

Nurturing Environmental trepidations: Exploring Climate Awareness and Childhood Innocence in Bijal Vacchrajanai's *Saavi: The Memory Keeper* - July - September 2024

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*Saavi: The Memory Keeper***

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ABSTRACT

Cli-fi bestirs as a emanating genre on the grounds of disparate and coercive environmental repercussions. The writers emulated an idiosyncratic perspective on the sweeping ecological and climate crisis with an amalgamation of our country's rich cultural heritage and coevaleco-friendly problems. Traditional narratives are intertwined with futuristic scenarios aiming to emphasize the lurking danger behind deforestation. Water scarcity, Rising sea levels, and Melting of polar ice caps and glaciers were the ancillary eventualities due to the hastyobliteration of trees and forests. In this context, juvenile fiction has the restraint to foster ecological anxieties and cognizance among the readers. The article aims to explore how Bijal Vacchrajanai, in her novel *Saavi: The Memory Keeper*, makes use of imaginative storytelling to pinnacle the increasingly erratic

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weather patterns. It also highlights the unprecedented climate upheaval that Mother Earth is going to face in the distant future. The paper focuses on the potency of environmental knowledge and climate advertency among the young generations.

Keywords: Climate Awareness, Ecological Concerns, Children's Literature, Crisis, Progress

Climate fiction, prevalently called Cli-fi, is fictitious literature that artifies the impact of fluctuating climate due to both artificial and non-natural contaminants. Though it is profoundly entrenched in Science Fiction, it lures devotion to literary realism. The term Cli-Fi was ubiquitous during the 2010s, but many novelists have been writing fortuitously for at least two decades. Even in 1815, George Gordon Byron penned a poem named "Darkness". In the poem, he exposes the dark, wet, and spiteful summer in Europe in 1816. He spent that summer with Mary Shelley near Lake Geneva, Switzerland. As the poem spotlights calamitous and abysmal circumstances, the poem is considered post-apocalyptic. In the poem, he illustrated Earth as "icy". Byron declares, "Men forget their passions in the dread of this their desolation" ("Darkness", 7-8). As people mislaid their impetus due to the detrimental meteorological conditions, they became wretched and set fire to woods for light and balminess. Dearth flares up, and the residents dwindle, resulting in the ruin of European Civilization.

Climate change is not a one-person concern; it is a far-fetched systematic problem. A solitary protagonist cannot debunk it, so the plot is centred on the poignant arcs of the characters. The augmented striding of the plot is interspersed by catastrophe. Cli-fi plays a substantial role in concocting solutions for the looming jeopardy. Having explored and offered an illusory way out, these novels foster readers to envisage latent real-life solutions. Some of the prominent works of Cli-fi are Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, *MaddAddam* Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Sherri L. Smith's *ss Orleans*, Helen Philips's *Some Possible Solutions*, Omar El Akkad's *American War*, *Factory Air* James Bradley's *Clade* and Lauren Groff's *Florida*.

As the climate predicament unfolds, Indian writers ruminate that fiction should be the absolute place of residence. Amitav Ghosh is endorsed as the first Indian English-language writer to venture into the genre of Climate Change with his non-fiction work

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The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable. The non-fiction caters a stable steam to progressively sentient and snooping onlookers. Waning monsoons, urbanization, famines, noxious air, and adulterated water are the upshots of climate change that are spotlighted in many Indian narratives. The narratives evolved as a result of laxity and gaffes that drastically changed the sense of our nation. Every writer felt an urgency to picture the post-climate change world owing to the mess caused by natural calamities.

Ecologist and wildlife activist Akshay Manwanid desires to instill inquisitiveness and a sense of miracle amidst progenies through Climate writings. According to him, Children's minds are sponges, and the book that draughts the poaching of flora, fauna, and ecosystem encumbers the fledgling minds with the impulse of life and nature. Climate fiction in juvenile literature does not intuitively entail the adverse climate discourse; instead, these fictions should be crafted with subliminal messages of upholding the poise in the ecosystem by looking after with reverence the way they have treated humans. Apart from familiarizing them with our country's flagship species to the children, these narratives enrich and enthrall them with the rich vastness of India's biodiversity. Hence, children's literature plays an edifying role by mutually catechizing and elevating young minds by leavening their minds with environmental alertness.

Indian writers have the privilege to facet the imperilled birds in our country, like the peregrine falcon, the sarus crane, the Indian grey wolf and the silver-breasted broadbill. Countless writers emphasize our country's flagship species, like the tiger, which has colossal schemes for its conservation in the Indian subcontinent. Thus, Indian writers have to focus on the continuum of dying out species. Hence, the genre Climate fiction not only highlights the malleability of the climate crisis but also its hostile influence on the native flora and fauna. Owing to the desolation wrought upon the planet by incessant urbanization in the name of advancement, Children's writings are teeming with ecological concerns and unmatched relationships between humans and non-humans. One such children's writer who drafts about sustainable environment development is Bijal Vachharajani. She is the author of many planet-friendly narratives like *Saavi: The Memory Keeper*, *The Cloud Called Bhura* and *When Fairyland lost its magic*. She has her masters in Environment Security and Peace with a specialization in Climate Change and Security at the UN-Mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica. Being a

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certified climate worrier, her writings focus on the changing global climate and its havoc on humans.

In the novel *Saavi: The Memory Keeper*, the protagonist, SavitriAbhay Kumar, is a thirteen-year-old girl who has just relocated to a fictional town named Sharjapur. BijalVachharajani chose a fictional setting for her plot as she needed help locating a city with a flawless climate in today's scenario. After the demise of her lovable father, Saavi moved along with her mother and sister to Sharjapur. She was exasperated by the adulterated air and infested drinking water in Delhi. She illustrates the condition of Delhi, "It had reached properly muddy brown and foul-smelling proportions. But at least in smoggy Delhi, everyone was equally gloomy" (1). Though she is a novice to Sharjapur, she gets mesmerized by the lushness of its climate as every person in the city relentlessly swears about the seamless weather. She calls it a blissful climate as it has just right in the summer, winter, monsoon and spring. She adds that everywhere else in the world has water and food scarcity, constant hurricanes and cyclones.

Saavi parallels the climate of Delhi with Sharjapur. She elucidates the climate of Sharjapur as a pearly fresh rose just plucked from a Mughal Garden. She remarks on the city of Sharjapur, "Happiness was a low electricity bill. It was a matter of pride that nobody needed to own an air conditioner" (3). People in the city rarely fell sick, and doctors led miserable lives on account of minuscule incomes. Even the school prospectus in this city was slightly different from other cities because besides teaching about climate change, they also expound about the other living species on the planet. In the newspaper, the weather report section proclaimed the city's weather as 'The Happiness Report'. Being her husband's native city, her mother migrated from smoggy Delhi to Sharjapur. As her father was an ardent lover of plants, she took all her father's forty-two plants with her without leaving them alone in Delhi. The whole family, after the unanticipated demise of Abhay Kumar, desired to restart their life with a new job and new beginnings in a place where the air was miraculously clean with impeccable weather unscathed by climate change.

As soon as they moved to his hereditary apartment, Saavi sorted all his dad's plants in her room. Among them, Jasmine's plant is his esteemed one, and so she moves

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that plant with utmost care closer to the windowsill. While touching a smooth, shiny leaf of the plant, she sinks into deep and lush green moss. The Jasmine plant takes her over to another world, where she sees a little boy jump down from the lowest branch of the tree. She describes that "His frown disappeared for a second as he touched the gigantic tree's trunk" (19). Saavi is baffled as she does not understand what the plant is trying to show her. She feels surreal, yet the perfect weather makes her feel less alone. She correlates the climate of Sharjapur with Delhi. She delineates, "It had been so long since I had inhaled fresh air that I had forgotten what it felt like" (23). When she inhales those sterilized air, it actually hurts her like a Knife scraping over a piece of carbonized toast. Being a newbie in her school, she did not have any companions with her.

During the lunch break, she grabbed her lunch box and departed to the field behind the school grounds. There was an outlandish voice calling her Savitri. She was incensed at first, but finally, she realized that a tree was calling her, and it was the same tree that the jasmine plant had shown to her. She epitomizes the tree: "I stared at the ginormous tree in front of me. Its branches spread out like a peacock dancing in the rain, proud and magnificent" (31). Having never seen a tree like this in her entire life, she professed that it was the palatial tree that the jasmine plant had exposed to her and that the small boy she had dappled was none other than her father. She apprehended that her dad communicated with her through trees. Hence, she acknowledged that tree as a big, friendly giant and a soulful companion to her loneliest school life. She leaned back against the tree trunk and sealed her eyes. Tree enunciated to her that it was their magic that controlled the climate of Sharjapur.

Tree divulges its agony with Saavi. It has revealed that "The Laburnum tree fell next, As did the amaltas, So did the neem tree, And the Gulmohar" (37). It endorsed that humans used a strange word for chopping up the trees. They ratified this as a reclamation. They reclaimed the tree that belonged to the mudskippers, the corals, the crabs, and the lapwings but receded it as theirs. It specified that its magic weakened owing to the shrinking of its fellow tribes. It also painfully publicized the void left by the fallen trees. "Grew a forest anew, Canopies of glass, Roots of Cement, Barks of steel and not a forest of concrete" (37). It disclosed the narrow-mindedness of Sharjapurians as they have been desiring buildings, malls and parking lots over trees, beaches and

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mangroves. It enumerated how birds, wasps, flew crested serpents, eagles and black kites were enraptured, surrounded by an assortment of trees. Saavi deduced that she was going to live in a weird climate worse than Delhi's Climate. She surmised that if there is something good, people will end up taking it for granted. She was spooked and astonished when she espied that the trees conferred her and pontificated its reverberation with her. She was pleased that she got a weird superpower in a weird weather city.

As days passed, Saavi began to witness the unthinkable climate in Sharjapur. People were running behind the AC fitting crew as they could not able to withstand the bizarre climate. Once the people had been so exultant and proud of their perfect weather, they had overlooked the slowly changing climate. In the fair weather in Sharjapur, weather apps display a hovering temperature of 30 degrees Celsius. Looking after and confronting the tree became a part of her everyday life. She perceived that being around the tree did not stop the hurt. Instead, her presence eased them as they had someone to bespeak their fretfulness. When she touches the trunk, it begins to speak with her. It was discerned that the people of Sharjapur began to forget about the outside green world. The tree revealed its gripe, "Each time a group complained-those green, eco, citizen of friends-saplings were planted, and photos were taken alongside tons of back-slapping"(51). It whimpers that people click on a signature petition and getdistracted by a social media post or an advertisement about famous brands.

Every time Saavi clasps the tree, it laments its angsts and frustrations without any hesitation. It also notes how people would be distracted by any news about trees being chopped or mangroves being reclaimed for land. Because of undesirable weather, her plants are declining increasingly. She confronts that, "The line of definitely dead plants was increasing and the rows of definitely alive plants dwindling, like a horrendous question in a maths exam with the most dreadful of calculations" (53). She admits that being talked to plants actually results in the healthy growth of plants. This fiction apprehends that trees communicate with each other, share nutrients, and even send distress signals.

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Jerry Pinto acclaimed this novel as a book of magic. He added that when we had finished the reading, we would go out and hug a tree. The novel *Saavi: The Memory Keeper* summarizes creativity and awareness. Apart from entertaining, though there are appealing narratives and relatable characters, Bijal Vacchrajanai fosters a sense of accountability and empowerment in the minds of young readers. She acknowledges not only individual actions but also collective responsibility in battling environmental challenges. Through the character Saavi, she equips the next generation with the ecological understanding and stimulus to make a big difference in the unprecedented climate crisis. The fictitious Sharjapur sparks a nous of responsibility and awe, where young voices lead the charge to make a greener and more viable future.

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