

“Harmony’s Edge: Taming the Turbulent Winds”

Dr. Anju Malik

Associate Professor, Department of English, Pt. NRS Govt. College, Rohtak

ABSTRACT

Humanity is left fighting to live in the face of this unrelenting force of nature as winds increase with no obvious source or logic. The narrative follows several people as they try to overcome the difficulties brought on by the destroying winds, especially their impact on the environment, infrastructure, or human behavior. The fictional presentation of environmental issues is known as ecocriticism. One of the major problems the world is now facing is climate change. It would go through how mankind's hatred for nature. The novel's representation of the precarious balance between human civilization and the environment, as well as the way the individuals in the tale wrestle with the disaster's reality and their struggles to survive, might all be explored in the abstract.

Keywords: Eco-Catastrophe, Environmental Issues, Climate Change.

INTRODUCTION

The study of literary criticism now includes an important subfield called ecocriticism. It primarily evolved in reaction to environmental problems & climate change. It is a branch of literary criticism that first appeared in American studies throughout the years 1980 to 1990 in an effort to bring our focus to a previously unnoticed or neglected knowledge of nature. The word "eco-criticism" was originally used by William Rueckert in his article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism," but it wasn't until Cheryll Glotfelty's landmark book, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, that it gained significant meaning. The "interrelationship of nature and human emphasizing how human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" is how it is shown.

The Wind From Nowhere is the first novel of James Graham Ballard. It is his first literary foray into ecocritical fiction.

It aims to present the fragility of human beings in front of nature. Nature has turned hostile towards human beings responsible for the environmental degradation. It is one of the prescient novels in present times when there are frequent discussions on climate change and catastrophic events. It portrays vision of a "Tipping Point" where to quote Pramod K Nayar (*Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture*) "our living world is irreversibly altered" which can be triggered anytime today itself if the menace of global warming is not curbed. Because of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, global warming

is getting worse every day. Climate Change has aggravated our vulnerability towards catastrophic events such as flash floods, freakish hurricanes, massive wildfires, severe droughts, sudden landslides.

It has been manifested again in the very recent incident of New South Wales bushfire which was triggered by high temperature followed by severe drought. The fire leads to destruction of enormous flora and fauna along with deaths of many people. This awareness has also been underscored just a couple of weeks back by Lewis Pugh, a British South African Swimmer. He endured the icy conditions of the Antarctic ice during his ten-minute swim in order to issue a warning about the frightening effects of climate change, which can be seen in the wide gaps between melting water and glacier icebergs resulting from high temperatures and the propensity of the melting water to fall into oceans at any time.

He said as quoted in "Lewis Pugh swims under melting Antarctic ice sheet" (BBC News).

"I swam here today as we are in a climate emergency. We need immediate action from all nations to protect our planet."

The Wind From Nowhere, makes us peep into a scenario of eco catastrophe, using the metaphor of an increasing strong wind, which constantly blows from west to east, begins to collapse buildings worldwide, forcing people to live underground to survive. The most striking feature of the novel lies in Ballard's shift from a blame on anthropogenic activities to an implied warning of the offspring of global warming evident in the very hostile climate turning most part of the city totally unfit for the survival of humans. The characters literally struggle for fresh air to breathe.

"The air was full of large pieces of grit that flicked and stung at their faces like angry insects." (Ballard 105)

The very beginning of the novel takes us into the midst of winds that are destroying everything coming in their way. Ballard describes the winds brimming in terrifying power:

"Widespread havoc is reported from many parts of the world, particularly in the Far East and the Pacific, where tens of thousands are homeless. Winds of up to hurricane force have flattened entire towns and villages, causing heavy flooding and hampering the efforts of rescue workers." (Ballard19)

Ballard employs vivid imageries and apt words in order to highlight the nature of hurricane. He emphasizes that the wind "came from nowhere," denoting that it has an unknown source, and uses words like "flatten" and "heavy" to emphasize the wind's tremendous strength and its potentially deadly character. As Gregory Stephenson (42) says, "The nature of cataclysm is a global cyclone whose wind velocity ultimately reaches 550 mph, destroying nearly every surface structure on the face of the earth and inflicting untold millions of casualties."

Ballard depicts nature as winds that have become antagonistic and apathetic toward people. With their technical weapons, people had carelessly seized the earth in their own name of development. Now that they have been attacked by nature, all the supposedly sophisticated cities have been transformed into hell cities by ferocious cyclonic winds.

"The deliberate act of an outraged Providence, determined to sweep man and his pestilence from the surface of this once green earth." (Ballard 48)

The earth is now completely engulfed in the fierceness of the cyclic winds. No advanced country, including Singapore, New York, Tokyo, & others, is safe from its control. The wind has taken the lives of a number of people. The wind sweeps all manmade symbols of progress which includes skyscraper of capital, New York City or Nelson's column, Statue of Liberty or London Bridge. The wind eliminates the advances made by humans one at time, as if to reprimand an overconfident and domineering species. Such monuments' demolition is viewed as the demise of humanity's anthropocentric outlook. Ballard by portraying of destruction of world-famous monuments intends to suggest that whatever the man has created can be destroyed within the fractions of second and this demonstration provides the human race a clear signal to submit to nature's omnipotent authority. (Lingras 74) There is a subliminal message that man's intellect and reason are powerless against nature.

Ballard uses colorful and bizarre imagery to show how Earth, once the home of civilization, is becoming into a planet that is suffocating and wiping off the majority of humanity. It has turned into a nightmarish zone for its inhabitants owing to the asphyxiating atmosphere of extreme winds leading them to a slow death. The strange and unhealthy atmosphere have immensely destroyed the normal life of previous inhabitants of the city. It presents the fragility of humankind who with their scientific weapons are unable to stop the natural disaster. The so-called scientists fail even to get the correct cause of the ever-increasing catastrophe. All the governments come together in order to find a solution but fell down terribly.

Ballard depicts the psychological impact of the ecological calamity on people as they struggle to live. All the character turn against each other in a desperate battle for survival. In order to escape from the collapsing structures and wind driven debris on the surface, the people are

forced to take refuge underground. They are actually made to live like rats in their separate moles, which reflects how helpless they truly are:

"A sub-world of dark labyrinthine tunnels and shafts crowded with countless thousands of almost motionless beings, huddled together on the unlit platforms with their drab bundles of possessions, waiting patiently for the wind to subside, like the denizens of some vast gallery of the dead waiting for their resurrection." (Ballard 122).

Along with the wind, they also face a worsening food and water shortage. The picture has now changed with humans who have once claimed the vast lands of this planet are now stuck in small, narrow areas beneath the ground. The scene lays bare the fact how unprepared humans are against the impact of nature's sweeping intensity.

The abnormal environment leads to a drastic change in the behavioral patterns of the characters. They turn victims of strange and dreadful dreams akin to horror movies. They fail to differentiate between the dream and reality. Feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt take the charge. They desperately try to survive the dreary landscape. Their attempts are constantly defeated by swift winds enclosing them like parachute.

They are trapped psychologically between the devastation of the artificially created human world and the unbalanced natural environment. Dr. Maitland emerges as the embodiment of the deepest psychological crisis triggered by the alien environment. He fantasizes that he is severely wounded and blinded. In fact, because of his tired body and daunted subconscious mind, he goes on fantasizing eerie things. He has succumbed to the hallucination owing trauma.

He imagines himself to be in a hospital with other patients. Even after gaining full consciousness, he could hear feeble voices of doctors behind the walls. Additionally, the characters develop a ferocious way of survival to the point of turning against one another.

Kroll tries to kill Symington and Marshall. Everyone is trying to preserve his interest as for instance Marshall wants to leave the place of havoc along with Deborah only leaving rest of his team including Symington, Kroll, and Chrighton behind to die. The basic human values of humility, compassion, respect and empathy take a back seat in the picture.

Through the figure of Hardoon & the awful wind, the tale clearly portrays the dispute between nature and human beings. Hardoon symbolizes the modern man who has developed arrogance due to the scientific knowledge and the Hardoon Tower is a symbol of human endeavour to gain control over nature. He boasts that he can conquer everything with the aid of

technology including nature. He refuses to bow down before nature. He accuses others of being helpless, reduced to worms, insects, and sewer-like creatures that have submitted to nature. Hardoon is shown as being incredibly conceited, audacious, and self-assured in his effort to defy nature by building a pyramid-shaped edifice. However, the novel's conclusion shows that Hardoon is unable to vanquish the wind despite possessing an enormous amount of riches, power, and technological resources. Ballard aims to make the idea that man will never be better than nature by showing how a pyramid is destroyed.

The power and supremacy of nature is unchallengeable. It doesn't matter if walls of the pyramid are 30 feet thick fully capable to face the impact of a dozen hydrogen bombs or capable to withstand ten-thousand-mile-an-hour gales, it is ultimately buried down by one of the powerful forms of nature. The tale concludes with a scene of a massive pyramid being utterly demolished by a strong wind and immense drifts of dust. Thus, the wind projected in the novel reveals the immense power of nature and through the character of Hardoon, the ultimate reality of man's limitation is revealed. Gregory Stephenson rightly puts it:

"In the nature of Hardoon's struggle against the wind, and in his defeat, lies the symbolical meaning of the cataclysm." (43)

CONCLUSION

In the light of above discussion, we can confidently conclude that *The World From Nowhere* is one of the prophetic works of climate change in the present times which highlights not only our vulnerability to the grave consequences of climate change but also the fragility of personality and individuality celebrated by us as our prized possessions. Ballard vividly portrays the event of eco

catastrophe using the metaphor of cyclonic winds in the novel to reflect upon the worsening environmental crisis of today. He marvelously captures the threat of climate crisis and its grave consequences particularly the impossibility of human survival. At the heart of the novel lie the psychological effects of eco catastrophe on the characters confronted with an alien environment and their hopeless struggle against the catastrophe. It gives the ultimate message that there is no scope of survival for human beings unless and until they respect nature. The need of the hour is to address the climatic concerns in order to avoid such a nightmarish future.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1996.
- [2]. Lingras, S.A. *The Literary Ecology in the Select Novels of J G Ballard A Study in Eco Criticism*. 2017. Shivaji University. Ph.D. thesis. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/260267>.
- [3]. Ballard, J.G. *The Wind from Nowhere*. Berkley Books, 1961.
- [4]. Nayar, Pramod K. *Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture*. Routledge, 2019.
- [5]. Trautman, Kelvin. "Lewis Pugh swims under melting Antarctic ice sheet." *BBC News*, 24 Jan. 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-51212433>.
- [6]. Stephenson, Gregory. *Out Of The Night And Into The Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard*. Greenwood Press, 1991.