

Ecological Collapse and Magical Deflation in Bacigalupi's *The Tangled Lands*

Goldie D. B.

Research Scholar (Register number: 23213154012016),

Department of English, S. T. Hindu College, Nagercoil – 629 002,

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627 012)

Email: goldiedb26@gmail.com

Dr. R. Senitha

Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor,

Department of English, S. T. Hindu College, Nagercoil – 629 002,

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627 012)

Email: senitha87@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Environmental sustainability is maintained in the ecological world with difference in opinion to communal distribution of people. The magical usage in a cultural background denotes the unique identity created in a minimalized society. This contributes to a disastrous pathway targeting the notions of greater ecological collapse. *The Tangled Lands* is a dark fantasy co-authored by Paolo Bacigalupi and Tobias S. Buckell. The ecological collapse occurs due to the unstable mental abilities of people as they are targeted towards black magic. The primary idea of the author is to showcase the inner thought of individuals and their surroundings to make appropriate environmental space. This paper brings out the concept of magic as a tool of destruction which advocates Neo-paganism where nature is the cause and belief of worship

without assimilating to cultural norms. Eco-magical realism is a technical theory in literature employed by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. This theory could be intertwined with the concept of ecological collapse as the phenomena which reveals false beliefs that cannot be accepted. The message aimed at guiding the community is the concept of magic as a cultural practice which demolishes the valid purpose of education with nature. The collapse of environmental wealth could be regained through the worship of nature without artificial techno advancement.

Key words: Minimalized society, Black magic, Neo-paganism, Eco-magical realism, Environmental wealth.

Eco-literature is interconnected with ecological collapse to study nature and human mind.

Anthropocentrism is the prioritized theme concerned with eco-literature. It dwells deeper into the mental feasibility of humans considering their environment in the optimistic or pessimistic view. The sustainable ecosystem guarantees an output of magical deflation. The belief in overuse of magic to attain ecological growth finds the pathway of disaster. Planetary harm leads to a modernized society without the availability of natural resources depending on artificial machine developments.

The Tangled Lands, a collaborative novel, points to the misuse of magic leading to ecological disaster in a particular societal background. The authors are fascinated towards economical hierarchies. They also discuss contemporary issues in their work connected with environmental crises.

The balanthast, a magical weapon, is used as a secret creation in the novel. Jiala is a six-year-old girl who lives with her father, who is poised to witness life in Halizak's prison. It is an imaginative place meant to control people due to overuse of magic. The father does not want their lives to end up among the refugees of bramble spread areas in Lesser Khaim. This situation forces him to regenerate the balanthast regardless of the ecological consequences and economic impacts. The author describes, "The reek of

burned neem and mint filled the air. In the glass chamber atop the balanthast, a few sprigs of mint lay with bay and for a flower and the woody shavings of neem” (Bacigalupi 10).

Hunger crisis is the root cause of dominating lifestyle. Excessive use of chemicals to establish magical powers has degraded the quality of soil in further nourishment for the purpose of agriculture. The downfall of economic factors enumerates the loss of production quantities in food. The brambles are a wild bush having growth among the vegetative lands. The brambles have red or black berries.

The poisonous bramble does not aid in the growth of other plants, remaining as nature’s harm leading to famine in the land of Khaim. The article titled “World Hunger and the Global Economy: Strong Linkages, Weak Action” mentions about pathways to nourishment in the current lifestyle stating, “A person’s income, position in society, and the productive resources and other assets available for production and trade are now widely seen to be other important determinants of access to food” (Clapp 3).

The lost city of Khaim appears as a minimalized society in the novel. It reveals demolition due to human beings’ selfishness to achieve bigger environmental space within a short duration. The cold climatic conditions do not affect the bramble.

Jiala’s father wants to stop his daughter’s severe cough that has resulted from the attack of bramble. He turns his idea towards ancient magic to achieve his goal. This proves that an already harmed city is put more into trouble for the selfish protection of family leaving out the nourishing environment. The instance from Jiala’s father’s perspective to cure was that:

And then I read the ancient words of Majjister Arun, sounding out the language that could never be recalled after it was spoken. Consonants burned my tongue as it tapped those words of power. The power of ancients. The dream of Jhandpara. The sulphur smell of magic filled the room, and now round vowels of healing tumbled from my lips, spinning like pin wheels, finding their targets in the yellow paste of my fingerprints (Bacigalupi 19).

The difference between magic and alchemy steps out as a distinguishing factor in analyzing the mental stability of people. The authoritarian power of the mayor makes the civilian to be cautious in using the only term for treatment as alchemy. The theory of Eco-magical realism put forth by Gabriel Garcia Marquez criticizes false beliefs against nature's own creation. The acceptance revealed through his works is that nature already has its own magical creativity which can never be demolished. In the same way, the novel implies that the duty of alchemists is to invent medicines without altering ecosystems in the name of magic.

Illan Stavans, a famous Mexican American cultural critic in his work "On Gabriel Garcia Marquez" states that:

The principal complaint is that Magical Realism as cultivated by him has taught editors and audiences to expect a formulaic depiction of Latin America replete with clairvoyant prostitutes, forgotten generals, epidemics of insomnia, and rainstorms of butterflies. In other words, that a more urbane, less mythical view of the region is of little interest abroad (6).

The use of machines with gunpowder emerges as an alternative to magic. It withstands as a tool for Tana, an executioner, to fight against the opponents. The situation favors the survival of humans but in the case of magical usage, an unpredicted deflation prevails leading to ecological imbalance. The magical essence gains mental nourishment among the paikans. These are the oppressed class people suffering from bramble attacks and overuse of magic. Their belief is to send small children for pilgrimages to gain more magical power. In this situation, diminution of magic becomes possible with machinery fights i.e., by using axes and guns.

The idea of dominating the natural world covers the patriarchal domain that existed in Khaim. The prioritization of patriarchal norm gives importance to profit rather than environmental responsibilities. The outcome is the formation of culture that should be considered above nature. The burden is pushed upon

women revealing inequalities of gender during situations of environmental disasters. The belief of the Executioner is that:

I fought the Paikans to get my children back. To stop the culling. I had no wish to return to forcing the Way on people. And so I am forced to find the magic users, as I must, and hang them from the city's walls. On my worst days, I think I have become no better than spells and spiking their heads to the city walls. And to my chagrin, the Way's priests point to the people I execute as proof that only the Way can save these lands (Bacigalupi 148).

The populations with low income do not care about death as their fear is starvation. The situation of the poisonous bramble separates the sister from her own brother. He cannot accept the reality of rewinding his childhood days in a wealthy family with parents. This shows that income plays a dominant role in acquiring an environmental space without contribution to magical spirits.

The ecological imprisonments that we observe today are largely the direct outcomes of significant changes in biodiversity, which have occurred alongside an unsettling increase in magical resources that, while seemingly beneficial, often lead to unforeseen consequences. The detrimental effects of pollution and habitat destruction have become increasingly apparent, particularly because of the unchecked growth and expansion of bramble. This invasive plant species not only alters the landscape but also contributes to substantial fire emissions, which further exacerbates the environmental crisis.

In common discourse, the prevalent opinion regarding the bramble plant is that it poses a significant obstacle to further agricultural development on the land, effectively hindering the opportunity for cultivation and, consequently, fostering a sense of unease and displacement for many avian species that once thrived in these environments. This lack of suitable habitat creates a suffocating atmosphere devoid of the rich, diverse ecosystems that are crucial for supporting various forms of wildlife. Thus, the underlying

intent for freedom among these displaced species is painfully withheld due to what has now become a long-term ecological imprisonment, leaving them trapped in a cycle of habitat loss and decline.

The capitalist powers concentrate on estranged labor, leading to poor settlements of daily wage workers. The struggle of such labor can be envisioned through the life of a character named Sofija. The private ownership of the duke dominated the lifestyle of her family without promising wealth in return for hard work. The result of her life is that she buries her parents in dirt. This points to the tragic nature of power to the living environment. The discussion by Farshad Araghi, a post-doctoral fellow at Birmingham University mentions in the article “Accumulation by Displacement: Global Enclosures, Food Crisis and the Ecological Contradictions of Capitalism” about ecological and private imprisonments stating that:

It was “estranged labor”, not labor in general, that estranged humans from nature, i.e., presented nature as an “external” force to reckon with either via domination (in the first discourse) or coexistence (in the second discourse). Estranged labor, in Marx’s words, “tears away from him his species-life, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him” (117).

Biotechnology is a remarkable and innovative field that represents an artificial advancement in technology, specifically designed to contribute positively to environmental improvements in various ways. This fascinating discipline effectively combines principles of biology with those of technology, all while deliberately excluding any consideration of magical or fantastical elements that might otherwise cloud the understanding of its scientific foundation. The research and development within this field have progressed significantly, enabling the cultivation of a wide variety of plants that can thrive and flourish despite the challenges posed by changing climatic conditions.

In the context of *The Tangled Lands*, the lifestyle of most individuals heavily depends on high-ranking authorities, which creates a significant obstacle when it comes to the adoption and implementation

of technical improvisations that could enhance their quality of life. The findings derived from this study suggest that incorporating hybridization into the personal lifestyles of individuals creates a life that harmonizes obedience to nature with minimal reliance on technological resources. This will not lead to personal gain but can pave the way for the overall betterment of society. This approach promises to mitigate the risks associated with potentially harmful plants, such as the notorious bramble, thereby creating a safer and more sustainable environment for all.

Works Cited

- Araghi, Farshad. "Accumulation by Displacement: Global Enclosures, Food crisis and the Ecological Contradictions of Capitalism". *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, vol.32, no.1, 2009, pp.113-146. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40647791. Accessed 20 February 2025.
- Bacigalupi, Paolo, and Tobias S. Buckell. *The Tangled Lands*. Saga Press, 2018.
- Clapp, Jennifer. "World Hunger and the Global Economy: Strong Linkages, Weak Action." *Journal of International Affairs*, vol.67, no.2,2014, pp.1-17. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.com/stable/24461732.
- Stavans, Illan. "On Gabriel Garcia Marquez." *Evanston Public Library*, Sep,2021, www.epl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Career-Life-and-Influence.pdf.