Apocalyptic Writing in Indian English Literature: An Overview

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Abstract— In recent decades, global literature has witnessed a surge in apocalyptic and dystopian narratives: stories imagining collapse, catastrophe, environmental ruin, social disintegration. Often associated with Western science-fiction traditions, such "apocalyptic writing" has increasingly been adopted and reinterpreted by writers worldwide. In India too, a nascent but growing body of literature in English imagines "apocalyptic Indias": futures shaped by environmental disaster, climate crisis, social collapse, and political dystopia. This article examines the trajectory, characteristics, and significance of apocalyptic writing in Indian English, broadly understood to include dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and climate-fictional. It traces patterns in thematic concerns, narrative strategies, and ideological orientations; it highlights challenges and tensions; and it argues for the critical importance of reading such works as part of the broader cultural and ecological imagination of contemporary India. In doing so, the essay draws on recent scholarship — especially the work of Sagnik Yadaw and Rupsa Roy Chowdhury — which examines the representation of the Anthropocene in Indian English literature.

Keywords— Apocalyptic writing, Dystopia, Climate-fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction

In the Indian context, apocalyptic writing in English intersects with postcolonial sensibilities, environmental anxieties, urbanization, inequality, and socio-political critique, making it distinct from Western apocalyptic tropes rooted in nuclear-war or alien invasion. One reason for the relatively recent growth of apocalyptic writing in Indian English is the legacy of postcolonial literature's dominant concerns such as identity, hybridity, tradition versus modernity, past against present. For decades, Indian English fiction was shaped by the colonial aftermath, nation-building, cultural identity, and social realism. Consequently, imaginative futurism or speculative disasters were rare. As argued by Yadaw and Chowdhury, "Indian English literature's meagre response to the Anthropocene is always marked with an uneasy influence of western Climate fiction." (358)

However, with accelerating environmental crisis, climate change, urban degradation, rising inequality and political unrest in 21st century India, writers have begun to explore future-oriented imaginaries. That shift reflects broader global anxieties but also Indian-specific experiences viz. climate vulnerability, social stratification, urban crowding, resource scarcity, environmental injustices.

Further, the rise of publishing speculative fiction and growing interest in genre writing (sci-fi, dystopia, fantasy) in India has created a space for Indian English "apocalyptic" narratives. E. Dawson Varughese in her recent book, *Post-Millennial Indian Speculative Fiction in English* observes that this fiction increasingly features dystopia, near-future apocalyptic Indias, and imaginative reworkings of identity, belonging, and future histories. She maps a growing post-millennial literature in English that envisions dystopian, near-future and apocalyptic Indias — reflecting contemporary economic, social, political, biological, environmental transformations. These interventions mark the beginning of critical recognition of "apocalyptic Indian English" as a definable trend as well as turf. Though the corpus remains limited, a few texts and

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critical studies illustrate the contours of apocalyptic writing in Indian English.

The article by Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, "Resisting the Apocalypse: Representing the Anthropocene in Indian English Literature" investigates how Indian English literature has attempted, though modestly, to deploy apocalypse as a trope, rhetoric, and aesthetic in response to ecological crisis. They examine four key texts: *The City and the River* (1990) by Arun Joshi; *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh; *Animal's People* (2007) by Indra Sinha; and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (2015) by Sarnath Banerjee. While far from comprehensive, these works illustrate different modalities of apocalyptic imaginaries in Indian English fiction:

Animal's People fictionalises the aftermath of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy. The protagonist, "Animal", represents a generation living with the consequences of industrial catastrophe. According to Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, Sinha reframes apocalypse not as distant future, but as ongoing present: "the apocalypse … as recurring presence," calling victims "the people of the Apokalis."

All Quiet in Vikaspuri is a graphic-novel set in a post-apocalyptic Delhi haunted by water scarcity; Banerjee uses satire, irony, and fragmentation to critique capitalist exploitation, urban neglect, ecological collapse, imagining a dystopian cityscape that resonates with contemporary anxieties.

The Hungry Tide is not a conventional post-apocalyptic novel; yet it engages with ecological vulnerability in the Sundarbans — tidal surges, fragile delta ecologies — weaving environmental precariousness into human stories. In the critical reading by Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury, the ever-present threat of disaster (rising tides, climate precarity) becomes a subtle apocalyptic motif.

The City and the River may be looked upon as the pioneering work, which in ecocritical readings can be interpreted as an allegory of modernity's clash with nature, City versus River, evoking apocalyptic overtones if read through an environmental lens.

Beyond these, the broader field of post-millennial Indian speculative fiction (as discussed by Varughese) includes numerous novels and stories by authors such as Samit Basu, Gautam Bhatia, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Prayaag Akbar, Anil Menon, among others, that reimagine Indianness, identity, environment and future through dystopian or speculative lenses.

Based on the critical and fictional texts above, we can tentatively identify several recurring features and tensions in Indian English apocalyptic writing:

Unlike classic Western apocalypses — nuclear war, zombie plague, alien invasion — Indian English apocalyptic writing often emerges from environmental crisis: ecological fragility, climate change, industrial disasters, resource scarcity, urban collapse. As Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury argue, the trope of apocalypse becomes a way to represent the Anthropocene (human-caused environmental rupture) and its social consequences.

This ecological apocalypse is frequently grounded in specific Indian geographies — deltas, rivers, megacities, urban peripheries, making disaster simultaneously global and local. For instance, in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, the water crisis in Delhi becomes the crucible of social collapse; in *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans' fragile ecology shapes human destinies.

Apocalyptic Indian fiction often intersects with issues of class, caste, marginality, and social injustice. Disasters — environmental or industrial — disproportionately affect the poor, the underprivileged, migrants, urban underclass, marginalized communities. In *Animal's People*, for example, the victims are the working-class and dispossessed; the novel critiques how disaster exposure maps onto preexisting social inequalities. Similarly, the dystopian urban collapse imagined by Banerjee in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* plays out along lines of economic disparity, revealing how post-apocalyptic spaces often reproduce inequities rather than abolish them.

A common undercurrent is scepticism toward unbridled modernization, industrialization, and urban expansion. Such "progress" becomes implicated in ecological destruction, social alienation, and eventual collapse. In *The City and the River,* Joshi's symbolic opposition of city and river can be read as a critique of modernity's detachment from nature; in later works, the critique becomes more explicit: environmental degradation, privatization of resources (water), commodification of nature, and capitalist negligence, leading to dystopia or collapse.

Apocalyptic Indian English is often not "pure sci-fi" as many of such works blend realism, allegory, magical realism, social realism, ecological fiction, and speculative elements. This hybridization reflects the difficulty of transplanting Western apocalyptic tropes into Indian socio-cultural contexts; instead, Indian writers rework them, merging myth, realistic social conditions, ecological awareness, and speculative imagination. Critical studies note this hybridity: Indian speculative fiction often refuses Western-style high-tech futurism; instead, it situates apocalypse in culturally and geographically specific worlds, using satire, irony, social critique and symbolic tropes.

Despite promising growth, apocalyptic writing in Indian English faces several challenges and critiques. As compared to Western cli-fi or dystopian fiction, Indian English literature's engagement with apocalypse remains "meagre" and sporadic. Many apocalyptic tropes — rhetoric of catastrophic disaster, dystopian collapse, climatic apocalypse — derive from Western climate-fiction traditions. Critics question to what extent this import reproduces Western ecological imaginaries rather than cultivating distinctly Indian ones. Yadaw and Roy Chowdhury call this an "uneasy influence" (Ibid).

Using apocalypse as spectacle, there is a risk of sensationalism, detaching from serious socio-environmental critique, or reducing crisis to entertainment. Given India's real ecological and social issues, there is a danger that such fiction becomes escapist rather than transformative. Fictionalising disasters, especially those grounded in real historical events (industrial disasters, environmental degradation), raises ethical questions: whose voices are represented? Do these narratives risk appropriating trauma for literary effect?

Given these challenges, apocalyptic writing in Indian English matters because of several reasons that reinforce its critical importance. As India grapples with climate change, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, urbanization — literature that imagines ecological collapse helps articulate anxieties, make visible hidden fractures, and ask urgent ethical questions about sustainability, justice, and survival. By linking ecological catastrophe with social inequality, caste/class marginalization, displacement, resource injustice, apocalyptic fiction can critique structural inequalities, raise awareness, and potentially foster empathy and political imagination. Rather than mimicking Western sci-fi or dystopian fiction, Indian apocalyptic writing (through hybrid forms) can contribute to an authentic *desi* speculative tradition, deeply rooted in local geographies, histories, languages, social realities, cultural mythologies, thereby enriching Indian English literature with new forms and sensibilities. Apocalypse in Indian writing becomes not just plot device but metaphor for loss, memory, vulnerability, collective responsibility. It urges readers to be critical and contemplate on what kind of future does one expect; which values really matter; and who has to bear the cost of "progress"?

In summation, apocalyptic writing in Indian English is not yet a dominant mode, but it is emerging as a significant, timely, and politically resonant literary field. As India and the world at large face unprecedented environmental, social, and political challenges, such literature provides powerful tools: not only to imagine collapse, but to question, critique, mourn, and re-imagine. By mapping ecological fragility, social injustice, urban decay, and cultural disintegration, Indian English apocalyptic narratives challenge comfort zones, disrupt complacency, and confront readers with possible futures. At their best, they offer more than disaster porn or speculative thrill: they provoke reflection, empathy, responsibility, and even hope. For scholars, readers, and writers alike, investing attention in apocalyptic Indian English literature is not only intellectually rewarding but it may also be ethically necessary.

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