



Images of Apocalypse on Screen: Climate Future in the Short Film *Carbon: A Story of Tomorrow*

Parveen Kumar

Research Scholar, Department of English, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri, J&K -185132

Abstract: *Nature has perpetually been utilized as a backdrop in bollywood films in multiple ways. Considering the romantic songs shot in the beautiful landscapes; the lonely islands in horror films and the deserts, seas and the mountains behind the plot, the relationship between nature and cinema is not newly established. However, it was always difficult to look at the environmental issues underneath these romantic elucidations of the landscapes that seemed perfectly unified to their respective environments. With the turn of the time, as environmental discourses have taken an influential stance at the global level, film makers are also stepping ahead to express their concerns for the environment. This paper aims to ecocritically scrutinize the short film *Carbon: A Story of Tomorrow* (2017), the first Hindi science fiction film, to recognize the role ecocinema as an emerging field has to play in the worldwide discourses about the effect of popular media on moulding the environmental attitudes of the audience. It further aims to scrutinize the film intensively to recognize the visual elucidation of catastrophes and apocalypse that are fictionalized in ecocinema to make the audience envisage the severity of environmental issues and thus ignite its eco-consciousness.*

Keywords: *Apocalypse, Bollywood, Carbon, Ecocinema, Visual*

There are scores of ways in which Digital media is opening a variety of avenues for sharing diverse perspectives about the environment. There is a growing trend of short films in the popular media, especially on the universally browsed digital social media platform i.e. YouTube. The recent years have witnessed an upsurge of environment focused short films in which there is a remarkable coverage of environment related issues ranging from climate change to eco-friendly lifestyles. Therefore, it is an fascinating subject of analysis to investigate how the environment and its related crisis are portrayed and addressed through short films.

Equally fascinating is to look at the effects that such short films have on the viewers and how these films are acknowledged, what are the reactions and attention they perceive and what kind of eco-consciousness they aim to perpetuate. There are a considerable but not enough number of short films on YouTube that engage a multitude of environment oriented themes. These films reflect pressing environmental concerns such as pollution, climate change issues, effects and denial, promotion of sustainable lifestyle, elucidation of wildlife and energy resources, environmental advocacy and environmental justice, conservation of environment, shortage of resources, natural disasters, deforestation and the most important of all- fictional catastrophes and apocalyptic events.

In the book *Ecomedia: Key Issues in Environment and Sustainability* (2015), Stephen Rust along with Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt debate the importance of studying media through an Ecocritical lens and mention:

It is only in recent years that ecocritics have really expanded their focus to consider popular media texts. Cinema, popular music, and television have all become important subjects of analysis. Most contemporary ecocritics recognize that popular cultural artifacts are at least as significant mediators of the human-environmental relationship and its attendant anxieties and joys as are literature and the fine arts. (02)

This has given rise to a new interest in ecocritically analysing the films that have a widespread consumption among the audience. In the contemporary scenario, environment oriented themes of several types are variously imbibed in the cinema. The emergence and universal consumption of short films is a potential platform for the circulation of environmental awareness on various levels. The green turn in the film industry and specifically in the short films is visible in the form of films that take the environment into center from the peripheries of cultural discourses.

Among the prime ecocritical concerns visually described by the short films are included the Climate change, global warming, apocalypse and natural catastrophes. These themes are differently dealt across the cultures and presented as such in the cinema. In this regard, nature has always been used as a backdrop in bollywood films. Considering the romantic songs shot in the beautiful landscapes; the lonely islands in horror films and the deserts, seas and the mountains behind the plot, the relationship between nature and cinema is not newly established. However, it was always difficult to look at the environmental issues underneath these romantic elucidations of the landscapes perfectly unified in their respective environments.



With the turn of the time, as environmental discourses have taken an influential stance at the global level, film makers are also stepping ahead to express their concerns for the environment. Apart from the mainstream Bollywood movies such as Nila Madhab Panda's *Kaun Kitney Pani Mein* (2015), *Kadwi Hawa* (2017) and Abhishek Kapoor's *Kedarnath* (2018), the film makers are also interested in directing short films to give a visual and artistic expression to the environmental concerns.

Maitri Bajpai and Ramiz Ilham Khan's short film *Carbon: A Story of Tomorrow* (2017) has appeared as the first Hindi science fiction short film of twenty five minutes and portrays a catastrophic visual elucidation of the effects of excessive increase in carbon and prompts the audience to visualise the effects of global warming. The film has a futuristic setting of the year 2067, almost 50 years from when the film was released. It is depicted as a year in which the planet Earth is facing an extreme oxygen and water crisis. In the film, there are a lot of changes in the future as human's quest to reach Mars is fulfilled and people are travelling from Earth to Mars and vice-versa. This achievement however, has made the humans to lose much because in order to reach the Mars, they are shown having destroyed the Earth completely.

In a short duration of 25 minutes, the film remarkably demonstrates the future capital of Delhi and the environmental issues awaiting humans in 2067. In the film, these issues are primarily a scarcity of oxygen and water whereas the carbon level is increased to a higher level. This raises a sort of oxygen war and there is black marketing; not of money, gold or diamonds as shown in earlier Bollywood films, but of pure oxygen and fresh water.

The film is set in the futuristic capital of Delhi where the carbon level has increased to such an amount that oxygen is being sold privately at higher amounts. There is also a supply of oxygen from the government but it is not of good quality. However, pure oxygen is rare and it can only be found and supplied from the topmost Himalayan ranges. Good quality of water is a rare resource and the oxygen and water are supplied from Earth to Mars. It is for those rich people who would have managed to flee to Mars and made a planetary migration.

The power cuts in 2067 Delhi are not of electricity but of oxygen supply during which the wearing of oxygen masks is mandatory for survival. The black marketing and crime is shown emerging out of this gloomy scenario in which pure oxygen and fresh water are more important than money. The film also moves through a flashback of years when the greenery on the Earth was lush and every resource was abundant, probably the year 2017 in which the movie was released. But instantly it takes to a point in the fictional present in which humans are described lamenting over the fact that their predecessors did not take proper actions to save the environment. Random Shukla's artificial heart reminds him of the carbon pollution due to which the year of his birth led to many children taking birth with collapsed hearts. He holds humanity responsible for this and hates the very idea of modernization on the stake of environment.

The futuristic events also include posthumanistic themes such as artificial organ transplantations and human like robots who are used to achieve ends for the humans. The visual narrative also consists of underlying social, political and economic complications that are shown taking much dangerous shape in the coming times.

Paula Willoquet- Maricondi puts forth in the article "Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema", "Ecocinema overtly strives to inspire personally and political action on the part of viewers, stimulating over thinking so as to bring about concrete changes in the choices we make, daily and in the long run, as individuals and as societies, locally and globally (45). Short films like *Carbon* are appearing on the visual stage to attain these objectives. Whereas the widespread consumption of these films through popular media forms can help to scrutinize the responses of the viewers, the comments on the YouTube videos can be used as raw data to analyse the diverse cultural attitudes towards environment and climate change.

The appearance of Ecocriticism on the literary stage has given way to multidimensional recognizing of nature. It has greatly influenced the domain of films through which the environment is given a central position rather than merely taken as a romantic ingredient in human life. The shift has taken place in the form of Ecocinema in which the place of nature has been shifted from being used merely as a decorative background to a sensible representation of ecological concerns and the instability rather than permanence of the beauty of nature.

Taking into account the influence of cinema on the Indian society, the ecocinema can effectively influence the audience in reframing its attitude towards the environment and use it more judiciously. By the film makers, such attitudes are shaped by using a variety of ecocritical themes and embedding them into the cinematic setting. The use of catastrophic imagery is an important element of the films that fall into the domain of ecocinema. The short film *Carbon* consists of catastrophic visual imagery through which the viewers are made to take a glimpse of the apocalyptic future that necessitates a reevaluation of the environment. The scenes are deliberately imbued with colorlessness and gloom that signifies the changed atmosphere of the Earth. The fragility of human life is made apparent as the life is shown dependent upon the oxygen masks that the characters wear and artificial organs that can stop working at any moment.

In the catastrophic world of the film, pure oxygen and fresh water are the new drugs and the majority of economic, political and governmental policies are depicted as framed around these two vital resources that are taken for granted in the present times. Cinematic representations of these ecological issues and an imaginary life without the vital resources seems an important visual element to awaken the sleeping eco-consciousness of the inhabitants of earth.



Now-a-days, popular media has taken up almost everything under the planet into its course and the influence that it has in each corner of the world is not an exaggerated one. Ecomedia, which is a recently established field of media, is specifically focused on environment oriented forms of media. Stephen Rust and others have understood and explained this influence of ecomedia as, “Indeed, popular media have several important socio-cultural qualities (such as their broad consumption and appeal to multiple segments of society) that make them potentially finer antennae than the fine arts for sensing the changing moods and tendencies in cultural perceptions of environmental relationships and concerns” (03). Films like *Carbon* are a crucial addition to the field of Ecocinema as well as Ecomedia that has the aim to perpetuate eco-consciousness among the audience and to give nature a centre position in the cinematic setting.

It is further due to the reach of popular media that the film has got a huge viewership of 10,949,359 views and 6.1k comments across the world, since it was uploaded to YouTube on Aug. 21, 2017. A close analysis of the comments shows that the audience has taken the film’s theme in a sensitive manner and expressed deep concerns and commitments for the environment. A fair number of viewers have tried to make a connection between the prevalent COVID-19 scenario and the events happening in the film as foregrounding the pandemic. A lot of debate is also made by the viewers on the oxygen shortage faced during the pandemic and the wearing of masks that was unknown and queer back in 2017 when the film was released.

In the cinematic world, dialogues are an influential medium of constructing meaning into the mind of the audience. Without language, in the form of dialogues, the world of cinema is barren. In *Carbon*, the dialogues are intensely eco-sensitive and make the audience realize and envisage a world without the existence of vital natural resources that are taken for granted by humanity in the present time. It vividly portrays the visual effects of devastation that humanity is continuously inflicting upon nature. These concerns are also mentioned by K.Chu in the paper “Ecocinema” as, “In addition to natural phenomenon, ecocinema also concerns human induced complications on ecology and the environment, Industrialization, urbanization and overdevelopment signal the realisation of negative consequences in the forms of environmental degradations” (13). A visual elucidation of these ecological complications and their after effects provide the audience a sense of responsibility towards the environment and envisage a future without it.

Carbon is an influential reaction against the extreme anthropocentrism that extracts from nature to the extreme. The plot of the film foresees an apocalyptic scenario to raise questions about the ways in which nature is treated at present. It further intends to make the audience realize the importance of the present, and make the most of it, to save the future. The attempt is aimed to save humanity from facing the wrath of nature in the impending future. While questioning the monopoly of government in using nature, it also addresses the social and economic turmoil that can arise in the face of environmental catastrophes and crises. It has opened up a window towards a new dimension of Hindi cinema that looks at nature with an ecocritical perspective.

The film positions nature at the center of its narrative rather than using it as a mere decorative background in the love story of a hero and heroine- a typical feature of Hindi cinema. The bleak and catastrophic imagery of the film galvanizes the imagination and awakens the environmental attitudes of the viewers. The scenes are framed with such a dexterity that every effect of the future relates to a cause of the past, the past of future which is our present right now. The interplay of past, present and future drifts the audience towards a realisation that the anthropocentric activities are needed to be remodelled for the better future of the planet. As the war for oxygen in the film becomes more bloody, it also exposes the irresponsibility with which the earth is handled by humans in the present time.

Works Cited

1. Bajpai, Maitriy, and Ramiz Ilham Khan. “Carbon: A Story of Tomorrow”. *YouTube*, edited by Shakti Hasina and Abhishek Seth, Large Short Films, Aug 21, 2017, youtu.be/zMVpwc1n02k.
2. Chu, K. (2016). “Ecocinema”. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, vol. 10, no. 1, April 2016, pp. 11-14. doi:10.1080/17508061.2016.1142728.
3. Rust, Stephen, et.al. *Ecomedia: Key Issues in Environment and Sustainability*. Routledge, 2015.
4. Willoquet- Maricondi, P. “Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema”. *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*, University of Virginia Press, pp. 43-61.