

Narratives of Nature and Justice: Environmental Cinema and Literature Through Butler and Kingsolver

Indu Bala

MA English, Amity University Uttar Pradesh

Co Author – Dr. Shuchi Agrawal

Professor , Amity University Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

This research examines the role of environmental Literature and Cinema with the special reference to Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower, Barbara Kingsolver's Flight Behavior. It addresses the ecological concerns with a particular emphasis on how these works criticize social injustice and environmental degradation. Both the texts highlights how the ecological issues impacts the population while it exposes the interconnection between socio economic disparities and environmental challenges. In “Parable of Sower”, Butler visualizes a dystopian society stamped by various issues such as climate change, scarcity of resources along with economic downturn focusing on the urgency of sustainable solutions. In the similar ways, “Flight Behaviour” by Barbara Kingsolver projects the struggles and challenges face by the rural of Appalachian community, through the use of disturbed migration pattern of monarch butterflies as an indicator of climate change. With the amalgamation of such speculative fiction with contemporary realism, both the writers advocates for ecological awareness. They focus on the need for raising environmental awareness and highlighting the urgent need of addressing contemporary ecological issues. Through an ecocritical approach, this paper analysis how these texts acts as a tool for environmental advocacy

Keywords: Environmental Literature, Climate change, Cinema

Introduction

Raising awareness about the ecological system and environment has become one of the significant issues of the twenty first century. “There are more than enough empirical evidence to support the link between the current state of the planet and the global nature of advanced capitalism, which is made even more evident during the current COVID-19 pandemic”. These include the sudden change in the population rate, the extinction of species, climate change, deforestation and ecological imbalance. So, there is an urgent need to address such environmental issues before things get worse.

Environmental cinema has a significant role in raising *awareness* about ecological challenges and inspiring action. However, while it serves as a powerful tool for advocacy. The environmental documentaries can broaden perspectives on ecological issues by raising awareness about specific topics

and inspiring action in support of environmental or social causes. Environmental documentaries are a remarkable means of connecting people with underrepresented concerns that they may ultimately influence in both positive and negative ways. In 2006, *Inconvenient Truth* took the topic of global warming to the attention of the media. In addition to further exposing human responsibility for climate change, the number of documentaries addressing alarming environmental concerns and challenges has increased significantly since its debut.

Literature serves as a significant and powerful tool for environmental advocacy by creating awareness, fostering empathy and inspiring steps. With the help of storytelling and narratives authors try to bring attention to serious ecological issues such as global warming, deforestation, pollution and extinction of species. Texts like *Flight Behaviour* and *Parable of the sower* presents the social and ecological consequences of environmental destruction. Literature also helps in highlighting the intersection of social justice and environment, showing how marginalised communities are affected by environmental issues and crisis. By engaging the readers on intellectual and emotional ground, it encourages critical thinking and a sense of responsibility towards environment which ultimately influences public policy and discourse.

In 21st century environmental literature has expanded its boundaries to include climate fiction also known as cli – fi, as a significant genre that explores the negative consequences of climate change with the help of realistic narrative. “The Overstory” highlights deforestation as a major ecological issue. Such works not only creates awareness but also motivates the readers to seek solutions and act accordingly for the sustainability of environment. literature not only provides warning and threats about ecological collapse but also helps in providing hopes and motivation for the advocacy of environment, reinforcing it’s significant and effective role in fighting for environment conservation and sustainability.

Parable of the Sower is one of the groundbreaking novel by *Octavia E. Butler*. It was published in 1993. It focuses on the themes of ecological issues and social justice. This novel portrays a thought captivating presentation of the future society. Here, US faces a severe devastation due to change in climate, resource exploitation and disparities on economic level. Butler here skilfully incorporates the theme of ecological issues and social justice to create awareness among the readers. It projects a clear picture of racial conflicts and environmental terror in a post apocalyptic society and depicts and critiques the ecological devastation of our time. She clearly argues that humans are exploiting the environment and it ultimately leads to damaged life. Butler's novel's link between social injustice and environmental calamity shows how our culture already disproportionately targets the weaker segments of society, such as women, racial minorities, the impoverished, and homosexuals. Most of her views and thoughts are centered revealing human activities whether *human on nature* or *human on human* , these things acts as a big threat to our society. Additionally, people and big businesses disregard climate change and ruin everything to increase profits. The novelist wants to engage her readers in ecological issues to project how people who are in power especially “church”, “Government” and “religion” have misused the power to deceive and trick people who are poor and illiterate by making them realise this, that if you continue to suffer in this world, “Almighty will provide you heaven”.

The novel’s protagonist Lauren Olamina inhabits a society that is pushed into chaos by environmental disasters, she lives in a society where people are forcefully change the way they live their life. She tells about her neighbourhood as a *walled community* to protect its citizens from the outer world that is dangerous for them. There are lot many artistic expressions to criticise and reveal the ecological justice issues, environmental justice activists, and also exposing and criticising real world environmental

injustice. This novel can be read as an attempt to reveal comprehend real world issues. It makes the readers aware of the connections between the injustice shown in the text and the *injustice* which is there in the real world too. Though Butler never openly talked about the environmental justice movements in any of her interviews but her decision of put these problems as the central theme of the novel , “Parable of the Sower” and her hope that this novel will help in creating awareness among people about the negative consequences of environmental degradation , proves her advocacy for such issues.

Lauren, the protagonist of the novel start describing the world around her in the journal that she maintains. It is clearly mentioned that severe climate change and global warming has led to America’s degradation. Lauren mentions all such disasters in her journal in a very serious tone. She talks about the scarcity of water and how it has become expensive due to the occurrence of drought. She mentions how her family struggles to save water.

Butler in this text clearly establishes a connection between environmental disasters and social crises. Protagonist tells about the hardships and challenges faced by her and her family. This indicates that she is well aware of the social inequality in which she lives. She knows that her society is still privileged due to their middle-class status as *it is a mixed-race community*, also she is aware of the fact that her citizens are facing the social injustice and ecological crises unequally. Furthermore “She is also aware of the gender inequality that surrounds her in both American social within her own walled community despite know the fact that she is treated with respect in her community regardless of her being female”. The central experience of gender inequality is the assumption that soon she will be married, will bear children and will be a wife who will do all the domestic household chores. The second assumption that she makes was that she was not being paid attention by her father and other people of community, they don’t listen to her. But later on, she realises that this is possibly due to her young age and not because of her gender.

Lauren’s became more aware of the social injustice around her”. She meets different people during the trip towards the North, she sees various human beings with different destinations that projects the devastated society and societal issues of the time. Douglasses were the people that included an *African American* man his Hispanic wife and their son. The three people , “Douglasses”, “Travis” and “Natividad” aren’t slaves by their name. “The harsh and sad experiences of these people reminds her of the revival of slavery in the late 20th century”. Each member represents a melancholic story and dark image of modern slavery..

Butler's book presents a crucial picture of the significance of sympathy and empathy, tolerance, and terror. The heroine and the speaker , Lauren, has a special talent for empathising with the suffering and hardships of other people. Readers learn about Lauren's personal awakening process and the harsh reality of life in her neighbourhood through her diary. She understands that unless or until people change the way they live, their future life will be even more difficult as compared to the contemporary life. She assumes responsibility for informing her neighbours, relatives, and friends about their extremely difficult situation. “Butler” says in her novel, “even after so many centuries slavery is still so persistent in the society”. Oppression is frequently visible in the days of democracy. In “Parable of the Sower” , through the slave system, she points towards the social issue along with the environmental crises.

“Climate change is the defining challenge of our age. The science is clear, climate change happening, the impact is real. The time to act is now.” – “*Ban Ki-Moon*”

The novel, “Flight Behaviour” was published in 2012 and is set in the fictional background of Feather town, Tennessee where the whole population of monarch butterfly population has migrated. This is due to the series of events caused by climate change. Flight Behaviour by Kingsolver takes on one of the most

crucial subjects of time, Climate change. The novel is about the issue of climate change which results in negative consequences, and social issues such as class differences set in the rural Appalachia and millions of monarch butterflies.

The protagonist of the novel, Dellarobia discovers the whole population of monarchs has been descended on mountain. She is the wife of a farmer in southern Appalachians. Through her viewpoint, the text is a treatise on the threat that arises due to climate change. The message in the book is clear, short and easy to comprehend. Kingsolver talks about the danger that humans are creating for the planet. The major issue discussed in the text is the ignorance of climate change and lack of eco centric viewpoint. The novelist focuses on the devastating impacts of ecological events by locating the narrative within a small community. Kingsolver focuses on the main conflict of book that is, lack of eco- centric viewpoint among human beings. She portrays a detailed picture of climate denial. Through the character of Ovid, The novelist portrays her transcending concern on the ecological issue of *global warming* which is the *increase in the average temperature of earth*. The novelist's choice of name "Ovid" is inspired by the Roman poet and his work "Metamorphosis". The link between the both can be associated with two different levels. One focuses on the migration of monarch butterflies from their natural habitat and the other one talks about the transformation of Dellarobia's to a new self. There is a change in her ability to identify her environment leads to ecological consciousness that's why she explains the butterfly effect to her husband. Later on conscious grew when she observes the fact that, Nation based boundaries were never a barrier when it comes to climate change. She views the entire earth as a single planet. Through the amalgamation of ecological and environmental enchantment and scientific knowledge, Kingsolver maker her readers conscious of the ecocide, climate change and global warming. Through her narrative the novelist tries to make her readers aware and conscious of negative consequences of environmental degradation. The interplay of natural atmosphere (butterflies) and the human beings conflicted heart develops a type of ecological consciousness in the book. The novels end with a note that butterflies change the heart of Dellarobia. This indicates the role of nature in the transformation of human heart and soul. Also, there is a sense of awareness created by the novelist in the heart of readers to take a step forward and to protect the bog and fragile earth. The reality of poverty and socioeconomic differences in the wealthiest nation on earth, the swiftly shifting social norms even in the most reddish states, and most importantly, the effects of climate change on the day-to-day lives of regular working people are all depicted in Flight Behaviour. The arrival of millions of monarch butterflies in the woodlands above the Turnbow farm, whose long-standing migration patterns have been upset by significant environmental change, causes a dramatic shift in Dellarobia's way of life.

In the novel, Kingsolver portrays social commitment in a way that makes this book contain extra literary and generic attributes. The concept of Ecosocialism highlights the interaction between environment and society. Another significant theme is reflection of social rift in the book. It is reflected in various attitudes towards the monarch butterflies and in Dellarobia's relationship with her in laws and then with other issues which makes the text an Epic of modern man's conflicts with himself and the society around him. There was a sudden sense of realisation to Dellaboria when she became an assistant to Dr. Ovid. It was a turning point for her when she realised the truth of exploitative capitalist economy which prefers monetary profits over social relationships and the balance of ecosystem. Novelist exposes the use of fertilisers and the consequent disruption that they create to the ecosystem as well as as the rift these fertiliser. The use of fertilisers have also created a wide gap between the poor and the rich. Economy has turned out to be the most immoral, the focus is solely on profit making. The story of the butterflies takes center stage in the

narrative, demonstrating the anthropogenic nature of Flight Behavior and demonstrating how human over-reliance on nature can lead to irreversible ecological and societal division.

The increase in man's carbon footprint leads to more damage to environment and as well as to humanity. A variety of situations that illustrate some of the social elements that define the modern world are used to illustrate the social divide. The anticipated function of the media in raising public awareness of environmental disasters is one of these scenarios. The topic of education is another societal concern that is brought up in the discussions between Dellaboria and Dr. Ovid. They criticize modern education for failing to raise people's awareness of the interconnectedness of their environment and nature. They are not given the proper knowledge to deal with the terrible changes that are occurring all around them. Dellaboria questions how the basketball coach was her science teacher. Another significant topic addressed in Flight Behavior is consumerism. The gap in the *social metabolism* is revealed. Capitalist tactics are the driving force behind it, making shopping the new religion of the modern man.

Flight Behavior by Barbara Kingsolver is an epic of the dialectic interaction between nature and society, illustrating the drama of climate change in a realistically portrayed manner. Kingsolver creates a narrative of humanity moving towards the abyss by fusing science and fantasy. Her goal is to create a new civilisation that is founded on a harmonious coexistence of humans and the natural world.

Conclusion

Literature and environmental cinema has long served as a strong and significant tools for criticising ecological issues and promoting environmental justice and awareness. As the field of Anthropocene progresses, it is marked by major climate crises, degrading bio diversity and texts that establishes a connection between environmental destruction and social justice have become extremely important. In this research project, I have analysed the interaction of cinema, environment and literature. I have examined their development as a significant medium for ecological advocacy, alongside have also examined the critical ecological and social issues in "Butler's" "Parable of the Sower" and "Kingsolver's" "Flight Behaviour", and lastly have situated cinema within the framework of ecocriticism as a catalyst for sustainability. The finalisation of these analyses underscores that both cinema and literature have the potential and power to present the ecological issues and also creating environmental consciousness and social change. The introduction of this project has laid down the basic foundation for comprehending the term environmental cinema, analysis how it has emerged as a strong reaction towards environmental crises. From years cinema has developed as a art form that reflects the world to an influential platform actively shaping the environmental narrative. Similarly on the other hand, literature has also evolved from showing the beautiful and romanticised portrayal of nature to harsh and critical interrogation of environmental exploitation along with its socio political consequences. Both the mediums has contributed significantly to the discourse for environmental justice and advocacy. Evoking audiences to confront such environmental issues and their interconnection with social justice.

The hope and faith for a better future lies within the ability of environmental literature and cinema to create an ethic of care and love, encouraging the societies to move forward towards meaningful action. By analysing the interconnection of human and non human life, advocating for environmental friendly practices, literature and cinema successfully contributes to a major shift towards creating a better ecosystem and maintaining sustainability of environment.

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