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Writing on the Wall and our Shortsightedness

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Abstract

The *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, which brought the issue of pesticides to the center stage is dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, who said, “Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the Earth”. This paper will try to understand and analyse our position with regard to the prediction made by Albert Schweitzer. Are we still moving in the same direction of self-destruction or have we regained our capacity to foresee and forestall? Man’s interaction with nature has altered it in very significant ways which in turn has been affecting the life of man in unpredictable ways. The way forward is from adverse Anthropocene to conscious Anthropocene. Shankar’s 2018 release, Akshay Kumar and Rajnikanth starrer 2.0 warn us about the problems of radiation which will wipe away the birds from Earth before us going the same way. How the overcrowded telephone network towers and the radiation from them will wreak havoc, if not checked right away is the point of discussion in the movie. 2016 release Remo D’ Souza’s *A flying Jatt*, starring Tiger Shroff also speaks of the impending doom if we do not manage our waste properly. The pollutants

which we are releasing generously into the environment are nothing but our own suicide in installments. The writing has been on the wall for long. Poornachandra Tejaswi in his novel *Chidambara Rahasya* depicts the picture of a society which ignores this writing on the wall for short term gains and this shortsightedness results in the destruction of nature, culture and the life as we know. This paper intends to study the equation between man and nature as depicted in the above mentioned movies and literature.

Keywords: Man, Nature, Pollution, Shortsightedness, Media, Literature, Anthropocene, Conscious

The problem starts with our imagination, then the language and then the attitude which leads to actions resulting in life threatening scenarios. Here, life doesn't mean just ours; it includes everything which is alive in the nature. We imagine and believe that we are the center of the creation, and everything else in nature is for our use. The very word which Academics and Geologists use alike to describe the present geological period "Anthropocene" reinforces this attitude. Anthropocene implies that mankind has grown to the stature equal to that of natural forces like volcano, tsunami, landslides (or even lantana for that matter), which can alter the landscape and the composition of the nature.(1) We have become geological agents.

With this newly attained status of geological agents, are we destroying the Earth as Albert Schweitzer predicted? Ramachandra Guha in his essay on deep ecology writes that there are enough archeological records which powerfully indicate that western man has no monopoly on ecological disasters. Then we have Dipesh Chakrabarty quoting Naomi Oreskes in his essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses* "...virtually all professional climate scientists...agree on the reality of human-induced climate change but debate continues on tempo and mode". Whether we are capable of destroying the Earth or not is debatable because in nature there is nothing like destruction, only evolution. Destruction is part of our understanding and language. But for sure we are disturbing the balance in nature which is snow balling into threatening climatic changes. So, knowingly and unknowingly we are altering the nature which is essential for our survival into an unsupportive element.

In the name of development we are doing things which no other biological species has ever done to the planet. We dug wells into the Earth which is roughly estimated to be 50,000kms (2). This has created a long lasting impact on the Earth's system. Suleiman Bari, whom we never meet in person in the novel *Chidambara Rahasya*, does something similar to the ecology of Kesaruru by clearing the forest. Even the Gosaies, the nomadic people, destroy the forest for their survival. They poison the pond with herbs to catch fishes. Surely, no other specie poisons its own environment like us. The kind and amount of waste we are producing is equally poisonous to us and the environment. The bad man, Raka of the movie *A Flying Jatt*, gets his power from pollutants. The more he is exposed to pollution the more powerful he becomes. Flying Jatt has to take him away from the Earth's atmosphere to kill him. As we are yet to find a home other than Earth it's better to understand the planet we live on.

Melting glaciers were the alarm to which the scientific community woke up and started noticing the effect of greenhouse gases on the planet. People in business and the policy makers, for the reasons well known, tried to ignore that. Today we cannot afford to say; we will handle the greenhouse effect with white house effect as George H W Bush said in 1988 in response to the warning about global warming from James Hansen, the director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies. It's at our doorsteps, we can ignore at our own peril. The freakish weather of today "...are the mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms."(43) as Amitav Ghosh puts it in his non fictional work *The Great Derangement*.

When we think about the effect of Anthropocene we speak mainly about the global warming, but condition of the soil and the atmosphere is equally affected by our interference. Soil has to be rich with organic material if it has to produce enough to support the ever growing population. The arrival of technology and the absence of animals from the field have depleted the soil to an alarming level. Along with deforestation, the kind of vegetation also plays an important role in supporting our survival. When the forest was cleared by Suleiman Bari, Lantana takes over that space and destroys the local vegetation. Lantana is not a native species; it was brought to India from Europe. Even today we don't have a permanent solution for controlling this weed plant.

Our actions are being destructive not only for us but also to other species. Birds are disappearing in an alarming pace due to the radiation from telephone network towers. This is the point Shankar's movie *2.0* tries to make. Shankar is warning us if we do nothing about the disappearance of birds, we should get ready to go the same way very soon. This condition is the result of telephone towers which are coming up everywhere without any restrictions to cater to the need of more phone time. It is said that the radiation from the tower is carcinogenic (this needs to be validated by the scientific community yet). Movie has a solution to offer, it suggests restricting the number of telephone towers and telephone operators. This did not go well with the telephone industry. The fact that telecom businesses had objection to the movie narration clearly states that the priority remains the business.

Whatever happens to nature in turn will affect us too. It is very intriguing to see that we are so engrossed in making a living that we have forgotten what it takes to live. This is not just because of our shortsightedness but the very way we understand our relationship with nature. As Aldo Leopold states in his *A sand county Almanac*, Abrahamic concept of land is the cause of our belief that land is a commodity which belongs to us and we can use it the way we want for our benefit. This belief is at the root of our failure to see that we are connected to nature, by disturbing its balance we are disturbing our life. Unless we see ourselves as belonging to the land and not the other way things will not change.

In *Chidambara Rahasya* Dr. Patil puts forth this interdependency of species very clearly in his argument with his assistants; when a plant is destroyed, the insects which depend on that plant for food, the birds which depend on that insect for sustenance, the trees which depend on those birds for seed dispersal, the rain which depends on these trees and the

man who is dependent on all these will be affected. The nature is a web of life, a little disturbance anywhere in this fabric will be felt by one and all.

Is Anthropocene the reason behind the devastating changes affecting the nature? Poornachandra Tejaswi looks at this as the outcome of our attitude towards the Nature. When everything is taken over by commerce and business, and survival has risen to the American standards, we look at trees not as trees but lakhs of rupees and this change everything about them. Just a generation back tigers were ferocious and a sight of terror for humans but in a matter of few years we have reduced them to a status that they need to be protected from us (4).

Chakraborty quotes Edward O. Wilson from his *The Future of Life*: “Humanity has so far played the role of planetary killer, concerned only with its own short-term survival...” Humans are now a geological force. If we ignore or deny this it means that we are denying the status of geological agent to human beings.

The Anthropocene is the result of our unconscious decisions and choices. We have become geological agents without realizing it. How long will it take to see the trees as our extended lungs and not timber? How many more droughts, landslides and floods do we have to see to understand the extent of damage we are doing to the nature in the name of development? We are operating on an exploitative mode. We need to shift to a more inclusive and sustainable mode of living. If we pay attention to this web of life we will know how to live in harmony with nature, for that to happen we need to act consciously. Once we start working on a conscious mode we will do what works for us, not against us. We need to shift from adverse anthropocentric mode of the day to conscious anthropocentric mode. “Mankind will remain a major geological force for many millennia, may be millions of years, to come. To develop a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human-induced stresses will be one of the great future tasks of mankind, requiring intensive research efforts and wise application of knowledge thus acquired. . . . An exciting, but also difficult and daunting task lies ahead of the global research and engineering community to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management....Logically, then, in the era of the Anthropocene, we need the Enlightenment(that is, reason) even more than in the past”(3) Yes, this shift in view and approach need efforts, strategies, research and application of wisdom, and for sure it’s worth trying because it’s our life which is at stake and not the planet’s.

Endnotes

1. Pereira Savi, Melina. *The Anthropocene (and) (in) the Humanities_ Possibilities for Literary studies*.
2. Jan Zalasiewicz: The Anthropocene as a potential new unit of the Geological Time Scale. https://youtu.be/y_FbbXlgkgE
3. Chakraborty quotes Crutzen and Stoermer in his essay, *The Climate of History: Four Theses*.

4. PoornachandraTejaswi interview, uploaded by Raghu myk on 18th August 2013<https://youtu.be/NXTWACRb7zw>

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