



CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN MIGRATION IN CRICHTON'S *STATE OF FEAR*

Mr. Bhīma K. Paikrao

Department of English, B.N.N. College, Bhiwandi,
Dist. Thane (Maharashtra)

Email- bkpaikrao204@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

John Michael Crichton is an American author and filmmaker who is known for his techno-thriller narratives. His *State of Fear* (2004) delves deep into the theme of anthropocene and human migrations. The novel is about the exploration by environmental researchers who explore the space of Antarctica and trace the working of ecoterrorist organisations who under the garb of research, harm and dismantle ecology. The characters are so vibrant that they move from place to place, at times, experiencing alienation and uprootedness. John Kenner, Sanjong, Evans, and Sarah Jones, an assistant to Morton migrate to the icy and chilling Antarctica where the narrative delves deep into ecological concerns of these characters and their spatial shifting. The present paper attempts to trace climate, climate change and migration in *State of Fear*.

KEY WORDS: Climate, ecology, environment, migration

“Although Michael Crichton’s *State of Fear* is neither high literature nor scientifically accurate, it may well be the most important climate change novel yet written.” (Trexler 35)

INTRODUCTION:

John Michael Crichton, is a well-known American author and a celebrated filmmaker whose books have been adapted into films that have run in the cinema talkies across the world. His works feature prominently technology within the genre of science fiction. His novels often exhibit technology and

failures of human interactions with technology, science and ecology. He explicates the resultant catastrophes in ecology and displacement of humans, animals and plants. His climate change narrative *State of Fear* (2004) delves deep into the theme of anthropocene and human dislocation. The novel is about Peter Evans who is a lawyer for a millionaire philanthropist, George Morton. His prime duties are to manage the legal affairs surrounding Morton's contributions to an environmentalist organization, the National Environmental Resource Fund (NERF). The narrative showcases how the focal characters shift spaces for their experiments and observations in ecology.

ILLUSTRATION:

The novel upholds Crichton's concerns about ecology, nature, climate and climate change. The writer chronicles a series of ecological destructions by environmental terrorists. He brings to light the active participation of politicians, scientists and celebrities in conspiring against ecology. Trexler rightly critiques:

State of Fear uses postmodern ideas and textual strategies to critique the political investments of environmentalists and scientific realism to argue climate change is a postmodern conspiracy. In the novel, scientific realism and postmodernism bolster each other, suggesting that they are not argumentative poles so many ecocritics have claimed. Worse, *State of Fear* indicates that both theoretical positions can be adapted to scepticism of climate change rather easily, suggesting that they are not critical trump cards that critics have hoped. (Trexler 34)

State of Fear opens with the description of seemingly unrelated events like the mysterious death of Jonathan Marshall, a researcher in Paris, and, the purchase of industrial equipments in Malaysia. These events all prove to be connected to Earth Liberation Front (ELF), the eco-terrorist group. These events also trigger the nexus between climate and migration. The writer introduces John Kenner and Sanjong Thapa, the researchers while tracking ELF, cross paths with associates of the National Environmental Research Fund (NERF). The National Environmental Research Fund include Morton, the

philanthropist, Peter Evans, his lawyer and Nicholas Drake, the director of NERF. Nicholas Drake is primarily concerned with global warming and the resultant catastrophe. He and his team are preparing for a lawsuit filed by the Pacific island Vanutu against the US government, who, it charges as responsible for the global warming causing rising sea levels that threaten the nation.

Gradually, Morton begins to doubt Nicholas Drake and withholds funding for NERF. The writer exhibits the mobility of people from place to place and across international space. Even certain dramatic events add to the mystery of the novel and the consequent alteration in human relations. After a NERF banquet, Morton leaves for his home. On his way, he meets with an accident and he is presumed dead, although his body is not found. These events amalgamate human and non-human instances in the narrative making it more complex and interesting. Adam Trexler rightly points out, “*State of Fear* is not an example of social, political, or human realism, but rather a network of humans and nonhumans assembled by the forces of climate change.” (Trexler 63)

Michael Crichton showcases the pivotal theme of migration as it is evident in the snippets of conversation between Evans and Kenner, as Evans is moving to Antarctica, “Now I’m flying to Antarctica. Isn’t it time somebody told me what this is about?” (Crichton 215) Also, the author triggers curiosity among his readers as the cause of Evans’ migration is just hinted at. Gradually, all the narrative is about the mighty talks of expenditures on environmental issues, research and expenses on environmental preservation. For instance, the writer chronicles, “And last year the IWPF spent six hundred fifty thousand dollars to gather information on environmental issues, including three hundred thousand dollars to something called the Rainforest Action and Support Coalition, RASC. Which turns out to be a drop box in Elmira, New York. And an equal sum to Seismic Services in Calgary, another drop box.” (Crichton 217)

Crichton investigates thoroughly the causes of environmental degradation and reasons for climate change. The technological advancements and the production of nuclear weapons are responsible for climate change. According to

Kenner even the high-intensity radio frequencies also can cause climate change.

He states:

The third clue we have had for some time. Certain government agencies track the sale of restricted high technologies that might be useful to terrorist. For example, they track everything that can be used in nuclear weapons production—centrifuges, certain metals, and so on. They track the sale of all conventional high explosives. They track certain critical biotechnologies. And they track equipment that might be used to disrupt communications networks—that generate electromagnetic impulses, for example, or high-intensity radio frequencies. (Crichton 220)

Further, the characters discuss about the causes of rise in temperature. The global warming results into bringing down more rains than the regular and normal. “Global warming is going to raise the temperature, so more moisture will evaporate from the ocean, and more moisture means more clouds.” (Crichton 222) This showcases the prime concern of the environmentalists today that is evident through the untimely rains and change in the cycle of nature.

Crichton portrays the change in climate and the change in space as his subjects move to Chile. Evans traverses to Antarctic regions for his research. The change in climate is evident with the shift in location, as the writer narrates, “They stepped out onto the runway of Marso del Mar, shivering in the chill wind that whipped in off the ocean. The land around them was low, green, marshy, and cold. In the distance Evans saw jagged, snow-covered spires of El Fogara range of southern Chile.” (Crichton 224)

Subsequently, the researchers visit the Antarctic regions and the debate in them highlights climate change. “The data shows that one relatively small area called the Antarctic Peninsula is melting and calving huge icebergs. That’s what gets reported year after year. But the continent as a whole is getting colder, and the ice is getting thicker.” (Crichton 228) Further, Evans observes, “I also see warming of the peninsula of *several degrees*. That certainly seems more significant. And that peninsula’s a pretty big part of the continent, isn’t it?”...

“When you said earlier that the Antarctic is melting,” Sanjong said, “were you aware that it has been melting for the last *six thousand years*?” (Crichton 230)

Crichton makes his characters vibrant and mobile as they swiftly move from place to place. The researchers in the narrative migrate to the extreme end of the globe, the Antarctic region for their research. This migration is seen when **Crichton observes:**

They were interrupted by the pilot’s voice on the intercom. “Good news,” he said. “The weather’s broken over Weddell, and we will land in ten minutes. For those of you who have never made a landing on ice, seat belts should be low and tight, and all your gear safely stowed. And we really mean it.” (Crichton 234)

Kenner, Sanjong, Evans, and Morton’s assistant Sarah Jones observe that the ice in the Antarctica is getting thicker as they refer to the article written by a writer regarding the ice getting thicker in the Antarctic region. “On the contrary, the author suggested that the real news was the end of this long term melting trend, and the first evidence of ice thickening. The author was hinting that this might be the first sign of the start of the next Ice Age.” (Crichton 237) This act also amplifies that the ecology is at the stake. It is impact of technology on ecology as the ice gets thicker, it seems, the world is moving towards freezing. Also, the novel also amplifies the shift in space and the incessant increase in fear. It talks about how within minutes a human can lose his fingers and life, “Just remember that whenever you are outside your vehicle, it is going to be thirty below zero. Keep your hands and face covered. Any exposed skin will get frostbite in less than a minute. Five minutes, and you’re in danger of losing anatomy. We don’t want you folks going home without all your fingers and toes. Or noses.” (Crichton 242) In addition to this, the researchers discuss about the past events that changed the ecological system. For instance, a breaking of an iceberg as big as an island. “Two years ago, an iceberg broke off the Ross Shelf that was four miles wide and forty miles long. It was a big as Rhode Island. One of the biggest ever seen.” (Crichton 245)

Consequently, the author shows how scientists are turning into ecoterrorists who exploit the ecological harmony for destruction. Science is used

for destroying the nature and natural habitation. Ecoterrorism is nexus between scientists and terrorists who exploit nature. They make blasts after certain interval of time that facilitates to create big waves and melting of glaciers. Crichton narrates, "Precision-timed blasts. They're explosives detonated with millisecond timing by computer in order to induce resonant effects. The individual blasts are not particularly destructive, but the timing sets up standing waves in the surrounding material. That's where the destructive power comes from—the standing wave." (Crichton 250)

Further, the writer explicates how the ecology is at threat. The ecoterrorists, under the garb of research in the Antarctica use explosives that not only harm the life in the Antarctica but it also creates a greater alteration in climate. The following conversation between the two researchers highlight the magnanimity of tide that harm the climate. The tsunamis are created by the ecoterrorists:

"And these explosives do that?"

"Yes. In nature, standing waves are incredibly powerful. They can shake a suspension bridge to pieces. They can shatter a skyscraper. The most destructive effects of earth-quakes are caused by standing waves generated in the crust."

"So Brewster's got these explosives...set in a row...for a hundred miles? Isn't that what Bolden said? A hundred miles?"

"Right. And I think there's no question what he intends. Our friend Brewster is hoping to fracture the ice for a hundred miles, and break off the biggest iceberg in the history of the planet." (Crichton 250-251)

State of Fear equally navigates the multiple migrations of the characters. Kenner is a scientist who migrates places. He is never stable. For his research activities, he moves from place to place, as he says:

"...you don't know your way around this part of the world..."

"You forget, I am an IADG inspector," Kenner said. "I was resident in Vostok Station for six months in the winter of '99. And I was resident in Morval for three months in '91. I know exactly what I'm doing." (Crichton 252)

Gradually, Crichton develops the suspicion as Kenner tells Evans that he is suspicious about the intentions of Drake. Subsequently, Evans finds a DVD wherein Drake is discussing the manipulation of the presentation of scientific research in order to suit NERF's intentions. Further, the writer narrates how Kenner and Sarah follow an ELF operative to Arizona. They also come to know that the eco-terrorists are planning to test the creation of artificial lightning in Arizona. The writer also showcases that the ELF members entrap Kenner and Sarah in the test site, so that these two will be killed in the artificial lightning. But, Kenner and Sarah narrowly escape the accident of being struck by lightning.

State of Fear projects the fear of humans who are involved in unearthing the wonders of experimentation with nature and ecology. The novel also highlights certain acts of scientists who organise conferences and publish papers and patents to prove their claims of changes in climate. Beard demonstrates to the public the solar energy plant. These demonstrations are entirely scientific, and the same cannot be understood by the general public. Still Beard is interested in focusing on his presentations. These acts involve human intrusion in ecology and at the same time the mobility of humans from place to place. Scholars, scientists and new reporters from variant cities visit Arizona for the conference. In other words, the writer develops the themes of climate change and human migration hand-in-hand.

The narrative amplifies the use of vehicles by the common public. Similarly, the use of vehicles in wars and ecoterrorism. The organisations who claim to be eco-friendly avail funds from various sources. Actually, these organisations are busy in experimenting in ecology dismantling the ecological order. Therefore, ecological organisations turn into ecoterrorists that are blindly being funded by Hollywood celebrities. Trexler pin points:

State of Fear tries to wrest suspicion of sport utility vehicles from liberal critiques of their inefficiency by pressing them into the war with ecoterrorists, while climate predictions come off badly from their association with lawyers and Hollywood celebrities. Novelistic situations like these make it possible to follow

the dynamic contests over scientific objects, as well as the reinterpretation of the world that these things make possible. (Trexler 72)

Further, *State of Fear* documents postmodern scenario that projects the dependence of scientists not on the real experimentations and observations in nature but their over dependence upon simulations and models, which are neither human representation nor objective facts. Climatology depends heavily on global climate models (GCMs), which allow scientists to study the complex interactions among the ocean, land, atmosphere, flora, fauna, and human industry. These instances also project that scientists rely more on their simulations and models than the actual nature. *State of Fear* exposes the contemporary contradiction between institutions as places for producing truth and as sites of corruption. The novel uncovers the facts that universities discover facts about the world, such as the media brings truth to the public, government committees and agencies establish the truth for political action and courts seek legal truth. Further, wealth enables private citizens to pursue the truth. These findings are far from reality.

Now, climate change is not the issue related to ecological degradation and the concerns for preserving nature any more. Climate uncertainties are deliberately projected by political leaders. In other words, climate change is politicised by leaders through their policies that are propagated by the media. The novel bridges scientific research, manipulation of data and fiction as the writer provides graphs and climate models. Antonia Mehnert rightly vocalizes: One prominent example of literary fiction about climate change risks is Michael Crichton's best-selling Thriller *State of Fear*. He illustrates how uncertainty is manipulated and deliberately employed in order to meet certain political goals. Yet, in his book climate change is ultimately reduced to a sham made up by a group of eco-activists. Crichton uses several graphs and climate models in his novel and arranges them strategically to foster doubts about the relation between increasing global temperatures and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. This distortion of facts is in itself not remarkable for a work of fiction. (Antonia Mehnert 132)

CONCLUSION:

State of Fear projects eco-activists and their observations that ignore research regarding climate and anthropocene. They focus much upon the deliberately manipulated data and the engagement of political leaders, environmental organisations, eco-activists and celebrities in violent action to prove that climate change is happening. The novel focuses more upon the expenditure on misinformation. The author, thus amplifies the themes of ecology, climate, climate-change, scientific intrusion of humans in ecology and the mobility and translocation of humans.

REFERENCES:

- 1) Antonia Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, London.
- 2) Jeremy J. Hess, Josephine N. Malilay, Alan J. Parkinson, “Climate Change: The Importance of Place” in *The Health Impacts of Climate Change American Journal of Preventive Medicine* Volume 35, Issue 5, November 2008,
- 3) Laura Wright, “Cli-Fi: Environmental Literature for the Anthropocene,” in *New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel*, Eds. Sibylle Baumbach and Birgit Neumann, Palgrave McMillan, 2020, New York.
- 4) Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, “The Influence of Climate Fiction: An Empirical Survey of Readers”, in *Environmental Humanities*, 2018, Yale, Singapore.
- 5) Michael Crichton, *State of Fear*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2004, London.
<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/climate-change-novels/>
<https://www.outsideonline.com/culture/books-media/climate-fiction-ecommended-reading-list/>
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368222056 Climate Fiction A Promising Way of Communicating Climate Change with the General Public](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368222056_Climate_Fiction_A_Promising_Way_of_Communicating_Climate_Change_with_the_General_Public)