



Dystopian Futures and Climate Crisis in South Asia: An Ecocritical Reading of *The City Inside* by Samit Basu

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has become a critical crisis of the twenty-first century, which is particularly disproportionately impacting vulnerable areas like South Asia. The urbanization, population growth, poverty and fragility of infrastructure have exacerbated the situation in these areas. This challenge is well documented in the scientific and policy-making literature and it is in this literature that a narrative space exists to make the abstract information on the environment “emotionally evocative” and “ethically compelling. *The City Inside* by Samit Basu is an ecocritical analysis of a text that has received no systematic scholarly attention from any scholar in this genre of analysis in South Asian literary literature so far. With the help of qualitative textual analysis, inspired by interpretivism, the paper sets out to achieve three broad objectives: to discuss the theme of climate change and the social rates in the novel; to explore how the dystopian features mirror the environmental and political crisis in the South Asian context; to analyse its critique of ecological inequities and state control mechanisms. According to the findings, it is suggested that the novel is a cultural diagnosis as well as a political commentary on the climate crisis and an indictment of global environmental injustice in the urban South Asian context. This study contributes to the climate fiction research by placing the work of Samit Basu in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism and the environmental humanities more generally, and by emphasizing the importance of literature in developing environmental awareness and active participation in the Anthropocene.

1. Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most urgent crises of the twenty-first century, transforming ecological systems as well as economic, political, and social structures across the globe. Climate change is no longer a gradual change, but rather extreme temperatures, severe weather events, glacier and ice-sheet decline, sea-level rise and climate disruptions to human and ecological systems (IPCC, 2022). These effects are larger in more densely-populated and economically-challenged areas, where adaptive capacity is small, leading to greater exposure to climate-related hazards. In cities of major south Asian countries like Delhi, Karachi, Dhaka etc., the deteriorating air quality, extreme heat, erratic monsoon, water scarcity and poor infrastructure have turned climate change an immediate concern of the cities (Sengupta & Dasgupta, 2021).

This study will be on *The City Inside* by Samit Basu (2022), a modern-day South Indian dystopian novel set in a near future Delhi. Samit Basu paints a picture of an urban environment where climatic conditions are extreme, air is contaminated, digital

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surveillance is pervasive, and socio-economic inequality is growing. The novel is set in a city where safety, mobility, use of technology, and environmental protection are unequally distributed among the social classes (Basu, 2022). In this respect, the novel addresses the broader issue of climate risk inequality. Alston (2019) refers to this new phenomenon as “climate apartheid”, in which the effects of climate change are felt more strongly by those who are less privileged and less wealthy than by those who are more privileged and wealthier. Samit Basu’s imagined Delhi is thus a metaphor for the ways in which pollution, politics, technology, and socio-economic disparity can converge.

It is especially relevant to the South Asian context to discuss the link between the environment and social inequality. Climate vulnerability is not just a consequence of exposure to environmental hazards, but also poverty, social marginalization, weak infrastructure and unequal access to resources (Huq et al., 2015). Climate change is thus a social and political crisis as well as an ecological crisis. *The City Inside* explores this relationship through the themes of environmental instability, systems of surveillance, economic inequality and political control (Basu, 2022).

This research uses an ecocritical method in analyzing the representation of climate change and ecological problems in the city in the novel *The City Inside*. Ecocriticism offers a way to explore how literature and the natural world connect (Glottfelty, 1996). Additionally, Buell’s (2005) approach extends on this and focuses on the human relationships that are represented in literary works and the ethical implications of environmental damage. In contrast to Nixon (2011), who coins the term “slow violence,” to name the slow, often imperceptible, environmental violence. Unlike Nixon (2011), who coins the term “slow violence,” for slow, often imperceptible, environmental violence, however, These theoretical views are especially pertinent in the novel by Samit Basu, which foregrounds the environmental crisis closely linked to social inequalities and political power.

The City Inside can thus be seen as more than a geographical location, from an ecocritical aspect. It serves as a space of ecology and ideology where power, privilege, vulnerability and environmental risk intersect. The novel shows how climate hazards can become a part of everyday urban life, such as the unequal access to clean air, secure housing, technology, mobility and other resources (Basu, 2022). Thus environmental crisis is enmeshed with the representation of class divisions and political authority. It is also important that the novel is set in a South Asian context as this helps to frame larger discussions around climate fiction and environmental humanities that are not necessarily anchored in a Western literary paradigm. Chakrabarty (2009) contends that the local and the global are linked via climate change and that traditional views of human history are undermined. Likewise, De Loughrey (2015) calls for studies of the environmental crisis from a postcolonial and geographically varied lens. Therefore, the potential of South Asian climate fiction is to foreground experiences of climate vulnerability that often go unmentioned in dominant climate narratives, which can help to widen the field of the environmental humanities.

South Asian’s vulnerability to climate changes gives an important context to the novel ecological concerns. This is due to the high population density, reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods and inequitable vulnerability to climate-related risks in the region (Huq et al., 2015). South Asia is also estimated to be vulnerable to significant climate change threats, according to the World Bank report (2020), especially extreme heat, flooding, water stress, disruption of agriculture and impacts on human development. In this respect, the issue of climate change is not an isolated environmental problem in the region, but one that is connected with the social and economic vulnerabilities present in the region.

Another significant aspect of South Asian climatic vulnerability is the Himalayan region. The alterations of glaciers, rainfall and availability of water have effects not only on agriculture and ecosystems but also millions of people in the region (Kelkar & Bhadwal, 2007). Meanwhile, the impacts of climate change can exacerbate existing factors affecting food security and human development (Alam et al., 2011). These changes in the environment reflect how a changing climate can have impacts that cross national boundaries and impact inter-dependent ecological and socio-economic systems.

One example that is relevant for Pakistan is the interaction of climate hazards with social vulnerability. Soil moisture is below normal in many parts of the country and the communities are facing challenges of floods, droughts, and extreme heat, while climate-related disasters are adding a layer of stress on food systems, public health, infrastructure, and livelihoods (Khan and Siddiqui, 2018). Climate-related disasters may also exacerbate existing inequalities by disproportionately impacting those who have less capacity to recover from and adapt to disasters (Mustafa et al., 2011). The outcomes of climate change are therefore a function of environmental exposure and social and institutional capacity as shown in such conditions.

This broadly shared climate vulnerability has been noted through international climate risk assessments, as well. In the region, countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh have been hit multiple times by extreme weather events and have not been able to adequately respond to those events (Eckstein et al., 2019). The context described here is important for the understanding of South Asian climate fiction in which environmental crisis might be manifested as the sense of displacement, inequality, insecurity, and political instability.

Within this context, urban environments are especially significant as urbanization can exacerbate existing climate stresses. Some of these problems are interlinked and are being faced by cities like Delhi, Karachi, and Dhaka wherein there is a problem with air pollution, reduction in green spaces, water scarcity, temperature rise, and lack of infrastructure (Sengupta & Dasgupta, 2021). The urban heat-island effect can create much higher temperatures in heavily built up areas than in their surrounding environments and further exacerbates the warming trend. The impacts are often more pronounced for the people living in informal settlements and low-income areas, who may not have access to cooling systems, stable power, clean water and health services and safe homes.

Social and spatial inequality thus influences the urban climate vulnerability. Income, class, and political clout often dictate access to environmental protection or to other basic urban resources. Baviskar (2004) illustrates how urban development and environmental politics can insure inequalities by favouring the interests of the elite and displacing or marginalising vulnerable communities. Climate change can thus exacerbate social inequalities and turn access to a safe environment into a social luxury.

By focusing on social inequality and environmental vulnerability, this relationship is at the heart of *The City Inside*. Samit Basu's future Delhi is not only a literature of the urban, but also a literature of a growing polarization and differentiation between privileged and marginalized populations as a result of climate change. The dystopian setting of the novel illustrates how environmental deterioration can be connected to surveillance, technological control, economic disparities, and political oppression (Basu, 2022). In this process the text goes beyond the portrayal of climate change as a natural or scientific fact, and portrays it as a condition created and felt within social structures.

Climate change thus becomes an ecological and political reality in the novel. The unequal distribution of environmental risk is an expression of broader issues of who gets safe and who suffers the impacts of ecological degradation and who can afford to adapt. Questions like this reflect Nixon's (2011) definition of environmental injustice as a form of violence whose impacts can be slow, diffuse, and borne by vulnerable groups. The ecological crisis shown in *The City Inside* is then a critique of conditions that enable environmental privilege to exist alongside high levels of environmental vulnerability.

In conclusion, this thesis makes a case for *The City Inside* as a cultural diagnosis and as political commentary on a new reality of climate crisis in the urban South Asian context. The novel highlights the interconnectedness of climate change with issues of power and justice, as it portrays the novel's characters in polluted environments, extreme climates, under technological surveillance, and socio-economic inequality (Basu, 2022). The novelty makes it thus possible to analyse how the novel represents environmental degradation and to question the political and economic system that helps to create unequal experiences of climate change in an ecocritical reading of the novel. Overall, the study also suggests that the production of South Asian climate fiction helps to extend the environmental humanities as it introduces postcolonial, urban and socially unequal experiences of ecological crisis into the Anthropocene (Chakrabarty, 2009) debates. In this regard, *The City Inside* not only envisions a possible future in a world altered by climate change, but also asks readers to reflect on the connections between environmental, urban, technological, and human survival and how they are interacting.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To analyze the representation of climate change and its social implications in Samit Basu's *The City Inside* through an ecocritical lens.
- To explore how the dystopian elements in the novel reflect real-world environmental and political crises in contemporary South Asia.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does *The City Inside* depict the impact of climate change on urban life and social structures in South Asia?
2. How does the novel employ dystopian elements to critique political oppression, environmental degradation, and digital surveillance?

1.3 Significance of the Research

This study is significant because it contributes to literary studies, environmental humanities, and the emerging field of South Asian climate fiction. The region is experiencing an increase in extreme weather patterns, air pollution, water scarcity, socio-economic instability and rising temperatures, thus it is important to consider the literature's response and representation to these challenges. Climate fiction offers a valuable cultural platform to examine and analyse social, political and human impacts of climate change.

Samit Basu's *The City Inside* is particularly important to explore in an ecocritical lens as it introduces a South Asian literary lens to questions of climate change and environmental crisis. The discussion around Cli-Fi and environmental writing, which has had an impact, has been historically Western (contextual). This study is particularly focused on Samit Basu's depiction of an environmentally challenged Delhi in the future, thereby highlighting the importance of voices from South Asia in understanding the global environmental crises. It illustrates the distinct nature of the impact of climate change in geographic, social and economic settings and the ways in which the local literary story can respond to global environmental issues (Chakrabarty 2009; DeLoughrey 2015).

The study is also important because it considers dystopian fiction as a form of representation of environmental and social injustice. *The City Inside* is a representation of environmental degradation, political oppression, urban inequality, technological surveillance and climate change. The novel, set in a dystopian world, highlights the ways in which environmental crises can exacerbate inequalities between privileged and marginalised communities. In that sense, an ecocritical reading of the novel offers a way to understand the connection between environmental degradation and social arrangements, as climate change is a matter of justice, power and inequality, not just the environment (Buell, 2005; Nixon, 2011).

More importantly, this work is of interdisciplinary value as it brings together literary scholarship and environmental studies, political theory and social criticism. The analysis illustrates how narrative can be used to offer a meaningful way to understand complex environmental problems and their impacts on urban populations. Literature can help to make the abstract discussion of climate change more approachable by depicting environmental crises through individual experiences, social relationships and everyday urban life.

The results of this study could also benefit the scholars, educators, and researchers in the realm of climate fiction, ecocriticism, dystopian literature, and literature of South Asia. The study of *The City Inside* as an example of a South Asian environmental and political crisis could inspire other researchers to study modern South Asian literature and its relationship to climate change. It also can foster the use of literature in classroom settings to generate increased awareness of social and environmental injustice and social impact of ecological degradation.

Lastly, the research is meaningful due to the role of literature in promoting awareness and critical reflection regarding the environment. *The City Inside* is not only a dystopian future, it is a questioning of the social and political circumstances that might create such a future. This research will use an ecocritical approach to the study to explore the following questions: How can climate fiction be a tool to educate and raise awareness about environmental injustice? How can climate fiction help readers to dream more imaginative future scenarios that are more sustainable and more equitable?

2.1 Literature Review

Climate fiction, commonly referred to as cli-fi, has emerged as an important area of literary and interdisciplinary scholarship concerned with the representation of climate change and its environmental, social, political, and cultural consequences. Climate fiction differs from scientific presentations of climate change, which often employ statistics, projections and scientific models, in that it visualizes environmental change through the characters, the conflicts, the feelings, and the imagined futures. In so doing, it brings to life the abstract and large-scale impacts of climate change in a way that is more accessible and emotionally resonant to readers. Dan Bloom (2007) has been credited with popularizing the term cli-fi, which was used to describe works of literature on the subject of climate change and its repercussions. Since then, the study of climate fiction has grown to become a substantial part of the broader discipline of literary studies as well as environmental humanities, political theory, cultural studies and climate studies.

Literature is an important means of communication in conveying the complexities of climate change, as explained by Johns-Putra (2016), in which fiction can transfer the environmental processes that occur over a large scale into human experience. Climate change is a process that takes place over large areas and across long periods of time, and is problematic when it comes to the narration of a climate change story. Fiction helps to overcome this challenge by portraying climate change as a personal struggle to survive, move, lose, fight and change. Therefore, climate change is not only a scientific/environmental problem, it is also a literary/cultural problem that calls for new forms of storytelling.

In a similar fashion, Trexler (2015) investigates the novel's connection to climate change and contends that it is a fundamental cultural artifact that can help societies to imagine and interpret environmental change. Climate fiction provides opportunities to experience possible futures of the climate through narratives in addition to scientific information. Literature can be used to make climate scenarios come alive and into the reader's imagination, which can help them reflect on the ethical and social implications of environmental change. *The City Inside* is a more relevant study for Trexler's approach to working with environmental and social fear as a speculative urban narrative.

Moreover, Schneider-Mayerson (2018) highlights the possible connection between literary fiction and readers' views on climate change. Climate fiction can engage the imagination and emotions by offering scenarios of future climates under stress. Literary narratives can elicit emotional reactions by portraying characters and their problems, instead of merely informing readers of climate change. This emotional aspect is significant because climate change is often perceived as a future risk and threat. Fiction can lessen or overcome that gap by immersing the reader in a fictional world in which ecological crisis is a common experience.

Eco-narratology has likewise been instrumental in broadening the range of literary strategies used in the field of environmental fiction. Rather, James and Morel (2018) stress the need to look not only at the message of the story but also its form as a means of communicating ecological relationships. Stated in this way, the act of storytelling, time, characters, environments, and events can all be used to represent environmental change. This is especially pertinent with regard to *The City Inside*, as the novel's dystopian setting and depiction of a climate-changed future could be studied thematically as well as by the way in which the story is constructed to represent ecological and social crises.

Climate fiction often overlaps with dystopian fiction because dystopian fiction offers a useful tool for envisioning the future impacts of climate change. Dystopian stories can reveal social and political ramifications of current situations by casting a shadow of possible futures through projection of contemporary fears. Environmental dystopias are warnings and critiques, then, as such. They do not only envision environmental breakdown, but also explore the reaction of societies, governments and individuals when environmental crises arise. In the context of *The City Inside*, this link between climate fiction and dystopia is very interesting because it correlates with technology surveillance, political power and social discrimination.

One of the significant theoretical tools that help to analyse such representations is ecocriticism. According to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), ecocriticism is the investigation of the connection between literature and the environment. Ecocriticism was a reaction to theories that focused on human relations and humanities in interpreting literature without considering the connection of human societies and nonhuman environment. The approach enables literary texts to be analysed in relation to environmental ethics, ecological relationships, environmental degradation and the impacts of human activity. In the context of climate fiction, ecocriticism is especially helpful as it brings together literary representation and questions of ecological crisis and environmental justice.

As interest in the Anthropocene has intensified, so, too, has the link between ecocriticism and climate fiction. Climate change is an assault upon the conventional notions of history because humankind has been a significant agent of climate change as well. According to Chakrabarty (2009), climate change undermines the traditional understanding of history because human has become a strong player in the planetary systems. The viewpoint invites researchers to reflect on the transformation of attitudes towards human history, modernity, and responsibility in the context of environmental crisis. Within a South Asian context, this is especially important due to the interweaving of colonial history, social inequality, poverty, urbanization and uneven development with the impacts of climate change.

The dystopian genre has always served as an outlet to reflect social fears related to political repression, technological control, social control, and environmental destruction. The dystopian models of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* set influential standards with their depictions of surveillance, authoritarianism, social conditioning, and limitations on personal freedom. As a genre, dystopian literature can be a vehicle for social criticism, revealing the oppressive aspects of the existing social and political system, as suggested by Booker (1994). Dystopian literature is also explored by Moylan (2000), who sees it as a genre that allows the examination and questioning of contemporary social conditions.

Moylan (2000) gives the term "critical dystopia" which is unlike traditional dystopian stories because it retains the possibility of resistance and transformation. Critical dystopias are not necessarily grim futures, but they do challenge the readers to reflect upon the systems in place and to think about other possibilities. Baccolini and Moylan (2003) go further in developing such understanding by showing how contemporary dystopian narratives can be juxtaposed in their presentation of oppression and forms of resistance and ambiguity and potential change. The framework is applicable to *The City Inside* as the dystopian setting of the novel could be interpreted as more than just a reflection on the future's apocalyptic events, but as a criticism of current political, technological, and environmental conditions.

One of the most effective types of climate dystopias is one that portrays current environmental issues in a near-future context. Bracke (2017) notes that in climate fiction, the sense of urgency often arises from the portrayal of a climate future that feels like it could be close to today's world and therefore plausible. Climate dystopias are especially compelling critiques of their environments, thanks to the close connection between fictional futures and environmental realities. The scared worlds they create are scary in part because they have been linked to real-world issues like extreme temperatures, environmental damage, resource limitations, political unrest, and social disparity.

The City Inside is an example of contemporary South Asian dystopian climate fiction within this theoretical and literary terrain. The novel imagines an environmental stress, extreme weather, socio-economic divisions, technological surveillance and air pollution ravaged future Delhi (Basu, 2022). It depicts urban crisis which may be used to explore the interaction of environmental degradation with political power and social inequality. Thus the novel can be placed in the category of climate fiction, dystopian fiction and ecocriticism.

The South Asian context is especially relevant since climate change is closely linked to the rapid urbanization, environmental inequality and resource inequity in the region. Chakrabarty (2009) and DeLoughrey (2015) argue for the need to look at environmental crisis from a postcolonial and geographically diverse perspective, and not just the Western one. The study of *The City Inside* can therefore be used to engage with climate fiction, through the lens of South Asian urban imagination of climate change.

Overall, the existing literature establishes climate fiction as an important literary form for representing environmental crisis and developing emotional, ethical, and political responses to climate change. Theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and dystopian theory help us analyse the environment/literature and dystopia/political oppression, technological control and social crisis respectively. In current South Asian novels, however, the overlap of these lines is relatively unexplored, as is the case with *The City Inside*. This study combines the fields of climate-fiction studies, ecocriticism, and dystopian theory to explore how Samit Basu depicts the climate change and its social and political repercussions.

2.2 Research Gap

Although climate fiction and ecocriticism have received increasing scholarly attention, there is still limited research on contemporary South Asian dystopian fiction, particularly on the relationship between climate change, social inequality, political oppression, and technological control. Climate fiction has been talked about in relation to climate crisis and dystopian literature in terms of criticism of surveillance, political power and social inequality. But these viewpoints have not been well linked in the discussion of South Asian climate dystopias.

The City Inside (2022) by Samit Basu, however, despite that it portrays climate change, environmental degradation, urban inequality, digital surveillance, political control etc. is an under-critically read work from an ecocritical point of view. This novel offers a chance to reflect on climate change as an environmental and also social and political issue that influences urban reality and impacts various social segments in different ways.

This study thus tries to fill this gap and looks at how *The City Inside* depicts climate change and climate change as a social issue, and how dystopian aspects in the film satirize environmental degradation, political oppression, and digital surveillance. The study focuses on a South Asian urban context and thus supports the field of climate-fiction studies, ecocriticism, dystopian studies, and environmental humanities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to conduct an interpretive and contextually grounded analysis of Samit Basu's *The City Inside*. Qualitative research is suitable for studies of literature because meanings, experiences, contexts, themes, symbols, patterns, etc. are investigated and not numerical measurements or statistical generalizations are sought. According to Creswell (2014), research design is a bridge that links the philosophical perspectives, approach to investigation, and research methods. In the current research project, the qualitative methodology helps the researcher to explore the novel's representation of the climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, political oppression, and digital surveillance issues.

According to Kothari (2004), qualitative research is useful for studying in-depth the complex social and cultural phenomena. For literary studies, this method facilitates detailed analysis of the elements of the narrative, such as the characters, images, symbols, setting, themes, and ideological representations. The study technique employed is close reading and textual analysis, in accordance with the problem that is to be solved.

The study adopts a paradigm of interpretivism that considers the reality and knowledge is socially and culturally constructed. According to Schwandt (2014), interpretivist research involves interpreting the meanings people or cultural products give to specific phenomena in particular contexts. In literary analysis, this paradigm allows a researcher to analyze the ways in which environmental destruction, vulnerability to climate change, social inequality, surveillance, and urban dystopia are constructed and interpreted in *The City Inside*.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in the concept of ecocriticism with additional support of the concept of slow violence and post-colonial ecocriticism. They offer a useful lens with which to look at the relationship between environmental crisis, social inequality, political power and urban life in *The City Inside*.

Ecocriticism constitutes the central theoretical foundation of the study. The term is associated with William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) and was subsequently established as an important field of literary studies through the work of scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) describe ecocriticism as the "investigation into the environment of literature and literature of the environment. This process enables the analysis of literary texts with regard to environmental degradation, ecological relationships, ethics of the environment and responsibility of humans for the environment.

In developing the field of ecocritical theory, Lawrence Buell (2005) focuses on the way literature constructs environmental imagination and ethical sensibility. Reading can change perspectives of people on the environment and their impacts on the environment. This view is applicable to *The City Inside*, which makes environmental disaster a part of the daily life in cities. Both the portrayal of extreme heat, polluted air, environmental insecurity, and ecological instability can thus be read as literary engagement with current climate issues.

The other theoretical idea applied in this study is the concept of slow violence that Rob Nixon (2011) uses. Slow violence is "environmental harm that happens over time, and that is not immediately apparent, easy to see, or easy to feel." (Nixon) Slow violence may consist of pollution, climate change, resource depletion, environmental displacement and the gradual destruction of ecosystems.

The City Inside is an interesting case in which this idea can be of great help to understand the surrounding conditions. Issues like heat, air pollution, water scarcity, and weak infrastructure can occur gradually, but significantly impact daily urban life. Nixon's concept allows for examining how disadvantaged populations may be exposed to environmental harm without having the same access to resources that serve to buffer them from environmental risks as those enjoyed by privileged groups. It also addresses the connections between environmental degradation and ideas of class, governance, and political power.

In the theoretical framework, the third aspect is related to postcolonial ecocriticism, which is relevant due to the urban setting in which *The City Inside* is localized as being in South Asia. Postcolonial ecocriticism explores the interaction of environmental issues and history of colonialism, economic exploitation, socio-economic inequality, globalization. It challenges the ways that environmental crisis is perceived as a 'one-size-fits-all' experience, without taking into account differences in historical responsibility, political power, geography and vulnerability.

Climate change is a threat to the commonly held view of history because humans are an important driver of planetary systems, as argued by Chakrabarty (2009). His research has relevance for this study in linking global climate processes to human history and political systems. Similarly, Baviskar (2011) looks at environmental politics in India, and focuses on the connection between environmental change, urbanization, inequality and political power. They will prove helpful in understanding the vision of Samit Basu for a future Delhi as an urban landscape where the environmental vulnerability is tightly linked to its social and economic inequalities.

To the theoretical dimension also contributes the analysis by Amitav Ghosh (2016) on the challenge literature has encountered in the representation of the scope and uncertainty of climate change. Ghosh calls for more literature on the ecological crisis and how narratives are needed to represent climate-related disruptions. In this respect, dystopian and speculative fiction like *The City Inside* can offer an imaginative framework to portray possible futures for the environment and its social implications.

This study is comprehensive, integrating ecocriticism, slow violence and postcolonial ecocriticism in order to interpret *The City Inside*. The study of literature and environment is grounded in the idea of ecocriticism, the gradual and unequal damage to the environment can be explained by the Nixon's idea of slow violence, and the historical, socio-economic and political contexts of South Asia put these issues in the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism.

These theoretical lenses allow for the study to explore not only the ways in which Samit Basu frames climate change, but also the ways in which environmental vulnerability is linked to class inequality, to the exercise of political authority, to technological surveillance, to urban development, and to social injustice. The theoretical approach thus enables interpretation of *The City Inside* as a climate fiction account and a critique of the socio-political institutions that affect environmental crises in the contemporary South Asian context.

4. Data Analysis Results & Findings

4.1 Data Analysis

The textual analysis of *The City Inside* is guided by Catherine Belsey's (2005) approach to textual analysis, which emphasizes the role of language, narrative techniques, contradictions, and ideological structures in the construction of meaning. This method allows the researcher to study the role that literary elements like imagery, metaphor, repetition, symbolism, characterization and binary oppositions play in conveying complex social, environmental, and political ideas.

This analysis emphasizes the ecological imagery of the novel and the urban environment, characterization, the narrative voice, binary oppositions, and patterns of ideology. These are explored to comprehend how the theme of climate crisis, environmental disparity, technological mastery and social and political conflict are represented in the futuristic city of South Asia.

The study uses the methodological approaches of close reading and thematic analysis to examine the relationship between the environment crisis, urban management, technological mediation, social inequality and ethical responsibility. In the analysis, I show how *The City Inside* is a dystopian fiction, as well as a cultural and political critique of the realities of South Asian societies.

4.2 Technological Mediation and Digital Agency

Joey's character gives much insight into the issue of technology and human agency in *The City Inside*. Her work for the Flowco platform illustrates the impact of digital technologies on decision making, professional opportunities, visibility and social relations. Joey is a content creator and strategist in a technologically mediated world in which algorithms and digital platforms facilitate and limit individual agency.

In Samit Basu's portrayal of Joey, he brings forth a character who is aware of the power of technology, but also aware of its ethical ramifications. The examples of her interactions with Flowco illustrate the conflict between technology and human decision-making. Digital systems offer new avenues of influence and communication, but new avenues of control and surveillance. The technology agency is not an exclusively technical or professional skill, as Joey has shown with his ability to negotiate these systems, but equally means exercising ethical awareness.

For Joey, the character is a merging of tech, agency and ethical responsibility. Samit Basu asks, who is governing the digital platforms, who's visible, and whether digital technological systems can exist fairly in unequal social systems?

4.3 Strategic Agency

Joey is introduced as a smart, flexible and ethical main character. Her work is situated in an intricate urban context that is influenced by corporate agendas, social tensions, technology infrastructure and structural inequities. Joey's leadership is not defined by hierarchy or physical strength, but by her capacity to evaluate and understand situations, foresee risks and make decisions in uncertain conditions.

A significant example occurs during the Cyber Bazaar riot:

"A low rumble sweeps across the street, transforming quickly into a tide of yells: in the distance, she can see a convoy of water tankers slowly approaching, flanked by police jeeps. People rushing towards the convoy, pouring out of every alleyway, hundreds, thousands, she can't count that many." (Basu, 2022, p. 144)

Joey's situational awareness is shown in this passage. She is watching and seeing how a situation may be potentially dangerous, and how the situation is evolving. Her answer is an indicator that strategic agency is about planning but also an understanding of the unpredictable social and environmental conditions.

Ethical aspects are also related to Joey's strategic agency. She doesn't make decisions only for her own benefit and efficiency. Rather, she thinks about how she might affect others with her actions. Her intelligence and sense of virtue set her apart from characters who act based on profit or competition or self-interest.

What's more, Joey has a high degree of improvisation. The Cyber Bazaar riot is frenzied and unpredictable, but she adjusts to ever changing situations. Her reply is an example of how Samit Basu perceives leadership as an observation, anticipation, adaptability, and an ethical judgement.

4.4 Decision-Making under Pressure

Joey's ability to make decisions under pressure is another important aspect of her agency. She finds herself in situations of physical threat, social unrest, technological uncertainty, and ethical uncertainty throughout this novel. The Cyber Bazaar riot provides a particularly significant example:

"Her leg throbs. The boy who'd spoken tugs at her hand, and runs, dragging her with him: she takes one look at it—the crowd and follows, limping, then running as fast as she can." (Basu, 2022, p. 144)

Joey is quick to act, despite the chaos and injury. Her choice to join the boy reflects a successful adaption of judgement and recognition of the value of co-operation in a crisis. She doesn't only do things on her own but also allows herself to trust others when it's necessary to act quickly.

Samit Basu thus argues that decision-making in a crisis is a blend of situational awareness, flexibility, bravery and moral accountability. In the crisis Joey is not provided with existing processes or institutional power. Rather she assesses the situation on her own and reacts to the risks and opportunities at hand.

Her continuing performance in spite of her own physical injuries also exemplifies her mental strength. The lesson that Samit Basu hopes to impart from Joey is that a strong leader in an unstable urban setting must be more than just the authority figure—he must be the one who can intelligently and ethically deal with uncertainty.

4.5 Ethical Leadership and Moral Reflexivity

Additionally, Joey's leadership is one that is also driven by ethical awareness and moral reflexivity. She doesn't just think about the moral implications of her choices when it's convenient, but she thinks about them again and again. Her leadership is not just about what is possible, it's about what should be possible.

It is the ethical bent that is most evident in her interpretation of the Flowco casting system:

"I've done box-checking token diversity before—so have you. Now I want more. I want equality. And I want you with me." (Basu, 2022, p. 148)

This statement demonstrates Joey's rejection of superficial approaches to diversity. She is not asking for representation, she is asking for her equality. Institutional power and social responsibility are thus juxtaposed in Samit Basu's portrayal of her as a leader who strives to reconcile them both.

Rajeev's awareness of ethical issues is also on display in his interactions with Raja, a strong man in the city:

"Your family is protected. Nothing moves in your neighbourhood that I don't know about, and I am friends with all the powers that run it—for now. They need me, and they need Cyber Bazaar." (Basu, 2022, p. 142)

This interaction illustrates that Joey's ethical leadership is not passive or idealistic. She knows the nature of power and plays the game of power sensibly, trying to keep herself and others safe. Her leadership is thus a blend of morality and pragmatism.

Through Joey, Samit Basu implies that being responsible means understanding the impact of one's choices on other people. She is also critical of the exclusive data-driven and technologically-mediated modes of decision-making that are embodied in systems like Flowco. As a result, Joey is a symbol of a responsible agency in a technologically sophisticated but socially inequal city.

4.6 Strategic Planning and Operational Execution

Joey's agency is even more apparent in her planning, coordination, delegation, and organization of complex operations. Samit Basu describes her as a person who is both forethought and execution oriented. Her leadership also requires her to be able to manage people, technologies and resources effectively, not just to be ethically aware.

An example is that her management of the Flowco casting system:

"Tell the team what we're looking for, Jin-Young...Our standard unicorn. Someone completely original, but also trendfriendly. A wildcard, but market tested." (Basu, 2022, p. 139)

This instruction shows Joey how to communicate clear objectives and give her team enough flexibility to understand and enact. Her approach to leadership is a combination of direction and delegations in order to involve other people in decision making.

Joey needs to also manage people and technologies in an uncertain world. She is hampered by algorithms, smart devices, live data, infrastructure challenges and even social unrest in her journey to her goals. Therefore, her leadership is constantly a risk assessment and adaptation process.

The novel also illustrates her understanding of the interplay between technology and security:

“She knows what it was, though: a trained hawk, one of the troop that the mysterious crime lord known as the King of Nehru Place uses to keep the authorities’ drones from seeing too much of the market.” (Basu, 2022, p. 141)

This passage is an example of the complexity of Joey’s technological world. Technology is never just technology, but involved with surveillance, authority, resistance and the distribution of power. These relationships are enhanced by Joey’s ability to understand them and add to her strategic agency.

Overall, Samit Basu presents Joey as a leader in multiple dimensions, one who develops through such technological expertise, strategic thinking, ethical acuity, flexibility, and execution. Her character is crucial in examining the novel’s exploration of how people can manage their power and responsibility in a more technologically driven and environmentally unpredictable urban society.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Samit Basu’s *The City Inside* through an ecocritical perspective to explore how contemporary South Asian dystopian fiction represents climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, and political power. The analysis demonstrates that Samit Basu does not present dystopia as a distant or purely imaginary future. Instead, the novel constructs a plausible future shaped by environmental degradation, climate instability, technological surveillance, and social inequality. Its polluted and climate-affected urban environment reflects contemporary concerns in South Asia, where cities increasingly face extreme heat, flooding, water scarcity, and pressure on infrastructure.

The study further demonstrates that climate change in *The City Inside* is represented as more than an environmental problem. It is closely connected with social structures, political authority, technological development, and unequal access to resources. The novel shows that environmental risks are not experienced equally by all members of society; vulnerable communities are more exposed to environmental hazards, while privileged groups have greater access to protection and resources. Climate vulnerability is therefore presented as both an environmental and a social justice issue.

The analysis also reveals the significant relationship between environmental crisis and technological and political power. Through surveillance systems, digital platforms, and technological forms of governance, Samit Basu illustrates how technology can become a means of controlling urban populations rather than simply addressing social and environmental problems. The novel consequently raises important questions about the ethical use of technology, the concentration of power, and the responsibilities of governments and corporations during periods of environmental crisis.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *The City Inside* functions simultaneously as climate fiction, dystopian literature, and social commentary. Through its representation of a climate-affected South Asian city, the novel encourages readers to consider the relationship between environmental degradation, inequality, governance, and technological power. An ecocritical reading therefore reveals how literature can make complex environmental issues more visible while encouraging critical reflection on the social and political structures that shape climate vulnerability.

The study concludes that *The City Inside* makes a significant contribution to contemporary South Asian climate fiction by presenting climate change as an interconnected ecological, social, and political crisis. The novel demonstrates that literature can provide not only imaginative representations of possible futures but also critical perspectives on present environmental realities. It therefore contributes to wider discussions of climate ethics, urban vulnerability, environmental justice, and the relationship between human communities and their environments.

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