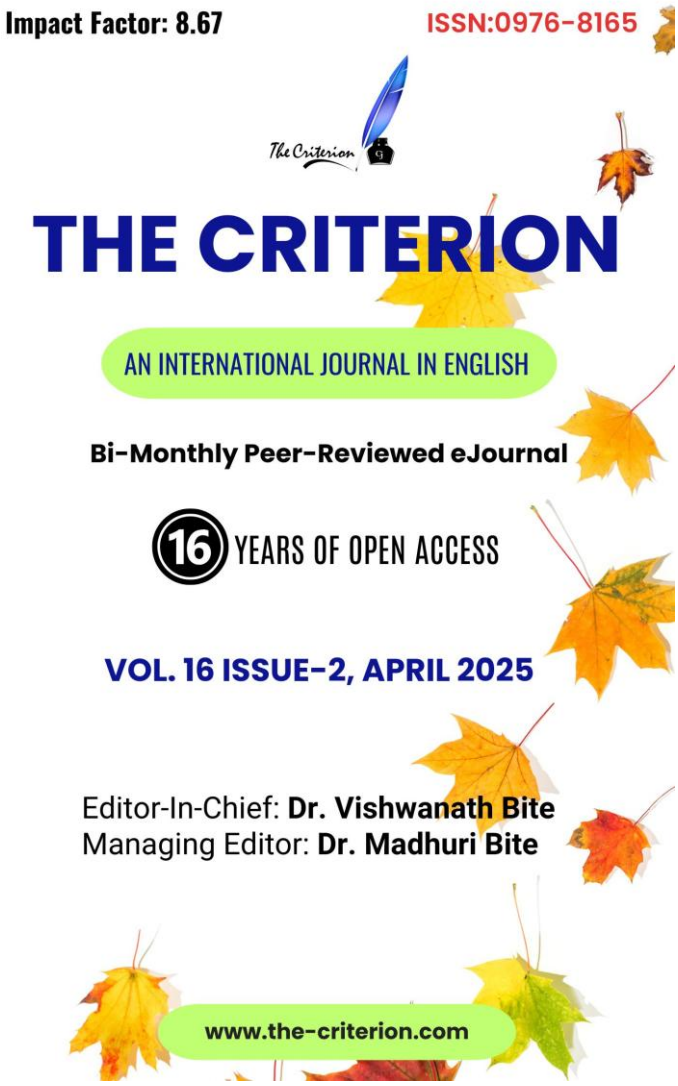


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# Climate-induced Migration and Anthropocentrism: A Study of Select Short Stories from *Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction*

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**Abstract:**

Climate Change poses a significant threat to nature and humankind, with devastating and lasting consequences on the environment and culture. Cli-fi narratives often highlight the consequences of this phenomenon by presenting a dystopian future. In this research article, select short stories from *Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction* have been critically analyzed to discover the representations of climate-induced migration and anthropocentrism. The various causes and effects of migration are highlighted, and the cases of voluntary and involuntary migration are also discussed. It is argued that anthropocentrism is the chief reason for environmental degradation. The characters' perspectives regarding migration and anthropocentrism are assessed in this study.

**Keywords: Climate change, Cli-fi, migration, anthropocentrism, environment.**

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary times environmental degradation has become a significant cause of human concern, and climate change is at the forefront of this discussion. Climate change, in a general sense, refers to the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns at a global

scale. Global warming and the continuous increase in average temperature across the globe can be cited as an effect of climate change. The cases of sudden rise and fall in global temperatures is nothing new in the planetary history. Scholars have identified cases of earth's significant climatic changes in the past, which lead to ice ages and periods of extremely warm weather. However, what sets climate change apart during the Anthropocene from previous epochs is that in addition to natural causes such as volcanic eruption and forest fires, human activities are now cited as the primary cause for today's global climate change. Using fossil fuels that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, deforestation and other human activities performed for human needs and/or desires can lead to global warming and climate change.

Climate Change poses a significant threat to nature and humanity, with devastating and lasting consequences on the environment and culture. Because of climate change various ecosystems around the world are in danger, and the niche of various species of organisms are disappearing in recent years. Climate change has also resulted in more frequent cases of droughts and the expansion of deserts. Conversely, due to irregular weather patterns, floods and storms in coastal regions are also being reported more frequently. All these problems not only negatively impact the ecosystem but also human society and culture. A less discussed impact of climate change on human society is the large-scale displacement of people from one region to the other due to the primary effects of climate change, such as droughts and floods. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), approximately 32.6 million people have been forcibly displaced within their own countries in 2022 due to climate disasters (Siegfried). The number of cross-border migrations is thought to be in the hundreds of millions, and this figure is only predicted to grow in the coming years.

Literature of any age is greatly shaped by the socio-political forces of the era, and in turn, those literary works feature themes of imminent social concern. In contemporary society climate change is at the core of many global issues that steadily impact the lives of people.


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Hence, climate change is often treated as a central theme in many contemporary works of literature, particularly the works of Climate Fiction, or Cli-fi for short. The term 'Cli-fi' was first coined by the climate activist Dan Bloom in 2008, and he argues that "Cli-fi is about facing the reality of global warming via literature or movies" (qtd. in Plantz). So, Cli-fi is a genre of fiction that primarily deals with narratives featuring an impending world, where humanity experiences the ill effects of climate change. In these narratives, the climate crisis has gone beyond a point of no return, and the results are catastrophic. The anthropocentric tendencies of men that have resulted in climate change are brought into question in the narratives of climate fiction.

For this research paper, select short stories from *Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction*, edited by John Joseph Adams, will serve as the primary sources. The short stories are: 'The Myth of Rain' by Seanan McGuire, 'Outer Rims' by Toiya Kristen Finley, 'The Creeping Sensation' by Alan Dean Foster, 'Eighth Wonder' by Chris Bachelder, and 'The Tamarisk Hunter' by Paolo Bacigalupi. Close textual reading of the short stories will serve as the method for this qualitative research. The texts will be critically analyzed to discover the representation of climate-induced migration and anthropocentrism.

## 2. Objectives

- To discover how climate change causes displacement of people.
- To find out the effects of climate-induced migration as depicted in the texts.
- To discover whether the characters resist or accept their displacement.
- To bring into question the anthropocentric tendencies of human beings and determine the stance taken by the author in each text.

## 3. Findings and Discussion


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### 3.1. Voluntary and Involuntary Migration

Climate change and the migration of people are interlinked, though it must be mentioned that "climate change will be one of a number of elements impinging upon mobility and non-mobility" (Hugo 9). The relationship between climate change and the displacement of people is highly complex, various facets exist in this relationship. Hugo argues that there are two types of climate-induced migration: Voluntary Movement and Involuntary Movement (12). He argues, "One of the key distinctions that needs to be made in considering the relationship between environmental change and migration is that mobility as a strategy for *adapting* to the impacts, and as *displacement* when environmental deterioration becomes so extreme that people are forced to leave an area" (13). Renaud et al have also distinguished climate-induced displacement according to the degree of force and choice available to the migrants:

> 'Environmentally motivated' migrants are those who choose to move, and in their choice, environmental factors have a role. 'Environmentally forced' migrants are in situations where environmental change has destroyed, or is likely to destroy, their livelihood- they have no choice in having to move but some choice in the timing to move. 'Environmental refugees' have no choice about either moving or the timing of the move. (qtd. in Hugo 13)

In the select narratives of climate fiction, one can discover instances of both voluntary movement and forced movement. In 'The Myth of Rain', California has been suffering from severe droughts. There is a lack of rainfall, to the point that forest fires have become more frequent: "the lakes were drying and the hills were burning and the whole stretch of green that we had all depended upon for so long was becoming a fairy tale. The myth of rain in California" (McGuire 39). As the weather becomes hotter, people from California and other drought-


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affected areas migrate to the Pacific Northwest of the USA as a mode of adaptation. The narrator argues, "It was inevitable that their eyes would settle on the Pacific Northwest, where the trees were still green and the rain was still coming down" (40). Although even the Pacific Northwest was suffering from the impact of climate change, with temperatures skyrocketing in cities like Seattle, people still chose to migrate to those regions as "They were still cool. They were still green" (40). Thus, the people that the narrator discusses can be categorized as the 'environmentally motivated' migrants. They are the ones who choose to move to escape the ill effects of climate change.

In 'The Tamarisk Hunter', droughts and desertification are also cited as reasons for the migration of groups from the arid rural regions of the Colorado River Basin to other parts of the country. It is said, "Everyone else has been blown off the land as surely as dandelion seeds, set to fly south or east or, most of all, north where watersheds sometimes still run deep and where even if there are no lush ferns or deep cold fish runs, at least there is still water for people" (Bacigalupi 503). Because of the depletion of ground water and a dry river, the residents have abandoned various small towns and villages in the area. Lolo, the protagonist of the narrative, while returning from his daily tamarisk hunt comes across "the familiar landscape of an eviscerated town" (504). Around forty-five thousand people had to migrate from that region when "Big Daddy Drought" took over the region (508).

Droughts are not the only consequences of climate change. Extreme weather patterns could also result in tropical storms and frequent flooding. In 'Outer Rims', it is discovered that the people living in the coastal regions of the USA are frequently subjected to destructive hurricanes. As a result the people living in these regions have to migrate to other places. Mrs. Burrell and her children decide to migrate from Portland to Ohio. Don Jackson, a sickly man, whom they come across during their travels, also declares that he is going to move away from the coastal regions: "I don't know. Midwest somewhere, I guess. I'm tired of hangin' around


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the outer rims. Who knows when the next bad storm's comin'" (Finley 53). The uncertainty of one's place of habitat in the face of the changing geography due to climate change is called into question by Burrell's children as they say, "Where will the land be next year? One day, the whole world'll be underwater!" (52). The rising of the sea levels due to global warming results in the flooding and eventual disappearance of the low-altitude coastal areas. In fact in this narrative, Mrs. Burrell had brought her children to a coastal town "to see the shore before the world changed again" (52). This was the place that Mrs. Burrell's family had visited in the past for their summer vacation. Similarly, Cantor and Burrell also reminisce together about the 9-Rail that used to run in Clarksville, but it is said to have gone underwater (55). Even though such places are significant to people, because of the effects of climate change, those places can no longer be visited.

The primary effects of climate change can also result in people losing their livelihoods. The loss of livelihood can lead to 'environmentally forced' migration. For instance, in 'The Tamarisk Hunter', it is discovered that Travis, a friend of Lolo, was a real estate agent. However, he lost his livelihood after people from that town were displaced due to desertification. To continue to live in that region and not be displaced like other people, Travis had also undertaken the job of a tamarisk hunter. Unfortunately, Travis could no longer rip tamarisk as his patch had run dry, and from a conversation between Lolo and him, it is discovered:

> "I think I might be heading north," Travis says finally.
>
> Lolo glances over, surprised… "And do what?"
>
> "Pick fruit, maybe. Maybe something else. Anyway, there's water up there."
>
> Lolo points down at the river. "There's water."


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> "Not for us." Travis pauses. "I got to level with you, Lolo. I went down to the straw". (Bacigalupi 508)

So, Travis had to decide to migrate to a place where he could find a new means of livelihood. Even Lolo is doomed by the narrative, since he also loses his livelihood. He depended on cutting tamarisk to receive money as per the water bounty payout program. However, it is revealed to him that the state of California was ending the water bounty (515). It leaves Lolo with only one option, that is migration. Although they have some choice in their migration timing, both Lolo and Travis' situations can be considered as instances of forced displacement. In 'That Creeping Sensation', though there is no explicit mention of characters migrating, it can be argued that Lissa and her company of enlisted military men often move from one place to the other to destroy the megafauna. Climate change has added excess oxygen to the atmosphere, which has resulted in the insects growing massive. So, they have to move from one region to the other in their armoured truck as requests for colossal insect suppressions come in: "As a chastened Gustafson headed the truck back toward the military base on the outskirts of the city, she leaned forward to have a look at the sky through the windshield" (Foster 238). The characters in both narratives have to move from one place to another for their livelihoods and as a mode of adaptation. However, both texts can also be distinguished based on how climate change, livelihood and migration are related. Lolo and Travis lose their sources of livelihood and have to migrate, so climate change can be argued to have an adverse effect on them. In contrast, Lissa and the army have acquired a new source of livelihood, which involves displacement, as a direct result of climate change.

Throughout these narratives, cases of involuntary migration of other kinds can also be identified. In 'Eighth Wonder', the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are past the critical point. The rising water levels and storms have flooded entire cities, leading to people getting displaced in haste. It is discovered that people are migrating to a massive


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structure called the dome in order to find a solid place to stay: "They came swimming, paddling, rowing with lumber. Shocked by storm, they rushed in like water" (Bachelder 344). The dome was a sports stadium that was housing thousands of people and sheltering them from the flood. As the narrative progresses, more and more people enter the dome to find refuge as "the world outside was still and flat and quiet. Faded pictures of food peeled away from half-submerged billboards" (353). The people who come to the dome to escape the floods fit the description of 'environmental refugees' as suggested by Renaud et al. These people are forced to migrate because of worsened environmental conditions, and unlike the characters from 'Outer Rims' and 'That Creeping Sensation', they do not have the choice to delay their migration. This kind of displacement is totally involuntary.

Although there are representations of both voluntary and involuntary migrations in 'The Tamarisk Hunter', on closer inspection it is discovered that there are also evidences of forced migration of people due to governmental involvement. In a conversation between Lolo and Travis, the latter mentions:

> "A trucker told me that California and the Interior Department drew up all these plans to decide which cities they'd turn off when." He looks at Lolo significantly. "That was after Lake Havasu. They figured out they had to do it slow. They worked out some kind of formula: how many cities, how many people they could evaporate at a time without making too much unrest…Anyway, it looks like they're pretty much done with it. There's nothing moving out there except highway trucks and coal trains and a couple truck stops". (Bacigalupi 508)

Hence, people are forced to migrate from the shutdown cities and towns to those which were still operating. The Californian government had shut down the cities in order to preserve water, and the citizens had no other option but to get displaced: "At first, when California started


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winning its water lawsuits and shutting off cities, the displaced people just followed the water-right to California" (514). Thus, in the select texts elements of both voluntary and involuntary climate-induced migration can be observed.

### 3.2. The Outlook on Migration

Following the discovery and discussion on the various types of migration associated with climate change, it becomes essential to explore the different outlooks held by the characters in the select narratives. Broadly, the characters can be categorized into two groups based on their perspectives on displacement. The first category includes characters that are pro-migration. And the second category includes those who not only resist their own displacement but also have a negative perception of migration as a whole. In 'The Myth of Rain', the narrator argues that because of the resources that they possess, it is usually the rich men who are not only willing to but also are capable of migrating as they please. It is said:

> The rich fled the places where the sun was too bright and the rain was too rare, and when the places they fled to dried up in turn, the rich fled farther, looking for some promised land that had managed to remain pristine while they were busy wrecking the world the rest of us had to live in. It was inevitable their eyes would land on the Pacific Northwest, where the trees were still green and the rain was still coming down… And a few of them- the ones who understood what was about to happen- complained about the way the big corporations were slipping around, the maggots moving on from the corpse of San Francisco, which they had already stripped down to dry bones. (McGuire 39-40)

Thus, it can be identified that in order to escape the harsh realities of climate change, the wealthy men are capable of frequently migrating. They are technically climate refugees, but unlike other refugees living in the same regions, they can move from one city to the other on a


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whim. Their migration is also supported by the government because of the support that they provide to the economy of the city they settle in. Hence, as these rich men start migrating to the Pacific Northwest and particularly Seattle, the government orders for the clearing of the forests to build housing complexes for them: "They say that the construction crews are running ahead of schedule, and we've taken in so many refugees from Southern California" (44). Even the big corporations are found to be moving their offices to Seattle, and these corporations are pro-migration as the workers have to get displaced to move to the new location. The migration of these corporations and the refugees they bring alongside are also supported by the government, because of the economic and political power they wielded: "But it was also the home to several large, thriving tech firms, which between them controlled more of the political figures in the area than anyone had ever considered", and "Commerce and trade were coming to the Pacific Northwest whether we wanted them or not" (41-42).

However, the narrator uses a critical tone to describe them. She says, "There were monsters coming to these woods" (39). In fact throughout the narrative her pessimistic view on displacement is highlighted over and over again. For instance, she mentions, "The Pacific Northwest was already full, sorry, and it wasn't looking to double its population anytime soon" (41). Though her outlook might come across as unhelpful, it also highlights why some people are against providing refuge to the people impacted by climate disasters. The resources of a city or a nation might not be sufficient to support the influx of climate refugees, hence they might be turned away. Recently, the government of Sweden had to turn away many climate refugees because of the inadequate resources that they possessed; the Swedish public was also found to be more hostile towards the migrants because of the competition that they brought not only for basic resources but also in case of education and employment (England). The narrator is particularly against the migration of corporations and wealthy men because of the environmental implications their move might have. An interesting idea to take note of is that


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while the rich might have the resources to migrate as they please, the poor, on the other hand, find it much more challenging to afford voluntary displacement:

> The changes that had done so much damage to the rest of the country had just made them more attractive to everyone else- especially the parts of everyone else who could afford to move on a whim. Forget the poor. Forget the disenfranchised. They were the ones who had done the least to destroy the world as we'd known it for so long, and now they were the ones being left behind. (McGuire 40-41)

In 'The Tamarisk Hunter', Lolo resists his displacement for as long as possible It is said that "It's a living; where other people have dried out and blown away, he has remained: a tamarisk hunter, a water tick, a stubborn bit of weed" (Bacigalupi 503). Unlike other people from his hometown, he wishes to continue to live where he was raised and takes action to achieve that. He actively plants tamarisk seeds alongside the riverbank to make sure his patch would never run dry, unlike Travis. It is an illegal act as per the new water laws, but Lolo continues to seed more tamarisks to "make sure they never get pushed off their patch" (509). It is not just Lolo; even his wife Annie displays resistance against their displacement, as she had been separated from her family after Lake Havasu City was shut down: "She has nightmares sometimes, and can't stand being in towns or crowds, and wakes up in the middle of the night calling out for family she'll never see again" (509). Annie provides stability to Lolo and allows him to continue his resistance. However, even Lolo cannot continue his resistance till the end, as a new policy results in him losing his job as a tamarisk hunter. In addition, the government offers him five hundred dollars to sell his plot of land and migrate to the north. The narrative ends with him wondering what he must do now, thus showcasing that despite the resistance put up by a single man, the political and environmental forces are far greater than his ability. Moreover, Travis is also willing to migrate to find a new source of living. Hale also willingly migrates to Utah alongside his family and has to work as a National


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Guard there as he states, "Come on, Lolo, I'm not like you. I got a family to look after. If I do another year of duty, they let Shannon and the kids base out of California" (514). The state of California had shut down many cities and prompted migration to solve the water problem. However, as more and more refugees rush into the operating cities, it is stated that: "It took a little while before the bureaucrats realized that what was going on, but finally someone with a sharp pencil did the math and realized that taking in people along with their water didn't solve a water shortage. So, the immigration fences went up" (514). Thus, despite supporting the displacement of climate refugees at first, even the people in power start resisting the phenomenon once they realize it does not benefit them.

Taking into consideration the great influx of migrants into the dome in 'Eighth Wonder', one would think that every character is supportive of migration. However, on closer inspection, it is identified that the people who arrived at the dome earlier are sometimes against the arrival of new migrants. In one instance it is stated:

> New people arrived at the dome daily, bringing ideas, guns, illness, strength, food, and hunger. The electrician rowed a small raft around the perimeter of the dome. He saw them swimming or paddling their leaky boats. *Go away*, he thought. *Please go.* Often, they were injured. Often their eyes did not work anymore except to see. He helped them into the lobbies and up the ramps to dry ground. (Bachelder 355)

Thus, it can be deduced that many residents of the dome shared the wish for no more new migrants to arrive. Such a wish can be attributed to the chaos, crime and anarchy that the dome experiences as people from different backgrounds have to share the same space: "They picked him up and threw him into the water. Broken-necked, he floated, and the boys swam in to pull his body out" (358). However, what sets them apart from the narrator of 'The Myth of Rain' is


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that they are sometimes willing to help out the new migrants even if their presence is unwelcome in their hearts.

In contrast to these narratives, in both 'Outer Rims' and 'That Creeping Sensation', it is discovered that the characters treat displacement as a mode of adaptation to survive the effects of climate change. Burrell, her children and many other characters readily accept their displacement to escape the storms in the coastal regions. However, it is important to note that the government in this narrative provides some resistance towards migration to prevent the outbreak of a newly emerged disease. The infected individuals, including Burrell and her children, are quarantined that makes them unable to migrate to Ohio. Even Branden, Burrell's son, questions whether they should migrate to a different place and risk transmitting the disease: "He wanted to get away from here. But did he want to give the rest of the world *this*?...it would jump from him to person to person until everyone on the planet died" (Finley 60). In 'That Creeping Sensation', Lissa considers moving from one place to another to deal with colossal bugs as something that ought to be done. Lissa, alongside her assistant, are constantly observed to be migrating from one place to the other: "Going after a goliath fly, Lissa mused as she let Gustafson focus on his driving" (Foster 236). Hence, it can be argued that the select narratives present multifaceted opinions on the act of migration.

### 3.3. Anthropocentrism

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Anthropocentrism can be defined as "a belief in humans and their existence as the most important and central fact in the universe" ("Anthropocentrism"). An anthropocentric point of view often disregards the importance of other life forms if they have no value to men. Any decision made by humans do not take into consideration the needs of non-human life forms. Climate change in the Anthropocene epoch is a result of human activities and the greedy anthropocentric tendencies of men. Naess argues


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that ideological changes need to be brought about in order to criticize the anthropocentric tendencies and highlight that "All living beings have intrinsic value" and "the diversity and richness of life has intrinsic value" (qtd. in Drengson and Devall 54).

The narrator of 'The Myth of Rain' also criticizes the anthropocentric tendencies of men that have proliferated climate change: "Climate change was still up for debate in those days, at least in the eyes of people who had everything to gain by keeping the argument going for just a little longer" (McGuire 39). Her pessimistic view of climate refugees is also due to the environmental implications migration seems to have. Even as people were suffering from the consequences of climate change, they still could not get rid of their anthropocentric views. As people migrate to the Pacific Northwest, the government has to clear the forests to expand the cities and build houses. This decision not only failed to take into account the loss of biodiversity that the region would experience but also the opinions of the environmentalists. The general population considered "Protection for endangered species and habitats wasn't as important as space for homes and cities and jobs" (42). The sharp criticizing tone of the narrator is evident when she sarcastically states:

> Why did owls need entire forests for themselves? Yes, it was important to preserve species diversity, but that land was needed by humans, who would do more with it than simply leave it untouched and growing wild. There were DNA banks now, there were zoos and private collections, there were a hundred ways to wipe a creature out of the natural world without losing it forever… How could they leave so much green and verdant land unused, when so many people were wanting?. (41)

Even though the government had sanctioned environmentalists like the narrator to save as many species as they could, Benet, another environmentalist, argues that with the little amount of time that they were given, it would have been impossible to save all the species in the area:


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"How are we supposed to save this ecosystem if we don't even know what's in it? We're going to fail" (43). The narrator, however, promotes an ecocentric view where all organisms have equal value, as she argues: "Everywhere I looked, there were trees…they were alive, and they were there, and they deserved this land as much as we did" (48).

In 'The Tamarisk Hunter', Lolo is discovered to have an anthropocentric viewpoint. His profession as a tamarisk hunter already highlights that both the Californian government and Lolo consider tamarisk plants to be a nuisance as "A big tamarisk can suck 73,000 gallons of river water a day" (Bacigalupi 503). The water bounty, hence, becomes a mode of promoting anthropocentrism. The needs of human beings are given precedence over that of plants. Even Annie's anthropocentric perspective is highlighted as she says, "Those enviros, they don't make any sense at all. Not enough water for people, and they want to give the river to a bunch of fish and birds" (512). Though the author in this text does not provide an ecocentric solution, highlighting of Lolo and Annie's viewpoints seems to suggest a subtle criticism of such perspectives. In 'That Creeping Sensation', while Lissa and her associates kill the massive insects, it is done to protect lives and cannot be considered as a case of needless murder. They only engage in battle with those insects that threaten their lives. This narrative is discovered to have an ecocentric inclination. Here, the insects seem to challenge humanity's dominance over Earth: "Insects, spiders, and their relatives had not only matched but in some cases surpassed the dimensions attained by their ancient relatives. This made for an increasingly uncomfortable coexistence with supposedly still-dominant species on the planet" (Foster 234). Lissa also argues, "In terms of sheer numbers, the ants had always been the most successful species on the planet" (239). She also criticizes Gustafson when he tries to anthropomorphize the intelligence of the insects, thus highlighting that it is essential to consider all organisms as having their intrinsic value. This also serves as a warning for the readers, so that they resist making human beings the axis while discussing attributes of other life forms.


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## 4. Conclusion

Thus, in the select narratives one can discover how climate change has displaced many characters. The migrations can either be voluntary or involuntary. There are various reasons that can result in migration, such as droughts, floods, loss of livelihood et al. It can also be observed that the characters possess different outlooks on the act of migration; some accept their displacement as a mode of adaptation, while others try to resist it. The various positive and negative effects of climate-induced migration are also highlighted, such as faster transmission of diseases, availability of new professions, loss of biodiversity et al. This research paper has also highlighted the danger of anthropocentric views held by some characters, and the critical tones used by the narrators to describe them. Hence, it can be concluded that in the select texts of climate fiction, a multifaceted and complex representation of climate-induced migration and anthropocentrism is presented. These short stories forewarn a dystopian society waiting for humanity if the issue of climate change remains unchecked. An ecocentric perspective is also highlighted as a solution to combat the current deterioration of the environment.

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