Instead, alterations in one facet of the environment are intricately linked with and exert influence upon other interconnected elements of the society and culture. Hence, it becomes crucial for literature also to not merely acknowledge the plight of the climate refugees troubling governmental agencies worldwide, but also to look into the disparities based on gender roles that prevail within the context of calamities. The novels selected for this study address the growing concern over gender bias prevailing in the society while considering women's exposure and adaptation associated with climatic changes. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt has been made to draw attention of the scholars and activists to the field by presenting interesting topics, opportunities for further research and challenges in the emerging field of climatology and literary studies. The novels under consideration show that their female characters like Piya, Riffat, Bebo, Honufa, Savi and Renu, who fall prey to social and cultural norms, are also disproportionately affected by climate change. The novels portray a variety of challenges that are brought on for female protagonists because of the unfavourable consequences of changing climate. These challenges cause the women to suffer, and in some instances, their ordeals even lead to their unfortunate deaths. The aim of this chapter in focussing on the hardships of female characters is to highlight the fact that the novels' authors have mainly paid more attention to describing the tribulations of male characters, while relegating the efforts of the women to the margins of the narratives. Nevertheless, in their respective narratives, the authors have provided a scope for a thought-provoking discourse by revealing the fundamental concepts that are associated with discussions surrounding gender and disaster.

The findings posit that the female characters in these novels require greater attention because of the prejudiced socio-cultural, economic, and political situations in which they find themselves struggling against adversities. This position can result in unanticipated outcomes due to women's sensitivity to the detrimental consequences of changing climate. Particularly in rural areas, women are among those who suffer the most due to calamities. While climate crisis has a damaging impact on both sexes, poor women are susceptible to it more acutely because they lack access to resources, regeneration and recuperation. Women are almost universally considered to be the primary caregivers and caretakers within the context of the family, which makes them more vulnerable to the effects of disasters such as earthquakes, land erosion, flood and storm. It becomes difficult for women to adapt to a new environment suddenly altered by natural forces, which also lead to 'ecological distress' in the aftermath of climate disasters.[1] Apart from such distress, women sometimes have no other choice but to venture out in search of food for their families and own sustenance. Both men and women experience migration and displacement on a fairly regular basis, which can result in both permanent and temporary displacement as the aftermath of a disaster. Outcomes of urban migration disproportionately affect women since they are more likely to survive in hazardous environments, such as those with poor hygiene and no access to safe drinking water. The deliberate indifference regarding their vulnerable state prevents them from being adequately represented in decision-making and restricts their political authority and recognition. Apart from physical harm, in the words of Dr. B. E. George Dimitrov (2019), there are also other kinds of vulnerabilities as "women face various emotional problems while there are natural disasters like fear, anxiety, disbeliefs, anger, frustrations, denial, irritation etc." (211). Psychological impacts of changing climate on female protagonists' psyche have been discussed elaborately in the fifth chapter of this thesis. The authors of the novels have emphasised how women are more prone to experiencing sudden shifts in mood or outbursts of anger in response to changing atmospheric events like heavy rain, humidity, or drought. However, every time such an event occurs, women continue to show how important their roles are in handling the catastrophe management cycles. Their traditional knowledge of risk management, information about their community, efforts to manage and protect natural resources and community networking make them significant players during and following calamities. A significant number of women do not have access to prior information regarding natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones and floods. Due to a lack of training in skills such as

climbing trees, swimming, and other coping mechanisms, the majority of women choose to remain inside their homes when a disaster strikes. During emergencies, life-saving abilities are usually attributed to men, while women are often marginalised when it comes to making decisions. Suffering from adverse health effects brought on by climate disasters is more common among women. The most significant effects on women are illness transmitted by contaminated water, undernourishment, mental disorders, anxiety and stress. Rural women are exposed to climate vulnerabilities because they have to collect and fetch water for the household. During the disasters they move to distant places to collect water for the family members by keeping their lives at stake. When there is a great deal of pressure to compete for natural resources like food, water and firewood, conflict and violent behaviour are likely to ensue for women. During these conflicts, women are subjected to gender inequalities; however, the majority of those who are victimised and killed while attempting to protect their families are men. The novels under study show that the females are often victims of the acts of violence such as sexual abuse, torture, and so on. The developed nations use global corporations to impose their globalisation principles on the less developed nations. These corporations are involved in activities such as mining and excavating, both of which have a negative impact on the environment and an indirect adverse effect on women. This is why, literary writers pose serious questions to the readers with a view to stir the conscience of the civil society stakeholders and government so that they step up to fight factors resulting in climate vagaries, protect the environment and put an end to women's victimisation. In short, contemporary literary practices promote feminist and ecologically-concerned approaches capable of tracking and enforcing a sound attitude for climate justice at every stage, ranging from local to global.

Although it would be an exaggeration to assert that these texts include representation of every single way in which women have been impacted by ecological degradation and climatic changes, a significant number of these issues have been portrayed in the course of these novels. As such, prior to delving into the accounts of women's victimisation in these novels, it is needed to look at the multidimensional effects associated with climatic shifts. A more nuanced socio-cultural construction of the phenomenon of climate crisis is revealed by the analysis of underrepresented perspectives as well as voices. In the realm of literature, this particular space provides a critical platform for the writers to look into the field of gender actions and policies. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to scrutinise long-standing customs and practices that were

once unquestioned and appeared static. Disproportionate representation of women among the world's vulnerable population puts them in the forefront of the critiques offered by ecofeminists. Structural constraints based on gender roles contribute to this inequality. Greta Gaard (2015) asserts: "[W]omen are indeed the ones most severely affected by climate change and natural disasters, but their vulnerability is not innate; rather it is a result of inequities produced through gendered social roles, discrimination, and poverty" (23). Gender roles limit the movements of women; impose responsibilities involved in production of food and the provision of care, and at the same time prevent women from getting involved in making decisions regarding climate change, emissions of greenhouse gases and choices concerning mitigation and resilience. Already burdened by poverty, females in developing countries experience the entire force of the catastrophes. This is because the shifts in ecological conditions introduce additional works for women to do, such as collecting fuel and firewood from faraway places, or gathering water, which are tasks that put an undue strain on their already massive familial obligations. It is often seen that women are about to remain hungry in the event that their households are experiencing food scarcity, which is already prevalent and might worsen due to the effects of rising atmospheric temperatures on agriculture. While they make sure the children and men in their households have food, they remain hungry themselves. As some regions face desertification, flood and other ecological hazards, these aspects result in an increase in male out-migration to urban establishments, where they are about to be offered the opportunity for economic gain and the return of wages to their families; however, these prospects are not always retained. As a result of male out-migration, more women are taking multiple household and agricultural responsibilities. Seasonal climate patterns, as well as natural disasters, pose a greater threat to these women's well-being because of their lack of financial support and other resources.[2] Most of the time warning information about the impending disaster is not provided to women because they largely remain confined to the household. When they want to escape, they have to think for their children and the elderly members of the family, whereas, men generally escape alone from their workspace outside. Due to their lack of training to fight calamities, women have to remain dependent on the male members who sometimes act as saviours. As a result of the death of the mothers of the household during calamities, there is an increase in the rate of infant deaths, the number of girls who are married off at a young age, more sexual assaults, women trafficking and child prostitution. The trouble exists because when it comes to major international negotiations

about global warming and its consequences, the focus is on the issue being a crisis of humanity, completely ignoring the relevance of gender roles. According to Greta Gaard (2015), "[G]ender-blind analysis leads to excluding data and perspectives that are crucial in solving climate change problems, while the issues that women traditionally organize around – environmental health, habitats, livelihoods – are marginalized by techno-science solutions which take center stage in climate change discussions and funding" (24). Gaard suggests that there has to be more fruitful study on culturally specific gender norms about masculinity and how these societal conceptions explain the active marginalisation of women from regional and international policy-making organisations. In this regard, Seema Arora-Jonsson (2011) also claims:

> The local forms of climate change need to be understood not only as effects but men and women's actions also as constitutive ingredients of climate changes. We need to be able to see women like men being responsible for as well capable agents in mitigating climate change without losing track of power relations involved, without having to categorise women as vulnerable or virtuous. (750)

In the novels, characters like Riffat, Honufa, etc. show their resilience in adverse situations to prove themselves such capable agents who can go beyond the power relations involved. However, it is observed that gender-biased norms promote increased victimisation, sexual abuse and the withdrawal of male members from the family during the climate crisis. In terms of exposure to changing climate, the gender gap is a double-edged sword: it reinforces pre-existing biases and also perpetuates inequalities. In the words of Joshua Eastin (2018):

> Disproportionate household and familial burdens and a relative lack of control over productive assets can enhance female vulnerability beyond that of men. In many cases, discriminatory legal institutions and social customs exacerbate these vulnerabilities by heightening exposure and undermining coping capacity. The result is that women are more likely to be impoverished than men, less capable of adapting to present and future climate change impacts, and less likely to participate in and contribute knowledge to policy-making processes that facilitate gender-specific adaptation or mitigation efforts. (289-290)

This above excerpt is relevant because the novels under study show that it can be difficult for women to obtain economic stability, enhance their productive capacity, and improve their health and well-being because of limited access to resources as well as increased exposure to natural disasters. While trying to adapt to adverse ecological conditions that reduce their means of subsistence and worsen resource shortages, women already confront more obstacles than males. Gender inequality in the distribution of labour, possession of assets, as well as persistently unjust social norms and legislation, limit their access to resources and fuel their oppression. Kyle Powys Whyte (2014) argues that the governments, NGOs, corporations and consumer groups must fulfil responsibilities towards indigenous women. Political responsibility to them may stem from the fact that they are disproportionately affected by authoritarian institutions that promote or tolerate economic marginalisation, racial and gender discriminatory treatment, exploitation, legal inequality, structural violence and silencing because of their gender. Women's capacities are generally diminished, and they are prevented from participating in important political processes. Because of these repressive societal systems, the effects of climate change are made much more disruptive. Indigenous women did not build institutions based on patriarchy, globalisation or imperialism, and so, these institutions do not provide any benefit to them. Politically responsible parties, including nation-states and organisations, must work to end prejudice against women. Indigenous women's wisdom can also be used to make sense of the concept of political responsibility (Whyte 610). Many indigenous women live in close proximity to the land, making them ideal observers of local symptoms of ecological changes and providing valuable insights into the best techniques for adaptation. Researchers and policymakers owe it to indigenous women to incorporate their insights in their planning and empirical endeavours. As described above, indigenous women should be provided with resources and aid by political institutions addressing climate change to avoid suffering impacts to which they contributed little but are particularly vulnerable.

In the aftermath of a climate disaster, women are typically expected to shoulder the responsibility of additional care, whereas, men typically resume their pre-disaster careers and responsibilities outside the home. Himangana Gupta (2015) argues that women will take on the burden of making adjustments despite the fact that their own involvement in greenhouse gas

emissions has been negligible. As this argument shows, women's societal positions, lower economic status, and gender inequality increase the likelihood that they will be negatively impacted by the increasing frequency of climatic disasters, even if they may not be at fault (Gupta 412). S. S. Yadav and Rattan Lal (2017) are of the view that urgent action is required to address the gender gap in decision-making by updating water, land rights, energy, forestry, and agricultural investment frameworks and policies to better account for women's priorities. Programs already in place at the local and state levels should be updated to include considerations for adapting to and mitigating the effects of the phenomenon. Efforts to combat climate change, empower women, and end extreme poverty must be coordinated and supported by multiple government bodies.

The authors of these selected fictions overtly reflect upon the needs of reducing poverty and adapting to climate change, especially for women. Indeed, the novels do not offer any concrete resolution to the problems they explore. By eschewing depiction of facile solutions, these novels encourage readers to actively engage in contemplating the uncertainties and nuances that are intrinsic to the human experience. In doing so, they have laid the groundwork for reflection on open-ended social issues that demand further attention to attain a consensus on improving the vulnerable status of women. To promote gender-responsive innovation in climate change adaptation strategies and to foster cooperation amongst implementing institutions, it is necessary to establish cross-sector, multi-stakeholder platforms. Karen J. Warren and Jim Cheney (1991) elucidate that for the purpose of critiquing and revising the overall idea of nature as well as the ethical parameters that govern the interactions between humans and the natural world, the centralisation of the voices of women is essential from both an epistemological and a methodological point of view (186). Contemporary challenges posed by climate change can be addressed more effectively if women's side of the story are heard and given due consideration while formulating policies. The novels selected in this chapter show various situations in which women find themselves fighting against the ill-effects of climate change. Women's efforts, if considered, can help illustrate the urgency of developing ways to reduce the impact on women.

In the novel *Latitudes of Longing* (2019) by Shubhangi Swarup, the character Chanda Devi was privileged enough to be born in a family where her grandfather insisted on her learning to swim, an act that would save her life during natural calamities brought on by a river near their

house: “Chanda Devi had grown up near a temperamental river, and her grandfather had insisted that every child learn how to swim” (Swarup 34-35). Her grandfather had been conceived in a house that the river would one day consume, and had been delivered during seasonal floods while the house was partially submerged. Therefore, he would ensure that each and every member of the family, regardless of age or gender, dove off a boat in order to pay a visit to the clan temple that was located at the bottom of the river. They were under the impression that if they did not, the river’s course would change and destroy their house. In this way Chanda Devi got the opportunity to learn swimming at a very early age. Most of the women, especially from poor households, do not get this opportunity to learn swimming and due to this they cannot survive during flood or tidal surges. Dr. B. E, George Dimitrov (2019) states, “In 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean an average of 77 percent casualties were women because they were not taught to swim where many drowned” (212). However, in the novel, a contrasting narrative unfolds as another female character named Bebo experiences a different fate, primarily influenced by the impacts of climate catastrophe. In an effort to appease the river Bagmati, Bebo’s parents named their firstborn after the river. Their house was the very last one to be flooded before the water completely took over. They were slum-dwellers who lived on the bank of the river Bagmati, and rains would cause them to lose either a tin wall or a tin roof each year. Bebo had no idea “When the calamity arrives, it will be wiser to swim than to run” (Swarup 216). A stray puppy that followed Bagmati or Bebo into the water was the first pet that she ever owned, but it drowned in the river. It was not the only misfortune that the river brought into her life. Due to the persistent flooding, her parents were forced to pay more attention to the shack they owned than they were to their children. Bebo, also known as Bagmati, was the eldest child, so she was the one who was sold as a domestic servant to a wealthy man. The master tried to assault her at every chance, whereas, the mistress paid no attention to it. Her parents considered it a ‘human calculation’ to give up one of their children so that they could focus on raising the other three. Chris J. Cuomo (2011) states that the adverse effects of changing climate have been observed to disproportionately affect certain groups within society: women, the poor and people of colour. In particular, ecofeminist thinkers and authors have investigated the misogyny, masculinism, anthropocentrism and racism that lie at the root of the cultures that are responsible for and have facilitated environmentally harmful forms of progress and development. Bebo’s father had to sell his eldest child due to the family’s extreme financial distress during the flood.

Through the act of selling Bebo into servitude, her parents have reaffirmed the disheartening reality that climate-induced hazards may contribute to the exploitation of young girls, ultimately resulting in the loss of their agency and subjecting them to the whims of insensitive decisions made to reduce the family's financial strain, even at the expense of their well-being. Consequently, Bebo finds herself stripped of everything she holds dear, becoming a hapless victim of cruel circumstances that demand her self-sacrifice. Even though Bebo had been offered as a sacrifice, she refused to wash the menstrual blood or others' dirty dishes. So, she decided to run away. She was forced to sleep on the streets of Thamel until she was able to find work in a dance bar. She took the name Bebo and became a waitress in the dance bar. After getting a promotion she could become a prostitute or a dancer. In that dance bar, Bebo ultimately started living a life like a prostitute. Her condition can be described as "She was lucky to have college-girl looks", her fat American customer commented, "the look customers wanted as they lusted after upmarket girls who hung out in malls and sashayed through coffee shops. It would bring her greater luck as a whore than as a wife" (Swarup 218). Bebo gradually realised that she had become more impoverished than the family and home she had left behind.

In another instance, Bebo tells another character from the novel, Thapa, that she hates the rain. She hates it more than winter, although the season dries her skin into parchment. She knows that the harsh sun is the biggest enemy of college-girl skin. In the rain her skin retains its elasticity and fairness. It is, however, her greatest enemy. She says, "The rain makes me angry, even as I laugh. It hurts me. I can't do anything. I am trapped by the rain. After a while, it bores me" (Swarup 210). Extreme mood-swings brought on by the change in weather conditions and seasons lead to her miserable mental agony. Bebo wants to end her life because she is fed up with her current situation.[3] She has become so bored and dissatisfied that she cannot see a way out. The rest of the world is foreign to her as she has never ventured out of Kathmandu. She has never visited any sea or waterfall, only witnessed the dirty, brown, garbage-dump of a river. Bebo's contemplations about death were prompted by the hardships of her life which has its origin in a climate disaster like flood. Her plight shows how climate change induced hazards like flood have had a significant impact on her life, transforming her from a young innocent girl into a working prostitute.

Swarup shows that other aspects of the changing environment also have detrimental effects on women. After her first pregnancy, Chanda Devi suffers from anaemia. She becomes very pale. The only doctor in Port Blair, a senior English gentleman, informs her husband Girija Prasad, "The water in the islands reduces the iron content of the blood somehow" (Swarup 50). On Ross Island, the majority of the women and children, as well as some of the males, met their deaths in this manner. They succumbed to an unspecified illness referred to as death by paleness, which was subsequently shortened to 'pale death' for telegrams. It was nothing but a case of anaemia. The water and air of the place did not suit Chanda Devi and after the pregnancy they made her more vulnerable. The doctor informs her husband, "Miscarriages are common. As common as childbirths in these islands" (Swarup 54). Chanda Devi loses her first child, a stillborn boy, through her miscarriage. Degraded resources affect women's physical condition. Chanda Devi's miscarriage is a sign of the risk women face in the face of diverse environmental catastrophes and fragile conditions of living. This unprecedented tragedy provides a hint at women's usual sensitivity and failed coping initiatives as they react to sudden and gradual environmental changes. These also provide the scope to examine, over the course of time, the individual and organisational resources that women in affected communities have at their disposal as agents of change, as well as the obstacles that stand in the way of their recovery. When a vegetarian Chanda Devi develops anaemia, Girija Prasad opts to treat her with fresh tomato, spinach and beetroot juice along with a spoonful of black sesame seeds rather than the doctor-recommended red meat and chicken soup. He believes that there is nothing in nature that cannot be treated by nature itself. Even after all these attempts, Chand Devi's health does not improve during her pregnancy because the weather of the island is not conducive to a healthy pregnancy. Through the portrayal of Chanda Devi and Bebo's sufferings, Swarup seems to develop a comparative approach to record historical trends in gender specific victimisation in order to explore particular environmental factors that put women in danger in different settings.

Rose Mary, a Karen woman in the Andamans, is also a victim of climate change much like the rest of the women protagonists who have fallen prey to its effects. In the novel, the author mentions the 1942 earthquake which was of such magnitude that it resulted in a grave transformation of the day, plunging the surroundings into a state of abrupt obscurity by a dense shroud of dust particles in the atmosphere (Swarup 150). Once the dust cleared up, the Japanese forces had successfully established their dominion over the Andaman Islands by seizing control

from the British. They were allowed to live in peace as long as the indigenous people continued to construct and cultivate for the imperialists. All hell broke loose when the harvest was completely destroyed by a cyclone. Constipation became a common problem for the Japanese because of their strictly maintained diet consisting of fish, vegetables and snails. As a result, the entire male population within the province found themselves compelled to engage in cultivation to accelerate the process of agriculture. The Burmese people endured a period of persecution after a number of them were discovered to be engaged in the act of theft from the storehouse, while the Karens were left alone. The individuals of lower social standing were captured and subjected to physical punishment coinciding with the constant beat of imperialistic slogans. They were prompted to repeat the slogans. If they were unable, they were severely beaten again. Instead of going to work, Rose Mary's husband resorted to excessive drinking at home. He started physically abusing Rose Mary one night over the insignificant matter of not finding pickle while eating. She was not shocked to see that men can be violent toward women. She remarks, "The worth of a man, her grandmother would often say, was judged by his ability to hunt, build a roof and beat his wife" (Swarup 151). Throughout history, women have been subjected to the constraints of sexist ideologies which have limited their freedom of thought and action. Women have been enslaved by these prejudiced ideologies, which have dictated their roles and expectations within the society. The patriarchal society, with its rigid power structures and hierarchical systems, has marginalised women and perpetuated their subjugation. Rose Mary also started preparing herself for a frequent slap or kick. Following each forceful blow, a fresh mark of wound appeared on her body: "An imprint of his teeth below her collarbone, like a displaced string of pearls. A bruise on her hip, placed aesthetically like a flower. Scratches on her cheek and neck, as if she'd been grazed by a palm frond. And the Japanese slogans – the only time he spoke to her in that language was when he beat her, shouting out imperial slogans" (Swarup 151). The effect of the cyclone and the consequent torture on her husband resulted in physical violence inflicted on Rose Mary.

Rose Mary's experiences make her acquire knowledge about the similar fate of another woman standing in a queue in front of her before the Japanese army. She was also frequently beaten by her husband. Out of curiosity, Rose Mary inquired about the husbands' behaviour of the women of the Andaman Island's indigenous naked clan. Hearing a negative response astonished her: "They don't. Beating a woman is a sign of civilization, like wearing clothes"

(Swarup 152). A number of studies have shed light on the various factors that may contribute to an increase in the rate of violent acts inflicted upon women following climate-induced calamities. In the context of the effects of climate disasters like flood on Bangladesh, Margaret Alston (2015) states, "These include men venting their frustrations on women due to increased psychological stress and lack of employment, and punishment for not managing the increased workload or resources, not serving food on time and their inability to procure relief" (156). The earthquake and the cyclone changed the lives of the women living in the islands forever. Rose Mary's condition shows that calamities can have adverse effects on people as they prompt domestic violence against women. Men are rendered jobless due to climate hazards and as a result they spend more time at home often drinking. Climate change is also a great concern for women's health and a growing number of physical assaults by their poor and jobless husbands.

A lack of extensive research on the above mentioned issues has prompted the adoption of a gender-informed lens while analysing Amitav Ghosh's novel. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) written by Ghosh focuses on the consequences of changing climate on the Sundarbans and its destitute inhabitants living in its islands. To situate the question of women in the broader context of an environmental issue like the climate crisis, it is crucial to first contextualise the setting's relevance. The Sundarbans, a vast archipelago, stretches for "almost three hundred kilometres, from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 6). As a result of rising sea levels, the islands of the Sundarbans are vanishing. Additionally, the increasing salinity of the soil and water poses a significant risk to the well-being of mangrove forests as well as to the soil properties and crops. In the Sundarbans, there are no boundaries that can separate brackish water from freshwater or rivers from the sea. With a reach extending several hundred kilometres inland, the tidal forces exert enormous influence on the surrounding landscape. Each day, numerous acres of forest succumb to the fluid depths, only to resurface hours later. The threatening strength of the currents is such that it exerts a transformative influence on the islands, causing them to undergo frequent reshaping: "The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily – some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 7). The novel does make reference to the abundant biodiversity of the Sundarbans, specifically when the marine biologist, Piyali Roy or Piya remarks, "[T]here were more species of fish in the Sundarbans than could be found in the whole

continent of Europe. This proliferation of aquatic life was thought to be the result of the unusually varied composition of the water itself" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 125). Therefore, the region possesses an irreplaceable and unique value from an ecological perspective. The tides have a significant impact on the landscape and cause it to continually change from day to day. Because of the strong tides and currents that flowed around Lusibari; the island did not have any docks or jetties as it was not possible to build permanent structures there due to the nature of the waters. Tidal surges, floods and cyclones are very common in the Sundarbans. To make readers familiar with the prevailing ecological situation, Ana Agostino and Rosa Lizarde (2012) state:

> Some of the events associated with climate change include the rise of sea level with all the risk this implies to coastal populations, changes in weather patterns with frequent occurrence of more intense and extreme events, loss of species and ecosystems, water pollution and so on. All these events have had a differentiated impact as a result of different factors including gender, geography, ethnicity and income group. Women are particularly affected because they are the largest percentage of the poor population (it is estimated that women account for 70 percent of the poor people) and they also face gender inequalities such as: lack of access to resources, limited participation in decision-making processes, more dependence on natural resources and greater caring responsibilities. (92)

The excessive reliance of natives on the natural resources found within the Sundarbans engenders difficulties in the aftermath of calamitous events. The novel shows that hunger and disaster are a way of life in Lusibari. The land's salt content has not completely been drained away despite decades of settlements. The soil produced bad crops and was not suitable for year-round farming. The majority of households only had one meal per day. In spite of all the efforts that had been put into the embankments, there were still occasional vulnerabilities as a result of inundation and cyclones as each instance of inundation brings about a significant disruption in the land's productive capacity, leading to a prolonged period of infertility that spans many years (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 79). The majority of the settlers in one of the islands called Lusibari came from agricultural backgrounds and the enticement of open land for farming attracted them towards the region. They were compelled to turn to fishing and hunting to satisfy their basic

needs, which often led to terrible consequences. Women were left to handle the responsibilities of running the household while their male counterparts were required to spend more time away from home in order to ensure the financial stability of the family.[4] A great number of people perished as a result of drowning, and an even greater number were eaten by estuarine sharks, tigers and crocodiles. In the Sundarbans, both humans and non-human species experience hunger, which is a part of daily life. Thousands risked their lives in order to gather very little firewood, honey, wax and sour *kewra* fruit.

The novel effectively communicates that the people of the Sundarbans are compelled to resort to scavenging in the wilderness as a means of managing the scarcity of food caused by unfavourable ecological circumstances. Kusum, one significant female character in the novel from another island of the Sundarbans, has witnessed her father die while foraging for firewood in the forests of the islands. Upon his arrival from a prolonged fishing expedition, Kusum's father harboured a desire to eat to his heart's content at home. However, the stock of firewood became exhausted in the middle of cooking, and he quickly left the house, promising to return shortly with the required firewood. After leaving the house, Kusum accompanied her father to the riverbank, where she waited for him to finish rowing across the water to reach the forest on the other side of the bank. It usually did not take long to go that far. But, that day it took significantly more time because of the strong wind that was blowing in from the distant shore. Then Kusum noticed a tiger flashing black and gold coat and was trying to stalk her father. As soon as Kusum let out her first scream, her mother along with other residents of the hamlet reached the embankment immediately. The strong wind's capricious nature was revealed as it drifted apart from its expected course and blowing in an unfavourable direction. So, Kusum's father, who was supposed to hear her warning scream, could not hear it. While the men ran to launch their boats, the women started making a great deal of noise by yelling and thumped on cooking utensils to warn her father about the approaching danger. Despite all these, the wind was against them, and Kusum's father on the other bank failed to hear them. The tiger was an expert at overcoming the effects of the wind. People on the other side of the river were helpless in the face of the fierce wind, and the tiger knew it. Eventually, after killing Kusum's father, the animal carried his body away into the woods.

After this tragic incident, Kusum's mother found herself devoid of any viable means of sustenance. Compelled by the circumstances, she searched for an employment within the urban landscape. This decision, however, demanded leaving behind her daughter in solitude. Many types of individuals attempted to exploit Kusum. Even more disturbing was the fact that someone was attempting to sell her. A man named Dilip Choudhury, a landowner from Satjelia island, offered Kusum's mother to engage her in a suitable profession in the urban centre. Her mother accepted Dilip's proposal since he had already found work for other poor women in the island. She faithfully followed Dilip and went to Calcutta, leaving Kusum in the care of her relatives. After dropping off her mother, Dilip returned to Kusum and informed her that her mother was doing domestic work for a decent family and that she would be in contact with Kusum very soon. After about a month had passed, Dilip paid a visit to Kusum and disclosed to her that her mother, in a written correspondence, had asked him to escort her to Calcutta. But, Horen, a fisherman from Kusum's village and her distant relative, came to know about Dilip's plan. He knew Dilip had connections with a gang that trafficked women. Horen also understood that her mother might have found herself captive in a brothel located somewhere in Calcutta. When it came to Kusum, Dilip placed an even higher value on her than he had done on her mother because: "young girls like her were known to fetch large sums of money" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 100). If Dilip would have become successful in his plan, Kusum would find herself in the midst of Calcutta's notorious areas, or perhaps in the even more dire circumstances of certain prostitute-quarter in Mumbai. Children, and girls in particular, are subjected to physical, verbal and sexual assault and they are also at risk of being kidnapped and sold into slavery. Horen rescued Kusum from the trap and placed her under the protection of a union that is exclusively managed by women in the locality of Lusibari. The hardship experienced by Kusum throughout her life can be seen as bearing some resemblance to the condition portrayed by Shubhangi Swarup in the character of Bebo. Their status as women leads them both to experience gendered vulnerability due to the adverse environmental conditions that affect their lives directly or obliquely. In this regard, Elaine Enarson's (1998) statement bears relevance as:

> Gendered vulnerability does not derive from a single factor, such as household hardship or poverty, but reflects historically and culturally specific patterns of relations in social institutions, culture and personal lives. Intersecting with economic, racial and other

> inequalities, these relationships create hazardous social conditions placing different groups of women differently at risk when disastrous events unfold. (159)

The tragedy that befell Kusum's father shows that the poor inhabitants of the Sundarbans region persistently find themselves vulnerable to the whims of climatic adversities and other dire circumstances. They are unable to engage actively in activities related to cultivation because the land has become infertile as a result of flooding and intrusion of saltwater. The male members of the households are living in abject poverty for a significant amount of time, and so, they are compelled to put their lives in danger by travelling to the nearby forests in search of food or firewood. When the male guardians of the households are not present, the women and girls are put in an increasingly wretched position.

The novel depicts another mishap with a woman who became a victim of physical violence. She found herself in a distressing situation when her intoxicated father-in-law returned home one night during her husband's absence. Her father-in-law, being drunk, stepped into their bedroom to find her sleeping with her children. He had tried to pull the sari off of her while holding a sharp machete close to her throat in front of her children. He had almost severed her left hand's thumb with the machete when she attempted to fight him off. He received severe burns after she threw a kerosene lamp at him, setting fire to his *lungi*. Despite the fact that her only effort was attempting to protect herself and her children, she was thrown out of her marital home. This incident reveals that women of the poor households are subjected to physical assaults by other men because of the absence of the families' head male members. Despite numerous instances in society that clearly prove the violation of women's rights and feelings of self-worth, it is unsettling to observe that they are not afforded the primary position in the public discourse surrounding climate change. Heather Boetto and Jennifer McKinnon (2013) state,

> [V]iolence against women in rural areas is invisible to the community and to policy-makers and […] reporting of experiences of violence by women in rural areas is likely to be lower due to a variety of factors, including: lack of access to police and support services; ambivalence towards external interventions; a more conservative culture; and shared friendship networks between the police and male perpetrators. These social and

> cultural aspects of rural lifestyle exacerbate the inequalities experienced by rural women, and impede the opportunity for rural women to actively contribute to the climate change debate. (236)

Boetto and McKinnon further added that in times of crisis, rural women face dual disadvantages, one stemming from the inherent patriarchal features of rural living and the other arising from extreme circumstances such as poverty, poor housing and domestic violence (245). These circumstances render women susceptible to the impacts of changing climate, in particular because they limit their options and prevent them from seizing the chances to improve their ability to adjust to the gender-inclusive impacts of the climate crisis. There are many such incidents evident in the Sundarbans because women lack the means to support themselves. Their reliance on their fate can lead to misfortunes at times. They are forced to rely on male members due to long standing cultural norms. The novel shows that cyclones, floods and sea level rise brought on by anthropogenic global warming and climate change affect coastal communities disproportionately because the natural hazards devastate agricultural land and fisheries, also putting women at greater risk of harm because of their vulnerable state.[5]

The author draws reader's attention to another strange socio-cultural custom that is common among the women of the Sundarbans and that serves to characterise the position of women in that society. Nilima Bose, one of the significant female characters in the novel, had only been in Lusibari for a couple of weeks when she made the startling discovery that a remarkably significant number of women in the area were wearing the attires of widows. Their entirely white saaris with barely any other adornment, such as bangles or vermilion, made these women easily identifiable. Widows were all too commonly encountered by the *ghats* or at the wells. Nilima further investigated the matter and found that in these islands, young girls got married with the painful belief that they would become widows in their early twenties or if luck favours a little then in thirties. It was customary for the wives of the men in the community to dress in clothes more befitting a widow while their husbands went fishing. They would remove their bangles and wash their vermilion off their foreheads. They would also set aside their marital reds before changing into white saris. It appeared as though they were making an effort to avert further misfortune by subjecting themselves to it over and over again. Nilima could not

help but wonder if this was just their way of getting themselves mentally prepared for something that they were well aware was inevitable. Nilima was astonished by the amplitude of these deeds because of their impact on young women. For her sister, her mother and her friends, the act of consciously removing these marital symbols would have been analogous to wishing their husbands' deaths. Even she, who thought herself to be a radical woman, could not even conceive of the idea of breaking her marital bangles in the presence of her husband. This custom became widespread as a result of the unpredictability of life in the Sundarbans: "But for these women the imagining of early widowhood was not a wasted effort: the hazards of life in the tide country were so great; so many people perished in their youth, men especially, that almost without exception the fate they had prepared themselves for did indeed befall them" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 81). It was truly the case that the widows were not condemned to an eternity of mourning in this marginal Hindu society; on the contrary, they were allowed to get married again if they were able enough. However, where there were so few men of age that was suitable for marriage, this provision was mostly meaningless. If the husbands had been afforded the opportunity to persist in their traditional agricultural practices in a stable climate, rather than embarking on activities outside of their area, it is conceivable that women, too, would have enjoyed a life of ease and contentment. Even more than on the mainland, Nilima discovered that being a widow in this region often meant enduring a lifetime of dependency as well as years of exploitation and abuse. Nirmal, Nilima's husband, was adamant that the widows of workers should not be referred to as 'a class' because in his opinion, "to speak of workers' widows as a class was to introduce a false and unsustainable division" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 81). To change the vulnerable condition of the widowed and poor women of the Sundsarbans, Nilima founded the island's 'Mohila Sangathan' – a women's union, and ultimately the Badabon Development Trust. Her Badabon Development Trust worked towards improving the lives of the disadvantaged and exploited women in the surrounding area. Nilima, being a woman with a radical worldview, was able to accurately predict the mistreatment of women that was prevalent in the society that existed on the islands in the Sundarbans. Nilima's contributions to the community offered them a glimmer of optimism that they could have a more productive life.

In addition to native women, Piya, an outsider conducting research on marine mammals in the Sundarbans, also encountered difficulties due to the shifting climate. The Sundarbans is home to two different kinds of river dolphins- the Gangetic and the Irrawaddy. Piya was unable

to spot any river dolphin at the initial stages of her survey due to the fact that their course of migration changed due to the seasonal changes: "the cetacean population has kind of disappeared from view. No one knows whether it's because they're gone or because they haven't been studied. There hasn't ever been a proper survey" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 11). She aspired to chart the paths taken by Orcaella and reveal their patterns of behaviour and migration. With the help of an illiterate young fisherman, called Fokirchand Mandol or Fokir, she decided to survey the dolphin's pool and their daily migration. She noticed that due to the changes in tidal surges, the dolphins of the Sundarbans behaved in a strange way. They were frequently changing their habitat according to the seasonal changes. The freshwater dolphins were noticeably less sociable and more possessive of their territory. During periods of abundant precipitation, characterised by heavy rain and subsequent rise in river levels, the dolphins exhibited a remarkable behaviour by venturing into distant territories. This behaviour entailed pursuing their prey into minor tributary waters and even venturing into inundated fields of rice. During the dry phase, characterised by a decline in river levels, a contrasting condition surfaced as "they would make their way back to certain spots. These were usually deep-water 'pools', created by quirks of geology in the riverbed, or by the water's patterns of flow (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 123-124). Piya had discovered that the same population of dolphins displayed a consistent pattern of returning to the same pool across multiple years. However, it was observed that with the change in seasons, they undertook extensive migrations downstream spanning hundreds of kilometres. On the other hand, the waters of northern Australia and southern Asia were reliably believed to contain several thousands of the coastal variety of dolphins as they preferred the saltwater. Another group of dolphins was more commonly found in freshwater and river ecosystems. This is due to their choice of habitat. Piya travelled to the Sundarbans, driven by the presumption that any Orcaella she might spot within its confines would invariably belong to the coastal species. Given the salinity of the waters in this region, she reasoned that this assumption was only reasonable. Nevertheless, what she noticed there made her question whether or not she had made a mistake somewhere. She observed that, contrary to their usual behaviour, a group of coastal Orcaellas was gathering around a pool. Only the river dolphins usually behaved like that. On the other hand, river dolphins could not be found in this specified location either due to the salinity of the water, which rendered it unsuitable for their habitation. She was unable to detect the reason behind the odd behaviour of the Orcaella in the Sundarbans. Piya had the thought pop into her

head that it was possible that the dolphins had uncovered an innovative strategy for modifying their behaviour in order to accommodate the tidal ecology. This hypothesis raised many questions:

> What for instance were the physiological mechanisms that attuned the animals to the flow of the tides? Obviously, it could not be their circadian rhythms since the timing of the tides changed from day to day. What happened in the monsoon, when the flow of fresh water increased and the balance of salinity changed? Was the daily cycle of migration inscribed upon the palimpsest of a longer seasonal rhythm?. (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 125)

Piya's survey took a completely different direction due to the odd behaviour of the dolphins according to the changes in climatic conditions. Without the assistance of Fokir, Piya would not have been able to locate the dolphins due to the declining population of Orcaellas in the waters of the Sundarbans. In addition to the high-tech equipment she used to carry out the survey, a native Fokir's extensive knowledge of the rivers helped a scientist like her. Being an Indo-American, she did not know the local language. It was not easy for her to communicate with a native illiterate fisherman like Fokir. In spite of this, her femininity endowed her with the capacity to establish effective communication with Fokir, primarily with the help of physical signals or expressions and the flashcards she possessed. She was concerned about the gradual disappearance of the dolphins in that area. Nirmal's conjectures pertaining to the deteriorating ecological conditions in the Sundarbans align closely with the discoveries made by Piya. Commenting on the condition of the birds and fish of the area, Nirmal wrote in his notebook: "The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take, to submerge the tide country? Not much – a minuscule change in the level of the sea would be enough" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 215). Anthropogenic climate change not only has an effect on human life, but also has a significant effect on the lives of non-human species. According to Piya, "When marine mammals begin to disappear from an established habitat it means something's gone very, very wrong" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 266-267). This 'wrong' can be understood as a manifestation of the widespread consequences resulting from the degradation of the environment on a global scale.

Piya's scientific and rational mind prompted her to consider the plight of non-human species that will also be impacted by climate disasters and take action on their behalf. Val Plumwood (2002) suggests that reconsidering rationalist culture and moving toward democratic economies and modes of science are essential for the future of humanity (239). Human/nature dualisms that refute our ecological membership and embodiment in the global ecological society must be dismantled throughout the dominant culture if cultural change is to be successful in the long term. In order to cultivate an interactive and place-sensitive culture that is capable of situating humans ecologically and nonhumans ethically, we need to combat those counterproductive forms of reason that radically separate us from the non-human realm and obscure or subside our ecological participation and vulnerability. Plumwood's primary focus is based on the communication of a critical perspective regarding the prevailing dualistic structure of nature and reason within modern society. These structures perpetuate the subordination of nature, particularly in its domains of the human body and non-human life, by emphasising reason as superior. Consequently, this creates 'polarising metaphors' and interpretations of these elements, which in turn contribute to various forms of social division within the dominant culture (Plumwood 19). These structures have the tendency to diminish the significance and involvement of women, the physical body, material existence, and the interconnectedness with the non-human world. By acknowledging the parallel vulnerabilities of women and non-human life forms, we can begin to address any crisis at hand and strive towards a more inclusive and equitable approach to safeguarding both women and non-human life forms. Eradicating the fundamentally unfair distribution of resources and power is required in order to encourage democratic and corrective forces. It is important to keep in mind that the origin of many irrational misrepresentations can be traced back to the privileged denial and downplaying of the fundamental collaborative and nurturing roles that excluded and devalued groups, especially women, play in society. Women are particularly affected by this denial. Our best chance of success is to work toward altering the foundations of democracy in order to create more completely egalitarian forms of democratic economies and cultures. This will allow for the fair allocation of advantages and disadvantages across all segments of the populace in the society. It is imperative that we work toward more equitable inputs in the process of trying to steer the ship, and that we do so in ways that are reasonable for everyone. We must have structures of working life that encourage us to take care of one another, as well as the natural world. Piya and Fokir's

unusual bonding offers a captivating glimpse of their work ethics. It shows Fokir's unwavering commitment to safeguarding Piya's life, even at the cost of his own. During the course of their journey, tragedy struck when Fokir lost his life attempting to protect Piya from a cyclone. After the disaster, Piya wrote a series of letters detailing the events of the cyclone and the unfortunate demise of Fokir. Several of Piya's acquaintances considered the cause and initiated a chain letter to solicit donations to provide financial assistance to Moyna, Fokir's wife and their very young son Tutul. They could not have dreamed of a better response than what they got. They would be able to purchase their own home with the money, and Tutul could possibly even use some of it for his college education. Due to the cyclone, Piya lost most of her collected data from her research. But, she prepared a report on her dolphin sighting in that particular area which sparked a lot of interest among the conservation and environmental groups that offered her for funding. She had the intention of starting a project that would involve consulting the local fishermen who lived in that region. She was unwilling to engage in any project that would impose the responsibility of conservation on individuals who were least capable of bearing it. Piya was eager to conduct her next research project with the support of the Badabon Development Trust, hoping that the Trust would also reap benefits from the sharing of funds. Her intention was to rent the top floor of the Trust's building to set up a data bank and a small office for proper accounting for the funds. She decided to engage Moyna for a part-time job in her office when she was not on duty at the hospital as a nurse. In this way Moyna would have access to an additional source of income, and Piya was confident that she would be able to successfully handle the work. Piya also desired to learn Bangla from Moyna in exchange for some English. Characters like Piya and Nilima, as well as the actions taken by them, portray that women are capable of improving the miserable conditions of other socially backward women if they make an attempt to do so and put forth utmost effort. They may be able to challenge the society's longstanding, grossly sexist norms and advocate for the well-being of impoverished women in climate change affected areas with their radical point of view.

In the novel *Gun Island* (2019), Amitav Ghosh reintroduces the readers with the characters like Nilima Bose, Piyali Roy and Moyna Mandol from *The Hungry Tide* along with a new band of characters. In *Gun Island,* Nilima takes the initiative to keep a record of the Shrine of Gun Merchant for the Goddess Manasa Devi because she knows that frequent cyclones and sea level rise would one day destroy the shrine in the Sundarbans. For her "the temple might be

an important historical monument" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 18). She even wrote to the Archaeological Survey of India describing the declining condition of the shrine but they showed no interest. So, she at last urged another character named Dinanath Datta to visit the Dhaam or Shrine of Goddess Manasa Devi. At first glance, Nilima understood that Dinanath's interest in antiquities would lead him to the shrine, where he would contribute to the effort to document the details of this rapidly disappearing shrine. Nilima's efforts show when confronted with adversity, women understand the risk and usually make right choices in order to safeguard not only their families but also other things of great importance. Later, as predicted by Nilima, the shrine got swept away by a bad storm.

In his novel *Gun Island*, Ghosh has again brought attention to the issue of a rise in women trafficking that has been aggravated since the climate disaster Cyclone Aila in 2009. Moyna told Dinanath about the catastrophic impacts of this calamity that struck the Sundarbans. Compared to previous cyclones, this one had a very different course of destruction. Cyclone Aila's prolonged impacts were far more catastrophic than those of previous disasters: "Hundreds of miles of embankment had been swept away and the sea had invaded places where it had never entered before; vast tracts of once fertile land had been swamped by salt water, rendering them uncultivable for a generation, if not forever" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 48). Because of the region's extreme poverty, the Sundarbans had always been a centre of attraction for human traffickers, but never in the numbers that have been witnessed since Cyclone Aila. Flocks of them had arrived taking women hostage and transporting them to faraway brothels. A significant number of those who left were never seen or heard from again. Along with the boys, the girls were also using unethical means such as borrowing money and engaging in theft in order to compensate the middlemen for their roles in securing employment opportunities for them at another place. Some of them even slipped across the border into Bangladesh, and paid the traffickers to transport them to countries like Indonesia or Malaysia on boats. Tipu, Moyna's own son, became a victim of human trafficking. If Piya and Cinta, the Italian historian, had not assisted Moyna in locating her son's journey to Venice and rescuing him, she was on the verge of losing him forever. Moyna lost her husband, Fokir, and was left alone to provide for her son, Tipu. With the help of Piya, she did her best to give a good upbringing and education to him. Tipu refused to get education in the United States under the guardianship of Piya. When he was of an age to go to college, Tipu also refused to stay in the Sunderbans due to the lack of prospect in a place which

is too prone to climate disasters like flooding, cyclonic storms and rising sea levels. He gradually became a stranger to his mother. As it has been discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, Tipu deceived both his mother and Piya and illegally migrated to Venice. Piya, Cinta and Dinanath rescued Tipu and his partner Rafi from Venice.

Moyna believed that the only way for young people to avoid suffering was to receive an education. However, the difficulty of eking out a living in the tide country prevented them from receiving an adequate education. According to what Moyna has suggested, having the appropriate education and knowledge about one's surroundings can assist women and young girls in combating adverse situations they are in. Contrary to the wishes of her family, Moyna herself received an education, and after the death of her husband Fokir in a cyclone, she was able to continue her work as a nurse with the Badabon Development Trust. Additionally, Moyna was able to secure some extra income for her and her son Tipu by working as an assistant of Piya on her project concerning the conservation of aquatic mammals in the waters of the Sundarbans. The availability of jobs for women in climate change affected regions can bring about a transformation in their everyday lives. It has been observed that in certain places, the threat posed by trafficking of women is made worse as a result of disasters caused by changing climate conditions. This is the greatest danger that contemporary society faces. Through Moyna's character, the novel shows that this problem can be resolved with the assistance of better income opportunities and increased access to education for the women.

Lubna, a Bangladeshi lady in the novel, also becomes victim of a fearsome cyclone, a '*tufaan*' in Bangladesh. The gusts of wind were so powerful that they blew away the roof of their house. After that, the level of water started to rise. They were forced to seek refuge in a tree because there was nowhere else to go. In some way, her brothers were able to successfully secure all of them within the branches of the tree. But then they discovered that the tree was infested with snakes that had climbed up there to escape the water below them. Her brothers used sticks in an attempt to scare some of them away, but one of them got bitten in the process. They lost sight of him after he fell into the flood waters and never found him again. One of Lubna's nieces was also bitten, and she passed away later that night. Lubna said, "Can you imagine what it was like? Being in that tree, with the wind howling and the flood raging below, not knowing whether you would be killed by the storm or a snake?" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 160). Lubna's

husband Munir's father saved their lives and rescued them. However, after the cyclone they realised that it was no longer safe for them to live in that village. As a result, they were forced to sell their land and relocated to another place called Khulna. She lamented the devastation caused by the flood that wiped out their entire village and their homes. Many women suffer the loss of family members as well as the means to support themselves because of climate-induced disasters like floods. Although women bear less responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and resultant global warming compared to men, they are particularly harmed by the direct consequences of anthropogenic climate change.

Ghosh's concerns are also reflected in the novel *Trespassing* (2003), in which Uzma Aslam Khan displays a similar concern about "the damage done to indigenous cultures and societies on account of this forced intrusion of the globalized market into the context of Third World ecosystems" (Hussaini 10). The author's concern about environmental degradation in Pakistan is shown in her depiction of the contemporary developments at a time of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation that have negative impacts on communities and natural environment. Karachi and the Indus Valley coastline serve as the backdrops of Khan's novel. Sanobar Hussaini (2018) claims, "Humans are seen as a menace to non-human habitations and the narrative also leads the reader's attention to the infringement of the habitats of indigenous groups (Indus Valley fishermen) by industrial corporate, resulting in polluted and fissured landscapes" (11). Many examples are cited in the novel to show how multinational corporations are destroying the environment. It shows how the sea resources and the coastal areas are no longer under the control of the indigenous fishermen. The author has mentioned the land as 'thirsty' and 'desolate' (Khan 99). Birds are also vanishing from the sight. Khan laments over the loss of natural resources that once supported basic necessities of the people of the Indus Valley as the place has become a desolate wasteland. The novel depicts how a high amount of business activity contributed to the production of toxic smoke and gases that made people's chest burn, and how the use of granite in place of sand, cement in place of mud and other chemicals for fishing made a contribution to the deterioration of the environment to the point where it was unsafe for humans to continue to live there (Khan 126). Salaamat, one character in the novel, came to know that the foreign trawlers, especially Korean trawlers, had been issued legal licences by the government to carry on their business. As a result, the indigenous fishermen community of people had to leave the places that belonged to them before. The grandmother of

Salaamat reminds him: “There is little left for you in this village. The fish are gone. Your spiritless father lies in the darkness of his room, willing the current to turn back to the days of his forefathers. It will not. Those ships are here to stay” (Khan 124). The lives of the fishermen were drastically transformed after the invasion of the foreign trawlers in the sea. In the past, summer was the time of year when fisherwomen would repair their nets. Women used to sip tea while sitting on the sand dunes just outside the decrepit walls of their homes, layers upon layers of cotton mesh would be strewn across the ground. They discussed the rain and hummed the *Sur Saarang*, the melody that invoked rain. Imagining they were sewing God’s rainy robes, Salaamat and the other children would stand by the women as they darned, eagerly awaiting the first drop to fall so they could play with the God. But, with the passage of time, such sights became increasingly rare. After growing up, Salaamat was unable to do anything but watch as this ‘other world’ fell apart around him due to the invasion made by international business in the sea which once belonged to them.

Within the context outlined above, Khan’s novel portrays an inspiring depiction of a female character who exhibits a strong resistance to the practices that are detrimental to the environment and contribute to the warming of the world. Riffat Mansoor’s worthwhile project of planting mulberry forest in Thatta, and her sericultural project of silkworms which engages indigenous methods of organic dyeing and avoids the use of chemical dyes are two examples of the ecologically conscious practices. The chemical dyes were not only hazardous to use, but they were also very expensive. Riffat relied on organic dying which once flourished in the subcontinent. She discovered that the majority of colours could be obtained from plants that were readily grown in that area. In addition, she gained knowledge regarding every detail of harvesting plants, including the duration it took, what portions to harvest, and to what hue the final product would turn: “Turmeric and myrobalan produced yellow; henna, madder, and pomegranate red; indigo blue; tamarind and onion black; chikoo brown” (Khan 100). Therefore, she decided to allot the remaining five acres of her farm’s land to the cultivation of the crops. Within two years, they achieved consistent yields, which led to the termination of their agreement with the dye company. They suddenly started receiving threatening phone calls probably from the dye companies. Fatma Denton (2002) argues, “Climate equity is about ensuring that some voices are not muffled at the expense of the more vociferous and powerful ones” (18). Women who raise their voices for environmental conservation face a variety of

hurdles in a male-dominated society like Pakistan; but, their endeavours should be given precedence. Fortunately, Riffat's mill won the loyalty of more customers. In lieu of subjecting the environment to the perils of hazardous chemical dyes, she deliberately opts for the organic approach, hence exercising her agency in pursuit of a more promising future. Her decision resonates with Chris J. Cuomo's (2011) view: "Those who care about humanity and Earth's green growing mantle of life need the power to turn dominant practices and policies toward better futures" (709). Riffat's endeavours show that if given the chance, women can use traditional knowledge and experience that has been passed down through generations to help preserve the natural world. In an area like Karachi, the act of planting trees can be a real blessing in terms of preventing additional damage to the environment.

Khan has also highlighted the problems of water shortage and drought-like conditions that currently exist in Karachi. Riffat's factory is entirely run by women who breed the silkworms and tend the maggots. Sumbul, Riffat's cook's daughter, is one of the farm's most valued workers. When it came to handling insects, the women treated them just like braids and babies: "The women had to chop up their food in tiny slivers and change the supply nine times daily or the fussy creatures would starve. If in their wilder days, they required no hygiene, now the perforated paper beneath them had to be scrupulously cleaned, or this too would elicit a hunger strike" (Khan 105). Sumbul believed that there were fewer good cocoons available compared to the previous year. A record low number of caterpillars had made it through all four stages of metamorphosis. Dia, Riffat's daughter, also considered that the number of cocoons produced was much lower than it had been the previous year. When she was a child, the mulberry leaf production used as food for cocoons peaked at sixty tons. As a result of rising water shortage in recent years, this has dropped dramatically. Due to decrease in food supply, larvae were either not able to develop into cocoons or their cocoons were abnormally tiny, thin-shelled, or perforated, all of which led to a reduction in the quality of the silk thread produced. The farm was badly suffering from water shortage. A lot more rain was needed to get the wells back up to normal water levels. The author has also mentioned about the 'scorching loo' that came from the desert making the place drier and more desolate (Khan 245). Dia suffered from intense mood swings as the humidity level of the place rose. Irene Dankelman (2002) is also of the view that women's livelihoods are impacted by a variety of events, not just major catastrophes. A severe rainy season or drought-like condition can lead to other issues that would

adversely affect women's daily activities and responsibilities and so add on to their burden (25). The novel suggests that lack of available water and harsh climate like heat waves and humidity in Pakistan contribute to a variety of problems for the country's women. It also raises the issue of those who experience frequent power blackouts and a lack of electricity. It is a source of great frustration for those waiting in a queue at the Housing Society's water office for several days to bring home a water tanker, especially for women, who are denied access to a tanker despite providing necessary documents. Riffat's family farm suffers a big loss due to an insufficient amount of rain, contaminated water and harsh climate conditions. The farm was also impacted by black rain: "soot covered the world and fell like ink" (Khan 343). People speculated that it happened due to the bombing of oil resources in Iraq. The unusual rain destroyed their mulberry trees and the farm ran out of food for the silkworms. When the farm is affected, the situation becomes more difficult for the women who work there. Women like Riffat who rely on natural resources, such as for organic dye-making, may lose their means of support due to the climate crisis. It is implied that Pakistan's government must urgently address the needs of women and work towards revitalising the lost grandeur of Indus Valley people by allocating necessary resources to tackle the challenges posed by changing atmospheric conditions.

The Storm (2018), the debut novel written by Bangladeshi author Arif Anwar offers an insight into the ways in which climate disasters of the present day affect the lives of poor women, as well as the ways in which environmental disasters affect women psychologically, even as they make attempts to rebuild the devastated landscape around them. This chapter also analyses the initiative that a female victim takes in order to save lives in the face of an environmental disaster such as the Bhola Cyclone of 1970, which wreaked havoc in Bangladesh. Environmental crises like devastating storms or cyclones threaten women's lives in particular because of the limited resources available to fight non-human forces in male-dominated societies. Household chores in Bangladesh consist of a wide variety of tasks, including the acquisition of fuel for cooking, water for both cooking and bathing, and much more. In many remote regions, it is common for women to teach their children at home, tend the family garden, take care of the upkeep of their homes, livestock pens, stoves, and store food for the rainy season. The lack of consistent access to affordable food is a problem that affects all families and is a primary motivator in the search for alternative sources of income. Women find a solution to this problem by reducing the amount of food they consume and by working harder to provide for

their families (Alston 101). Because of their close association with the natural world and their reliance on its resources, women tend to have a heightened awareness of environmental shifts in their immediate surroundings. In the words of Margaret Alston (2015), "Men and women are likely to notice different aspects of the slow-onset changes with women more conscious of temperature changes and men of the seasonal variations" (115). It is Honufa, an impoverished fisherwoman in the novel, who demonstrates how women can play an important role in dealing with detrimental climate conditions by drawing on their own indigenous knowledge to prevent unpredicted damage. Because of its focus on a devastating storm, and its effects on human lives, the novel can be classified as a fiction about climate change. The novel shows that such fictions can enable us to comprehend the potential consequences of any catastrophe we are facing; they can eventually assist in alleviating the crisis of imagination. This novel about a cyclone offers a sensible hope that, if it cannot provide concrete solutions to climate change, it can at least shed light on the ways in which women can use traditional knowledge to effectively deal with it. Adam Trexler writes in *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015) that in novels about climate change, unusually severe storms occur with a predictable increasing frequency. The cyclone, hurricane or remarkably intense rainstorm is a plot device that is almost impossible to resist using because it destroys the infrastructure of communities, builds suspense and throws characters into spectacularly terrible situations (Trexler 80). Climate change is not specifically mentioned in the novel's plot, but it's depiction of a devastating scenario caused by Bhola Cyclone increases the novel's narrative appeal to understand the effects of global warming and frequent occurrences of cyclones. The story begins in Chittagong in November of 1970. After waking up one morning, Honufa discovers that her husband Jamir has gone to work to the sea, and at the same time she noticed that a major storm was approaching: "Iron-gray clouds are moving toward the shore on legs of lightning – purple – white – trotting on the sea" (Anwar 15). It was not the first experience of a storm that Honufa had to prepare for; the frequent occurrences of devastating storms pose a constant threat to life on the bay. Honufa had to make preparations for the upcoming storm after she guessed its arrival. Climate change and its consequences like heavy rain, deluge, drought, rising sea level and cyclonic storms force the poor people in developing countries to develop unique ways of protecting their meagre possessions. A local protection system is especially important for women, as they play a significant role in preserving their resources. As depicted in the novel, one of the two enormous kantha-cloth bedsheets is used by

Honufa to secure their cooking utensils such as a *boti* or blade to cut vegetables, a nora to crush them, and pots and pans to cook lentils, spinach, rice and fish that they have gathered. She assembles their clothing and bedding on the second kantha-cloth. To keep their dried foods safe, she places them in a tough burlap sack. She slaughters two of their chickens in possession out of fear that they will be swept away by the cyclone. She starts digging a "half a man deep" hole in the courtyard. Rina, the older woman, arrives and picks up a second shovel and joins Honufa in digging the hole. Honufa and Rina then threw everything into the hole including freshly killed chickens which had been packed into clay pots before being dumped in. Before pounding the ground with the flats of the shovels, they first mark the location of the hole with a long stick placed in the centre. During the climate hazards, women tend to take action more readily than men due to their sense of responsibility for the household and they are impelled by fear for the other members of the family including children. In such circumstances, one woman taking actions to protect her family encourages another woman to do the same. Individual transformation generally accompanies group process.[6] The home has been traditionally considered as the domain of women, which means that women are more likely than males to take on these responsibilities. Cynthia Hamilton's observation holds significant relevance in the context of the importance of household responsibility for women within the urban landscape, particularly when considering its implications for women on a global scale. According to Hamilton (1994),

> Women often play a primary part in community action because it is about things they know best. Minority women in several urban areas have found themselves part of a new radical core as the new wave of environmental action, precipitated by the irrationalities of capital-intensive growth has catapulted them forward. These individuals are responding not to "nature" in the abstract but to the threat of their homes and to the health of their children. (677)

The imposition of risk upon their homes or children due to disasters places women in a distinct position, compelling them to respond in a responsible way. This response is independent of the profit-driven irrational attitude often exhibited by authoritative institutions, which seek to exploit their agency in order to combat adverse circumstances. Knowing that only one woman can best

support another in a time of crisis, Rina joins Honufa as she secures her belongings and takes care of her son while she is away. When their family is in grave threat from climate related events, women have a greater grasp of the severity of the situation. Honufa must travel to the hills to bring back their grazing nanny goat, so, to ensure the safety of her young son, she leaves Rina in her hut with him to keep an eye on him. The actions taken by Honufa to protect their meagre possessions of great value show that sometimes when women fight natural disasters alone, they get separated from their loved ones in the process. In case Honufa does not return, following her advice Rina has to take her son to the sturdy home of the Zamindar Rahim, where he is allowing people to take shelter from the storm. The conventional societal expectations placed upon women restrict their actions and connections within the confines of the public sphere. In the midst of a calamitous scenario, Honufa is compelled to transcend her deep-seated disagreement towards accepting assistance from a wealthy zamindar. This moment marks a departure from the conventional expectations imposed upon her by societal norms of marginalisation, as she fearlessly embraces a non-traditional role. Honufa's defiance of the rigid constraints placed upon her by the society underscores her determination to chart her own path, unencumbered by external expectations. Ayse Yonder et al. (2009) claim, "Disaster can literally push women out of the confines of their homes and neighbourhood and lead them to take on non-traditional roles in the name of ensuring their families' survival and well-being" (189). Honufa, who harbours a lot of resentment toward Zamindar Rahim for abandoning her, decides to send her son to take shelter in his house during the storm. Through this decision, she ensures the well-being of her son despite the fact that Zamindar Rahim is the man who once renounced all ties with Honufa to save his reputation and position. Honufa comments: "We have to set bitterness aside when a storm comes" (Anwar 11). Even in marginalised communities, women dwelling in conditions of extreme poverty have been motivated to initiate and coordinate self-help activities in response to climate calamities, including cyclones and floods. It is firmly established by Ecofeminist Dean Curtin's (1997) observation that the sustainability of genuine ecodevelopment is contingent upon the recognition and prioritisation of women's strategies and ways of knowing, which should be accorded the conceptual centrality that they rightfully deserve. During times of crisis, women's awareness of their surroundings is of great assistance in restoring both lives and property. Honufa has witnessed a great number of storms over the course of her life, and as a result of those experiences, she is aware that this is merely a test of the wrath of the storm; there

will be a period of calm after the eye of the storm has passed. This period of calm can be a trap for those who are not careful – "the storm's cunning trick" (Anwar 324). Once, Honufa had an aunt who braved the storm's eye to check on her livestock. But, she was just about to return to her hut when she was caught by the gales. Her aunt's daughter witnessed her mother being swept into the air by the fierce winds as she raced back to her hut. The winds were so powerful that they lifted her aunt into the air in an instant.

The fact that Honufa took safety measures to safeguard the life of her son reflects that she was well aware of the unpredictability of the storm's outcomes. Her next decision, which she will make after she has placed her son in the care of her friend Rina so that he can be safe, will likely determine whether or not she will be able to be reunited with both her son and her husband. Such a decision makes an already complicated situation even more difficult for women, particularly due to the uncertainty that ensues as an immediate outcome. While the men of wealthy families like Zamindar Rahim avail all the safety during climate hazards, poor women like Honufa struggle to save their families and possessions.

Those environmental debates that generally overlook the role of women can benefit from discussions that focus on their experiences. It is noted that women are often directly involved with the ecosystem and its resources through their work as loggers of wood for fuel, water haulers, farmers and fisherwomen. Due to their distinct roles, women have a strong connection to and concern for natural resources. Daily necessities like gathering fuel and food are frequently the responsibility of the female members of the household. Women generally possess a vast and in-depth knowledge of natural resources, the majority of which comes from their personal, day-to-day encounter with these resources. It is possible that the depletion of natural resources, including that which is stimulated by processes of man-made development strategies, can discredit women's capabilities to accomplish roles in the collection of fuel or water, production of food, or it can indicate that they can only fulfil these roles by incurring increasing costs in terms of their effort and time. However, women play a crucial role in the conservation of natural resources, like by engaging in activities like tree plantation and taking precautions to protect the soil. Thus, Melissa Leach (1992) emphasises the significance of incorporating women's roles in environmental policies. Leach states that neglecting to do so not only poses a threat to the preservation of the natural resources that women depend upon but also disregards the valuable

skills and knowledge that women possess (13). By failing to consider women's contributions, environmental policies run the risk of yielding adverse consequences and missing out on the potential benefits that women can offer. Honufa's 'feminine softness' has faded after three decades of hard living in the coastal village. For years, she has worked tirelessly husking coconuts; the ropes and nets she has worked with have hardened her hands. Her transformed physical feature reflects the hardships of her life as a fisherwoman, who provides a portion of the family's income relying upon natural resources. This transformation also serves as a testament to her tireless drive to provide for her family by relying on the limited resources available to her.

Honufa returns to her hut to find it deserted during the storm. Her subsequent actions upon arriving at the hut demonstrate her understanding and expertise in dealing with a challenging situation. There are only a few options left for her to protect herself, and each one is fraught with danger. A strong sense of self-respect prevents her from seeking refuge at Zamindar Rahim's house. With her injured ankle as she fell in the hills, she has no chance of escaping the storm. She is aware of the dangers of being on low ground during tidal surges. She knows that only a sturdy tree can offer refuge and help surviving a flood. She finds some boat-rope that has been strewn-together in her shack. She then looks for a sturdy palm tree, and decides to settle on one that is nearby. The tree's trunk is strong and inclined at an angle as a result of many years of storms. Honufa has complete faith that God will watch over her husband Jamir while he is out at the sea during the storm and protect him from any harm. Rina is already with her son, who is protected within the strong walls of Zamindar Rahim's residence. At this point, she has no choice but to focus on her own survival. After climbing to a height of ten feet above the ground and reaching the tree's crown, she begins tying herself to the trunk of the tree with the strongest knots that she is capable of making. The challenge for women is to treat themselves with the same kindness and consideration that women show to others. A change to the conventional precept is necessary to accommodate women's socialisation into caring behaviours and placing others' needs before their own. In the novel's narrative as well, Honufa prioritises her son's safety and the protection of their possessions before considering her own survival. After passing through the eye of the storm, Honufa still finds herself tied to the tree, but nothing is the same around her. The only remnants of her home are a few bamboo stumps, which have been described as looking like "the teeth in a crone's mouth" (Anwar 324). Through the author's portrayal of what happened around Honufa during the storm, a tragic scene emerges: "More than

anything, the storm feels like spun time, accelerating everything around her to their inevitable future states – houses turned to bamboo stubs, boats smashed to kindling, rice paddies drowned and salted; lofty trees made to prostrate into the sand. Beneath her, the dead begin to drift by, a grim procession of bodies, twisted and unrecognizable" (Anwar 326). As soon as Jamir finds a way to get back to Honufa, the storm starts up again, and they are both confronted by a massive wave that is building up in the harbour and making its way toward the shore. As a consequence of this, both Jamir and Honufa were unable to make it through the storm. After their tragic death by the storm, their only son Shahryar is raised by the childless couple Zamindar Rahim and his wife Zahira. Honufa dies due to lack of aid to protect herself from the storm, whereas, Zamir dies in protecting Honufa while the situation is already out of control. Honufa's tragic death implies that a great number of women often lose their lives while awaiting the arrival of their husbands or other family members to rescue them. Honufa might be unwilling to leave the affected place because doing so would result in the loss of essential items, such as cooking utensils, livestock as well as other essential belongings. The author depicts the circumstances leading to Honufa's tragic fate to highlight the distressing reality that women are often at a higher risk of injury or death during calamities. This is primarily due to long-standing gender biases in society that hinder their ability to move freely like their male counterparts, effective decision-making, resource management, communication and proper training to fight against the calamity. A lack of prior information also aggravates their vulnerability. In the novel, people have to rely only on the appearance of a Boatman to get the information about an impending storm. The sudden appearance of the Boatman serves as a warning for the approaching natural hazard. Following the predictions of the Boatman, safety measures are taken: "Each time he appeared, a great storm has followed" (Anwar 7). Despite the availability of many modern technologies, the poor illiterate people living near the coasts rely on traditional warning systems, which often can be inaccurate or fail to predict the full extent of a disaster's occurrence. Most of the time, predictions are made based on guesses and uncertainty. There are times when early warnings for impending disaster are not recorded, and those who are at home are frequently the ones who do not obtain them. Access to information is essential for effective planning and responses; however, gaining access to information can be difficult in countries where there are few points of contact. It is also troublesome that when women are given a warning, they frequently are unable to visualise the magnitude of the impending catastrophe, and as a result,

they may choose to disregard the warnings. Women suffer because most of the times they do not take into account the early warnings of climate disasters. Due to their close relationship with nature, women often get the first sign of impending disaster. In addition to her other observations, Honufa also spotted an unusual change in the appearance of the clouds. But, due to lack of resources and proper knowledge about safety strategies, she failed to save her own life. Most women like her perish while protecting other members of the family including children. When storms, tidal surges or floods become common in an area, women miscalculate the effect of one hazardous event by comparing it to the previous one. Because women are completely reliant on men to communicate early warning messages and have much more restricted access to information, it is possible that they will not receive warnings or that men will not have the time or energy to transmit them on. In the novel, Honufa initially doubts that the appearance of the Boatman means the approaching storm. But, Rina reassures her by saying that whenever the Boatman made an appearance in the past, a severe storm immediately followed. It suggests that the women in the novel continue to rely on the conventional warning system, which poses a risk to their well-being during a disaster. According to Keiko Ikeda (1995), in a society in which information, resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed, men and women are likely to behave in different ways, which results in different degrees of vulnerability to natural disasters (174). And this disparity in vulnerability persists throughout the entire duration of a disaster. The activities that take place within the confines of the house are the responsibility of women, whereas the activities that take place in the world outside the house are the responsibility of men. Women's daily activity space rarely extends beyond the confines of the house, where they are expected to complete all the household chores and guard the belongings of the house. During the time of the disaster, it becomes impossible for Honufa to flee quickly because she has to think for the safety of her child. The results of Ikeda's (1995) case study shows that in rural Bangladesh, the responsibility of providing child care falls solely on women. It is also accepted that this is a major factor for the death of women. After being caught in the disaster, women's chances of escaping are reduced or hindered, and their capacity to withstand the effects of physical stress is diminished. In Bangladesh, as well as many other countries prone to natural disasters, high death rates are exacerbated by socio-economic disparity. Ensuring equal access to opportunities, disaster related information and assets for both men and women is crucial in all

aspects of disaster management. It is essential that women have a voice in significant decision-making processes both within and beyond the confines of their households.

Not only Bangladesh, Sri Lanka is also vulnerable to the harmful impacts of changing climate and natural catastrophe because of its geographical location. As an island nation, Sri Lanka is susceptible to the growing consequences of the climate crisis that manifest in the form of cyclones, tidal surges, torrential rains, tsunamis and rising sea levels. These frequent natural disasters threaten the country's very existence. In *A Little Dust on the Eyes* (2015), Minoli Salgado portrays the rapid transition and terrible shift of the earth's climate based on the uncertainty that surrounds Sri Lanka's environment. The novel shows that after being separated during their childhood owing to the atrocities of the Sri Lankan Civil War, two Sri Lankan born cousins named Savi and Renu Rodrigo were reunited at a wedding ceremony of Renu's brother just weeks before the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 struck the island nation. Renu's encounter with the Tsunami makes readers experience the terrible pain of loss that haunts her. They had not got any prior warning of the tsunami before it struck, so they were completely unprepared. They had no personal experience with such natural disasters before and only learned about them through the stories that their house maid Josilin told them when they were children. As teens, Savi and Renu had grown up listening to indigenous stories of disasters. Their house maid Josilin is the one who initially introduced them to the story of Queen Vihara Maha Devi, the noblest and most pious princess on the island. The story depicts that the sea water which is now calm and magnificent in front of them was once enraged and devoured the land and the people living in it. When King Kelani Tissa, father of Vihara Maha Devi, misguidedly ruled his kingdom and indulged in evil deeds, the god's rage caused the sea to rise and swallow the land. His devoted daughter gave her consent to be offered up to the sea in a golden boat as a sacrifice; but, she did not die and instead emerged from the calmed waves as the noblest of queens. These myths and tales mostly told by women shed light on the value of storytelling in terms of assisting future generations of adults to comprehend indigenous culture and tradition that draw awareness about climate disasters. At the conclusion of the tale, it is revealed that King Kelani Tissa's 'bad karma' was the cause of the destruction of his kingdom and its people and his own untimely death. Women bear the responsibility of transmitting cultural values to succeeding generations, and in the process, the tradition of telling stories about natural disasters raises awareness about the myriad ways in which contemporary society, culture and the natural world are undergoing

transformation. These tales contain certain fundamental truths: “the ancient logic of cause and effect”, that reveal how human activity destroys the environment and how the planet constantly faces new challenges like climate change. The narrator remembers the story of King Kelani Tissa which describes a condition of tremendous tidal surges that is very similar to the one that occurred during the tsunami: “And the gods were so angry that they caused the sea to rise and take the land, carrying people and homes in its wake. Wave after wave came, taking more and more people, so the King understood he had done a serious wrong…” (Salgado 206-207). Through her act of storytelling, Josilin draws attention to the myth’s ingrained ethical perspective, which helps acquaint Savi and Renu with the capricious wrath of the sea waves, capable of transforming from a tranquil expanse into a merciless and all-consuming force.

When in reality the tsunami struck, Savi was at Dolmen House, but Renu was in their hotel Eden’s Bay with her father, Eden Rodrigo. Savi was enjoying swinging in the garden. She overheard someone shouting and calling down the road; the voice was so distinct that, it took her a few seconds to process what she had heard: “Run! Run! The sea is flooding!” (Salgado 220). Her body continued to go forward, propelled by the thrust of water and headed for a rumbling blackness. The wave was rolling in, getting bigger and darker, and finally reaching a height where it obscured the sky. Overlapping shouts and cries of children could be heard as the wave rose into a towering wall that was rapidly approaching her. The swing carried her upwards to the near safety of a tree, carrying her to a crucial brief moment when she might have reached the high branch of it, but she was wrenched from the moment, carried in the opposite direction, her body thrown, crushed, drenched and tumbling in the roll of a wave. During the surge, Savi made a desperate attempt to save the life of a young girl who was clutching her arms to keep afloat. Sadly, neither she nor the child was safeguarded by her actions. She witnessed the heads of a number of other women bobbing up and down amidst the waves. Savi’s body was completely submerged in the sea water and death engulfed her. Renu, on the other hand, was one of the lucky ones who made it through the tsunami, but her brother Romesh perished when driving his car.

Renu was constantly recording the stories of the families where people were abducted due to the civil war. Later, she also noted Bradley Sirisena’s disappearance during the tsunami. After the catastrophe, Renu could only record: “he had disappeared on the morning of 26th

December while on his way to see a friend. His friend had disappeared too" (Salgado 9-10). When victim's account of the natural hazards are documented, a new perspective emerges with every revision to view the collective struggle and suffering beyond any measure. In its own way, each narrative is unique, and it serves to demonstrate the futility of the actions taken by the administrative authorities of a nation to prepare for the impending disaster. Although the exact reason behind Bradley Sirisena's disappearance has not been revealed in the novel, Renu's account creates an open ended possibility of his death by the tsunami. However, Renu has not recorded anything regarding her cousin Savi's death. Susan L. Cutter (1995) concludes that in both developing and developed countries alike, women today endure a disproportionate share of the burden of environmental degradation; however, their capacity to adapt to or ameliorate the effects of these worsening environmental conditions are severely limited (194). To ensure a balanced implementation of mitigation strategies, it is important to adequately document impacts on each individual. More accurate information on the disproportionate effects on women will be accessible as the causes of environmental changes are better recorded. As soon as we have sufficient data, we can begin addressing the kinds of individual and societal adaptation strategies that will help these women recover from the effects of disaster without relegating them to the status of "forgotten casualties" (Cutter 194). When the tsunami claimed the lives of many men, the women were left with sole responsibility of the family. It is similar to the lives claimed by political struggles through abduction and disappearance of the male members of the households. In any case, women alone had to fight for survival. After losing their loved ones, the female characters wonder how they may reclaim a life worth living. After the tsunami, Renu as a disaster survivor begins to assemble and rebuild her life, both individually and as a part of the newly united group of the survivors including her parents. Renu's parents determined her fate after the catastrophe. She had to learn her father's craft of hotel business. The death of her brother Romesh made her enter the space where he was once. The shift of performative roles depicts how the tsunami has altered the conventional position of a male member as the forerunner of the family's business to a female protagonist now holding the duty of the business following her brother's death. After the deaths of her brother and cousin, Renu was forced to muster up enough mental strength to overcome the pain of loss and fulfil her deceased brother's duties in the family. It had been several years since Renu had seen Savi after being separated in childhood. Renu had no idea that their reunion would end up in a permanent separation. Renu's

life is irrevocably altered as the tsunami claimed the lives of both her brother and cousin at the same time.

In the novels discussed above, the South Asian authors have attempted to portray that women need to make significant adjustments to their lives to adapt to adverse climate situations. The authors have employed climate change as a motif to highlight a variety of contemporary societal and cultural challenges affecting women's well-being. The ordeals of the novels' female protagonists are not just another facet of the transforming world; they hold pivotal roles that must be re-evaluated through the lens of gender-specific norms. If we want to make progress toward improving the rights and conditions of the vulnerable people, we need to prioritise equality between men and women as a central focus in our pursuit of these objectives. It is possible to make significant progress when women's responsibilities, prospects and rights are acknowledged, when they are entitled to equal influence over national policies, and when they are included in decision-making on resource distribution and policy. With the inclusion of feminist values in climate change actions and decisions, the objective for a worldwide movement for the rights of the women is needed. This movement can help women around the world become more self-sufficient; but they can only do so if we ensure that the status of women in different socio-economic and cultural contexts is not influenced by gender-biased practices. Therefore, it is argued that these texts show that women and girls over the world are feeling the effects of changing climate in different contexts. This has sparked a need for an ecofeminist global movement. Contemporary South Asian fictions play a pivotal role in expanding reader's understanding of climate related matters. These narratives not only shed light on the pressing environmental challenges but also advocate for the empowerment of women in accessing resources and aid. By exploring these themes, fictions contribute to a broader discourse on the intersectionality of climate change, gender equality, and community engagement.[7] A global trend of environmental activism has the capability to bring to light the gender relations that are implicitly accepted in local customs, as well as in the distribution of aid, the availability of resources, decision-making, and the prioritisation of actions. This will result in a greater emphasis being placed on women's capacity for resilience and adaptation, as well as a reduction in the vulnerability that women experience in post-disaster environments. Thus, based on the portrayals of the risks associated with the female protagonists in the novels during the climate

calamity, it may be inferred that women indeed possess the potential of being desirable communicators of distressing situations within certain contexts.

Endnotes

[1] The term 'ecological distress' has been taken from Susan Wardell's article *Naming and Framing Ecological Distress* (2020) in which she defines it as "any forms of emotional, psychological, or existential distress related to present or anticipated ecological/climatic change" (188).

[2] See the findings of the World Bank Group and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) report titled *Gender Dimensions of Disaster Risk and Resilience: Existing Evidence* (2021) by Alvina Erman et al.

[3] Thomas J. Doherty and Susan Clayton in their article *The Psychological Impacts of Global Climate Change* (2011) published in the journal American Psychologist (vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 265-276) posit that higher rates of suicide has become one of the direct psychological effects of global climatic changes.

[4] Nabanita Mukherjee and Giyasuddin Siddique's extensive study on the vulnerable conditions of women in the Sundarbans has raised the fact through their work titled *Gendered Vulnerability of Climate Change: Experiences of the Women in the Sundarbans* (2019) that women are overburdened with maintaining household responsibilities that not only include household chores but also taking care of the children and shouldering the responsibility of earning money to meet the basic needs of their families (17). Their responsibilities get them engaged in climate sensitive subsistence sectors in which even minor variations in climatic conditions have a profound impact on their means of sustenance. This particular work is found in the book *Gender and Development: Aspects of Social and Economic Change* (2019), edited by Pranab Kumar Chattopadhyay and Daya Shankar Kushwaha.

[5] See Nahid Rezwana's *Disasters, Gender and Access to Healthcare: Women in Coastal Bangladesh* (2018).

[6] Rebecca Pearse considers community protection initiatives as a ‘feminine’ value. See Pearse’s *Gender and Climate Change* (2017).

[7] The term ‘intersectionality’ has been used in this context as a metaphor for understanding the interplay between various forms of inequality or disadvantage. It elucidates how multiple dimensions of prejudice can intersect and mutually reinforce one another, resulting in complex barriers that often elude conventional modes of analysis and understanding.

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