
A Panorama of Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism in *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson

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Abstract: This research paper focuses entirely on the life-centered and human-centered thinking of the people in a famous science fiction named *The Ministry for the Future*, by Kim Stanley Robinson. This novel is a fictional conjecture of the future and it explores the consequences of climate change, rising sea levels, heat waves, and displacement of the people. The title *The Ministry for the Future* refers to a United Nations Agency in this novel, which was formulated for the purpose of safeguarding the natural Ecosystem. This novel has two protagonists, one is an American aid worker in India named Frank May and the other is Mary Murphy, an Irish Diplomat who was the head of the United Nations Agency the Ministry for the Future.

Kim Stanley Robinson was a famous American writer, born on 23 March 1952. Most of his works deal with environmental issues, climate change, and nature. His notable works are *The Memory of Whiteness* (1985), *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2001), and *A Short, Sharp Shock* (1990). He is known for his famous trilogy named *The Mars Trilogy* which consists of the works *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993), and *Blue Mars* (1996). His Three California, also known as *Orange Country Trilogy* consists of *The Wild Shore* (1984), *The Gold Coast* (1988), and *Pacific Edge* (1990) depicts the future of California. *The Planet on the Table* in 1986 was a collection of science fiction stories.

The Ministry for the Future was published in 2020 and this novel consists of 106 chapters. This novel was nominated for the BSFA Award for best novel, the Locus Award, and the Dragon Award for Best Sci-fi Novel of the Year 2021.

Ecocriticism is a literary approach, which focuses on the projection of Mother Nature in Literary works. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was founded in 1992 in the United States of America to promote this approach. William Rueckert, and Lawrence Buell were some of the famous Ecocriticism theorists.

Eco and critic both derive from Greek, *Oikos* and *Kritis*, and in tandem they mean “house judge,” which may surprise many lovers of green, outdoor writing. A long-winded gloss on *ecocritic* might runs a follows: “a person who

judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political actions.” So the *oikos* is nature, a place Edward Hoagland calls “our wildest home,” and the *Kritos* is an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order, no boots or dishes strewn about the ruin the original décor. (Howarth 69)

The term Ecocriticism was first used by Willaim Rueckert in *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978). Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are considered superior in the world over the natural environment. Biocentrism is a belief that importance is given to all the living beings in the world.

Biocentric quality is intimately related to the all-inclusive self-realization in the sense that if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves. There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated. But insofar as we perceive things as individual organisms or entities, the insights draws us to respect all human and non-human individuals in their own rights as parts of the whole without feeling the need to set up hierarchies of species with humans at the top. (Devall and Sessions 68)

Deep Ecology is a concept in the ecocritical approach which focuses on the relationship between human beings and mother Nature. The term deep ecology was coined by a Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess in his paper titled *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary* in the year 1973. Some important concepts of deep ecology are bio-centrism, eco-centrism, self-realization, and the human-nature relationship. This research paper focuses on the bio-centric perspective offered by the contemporary sci-fi author Kim Stanley Robinson’s novel entitled *The Ministry for the Future*. This novel, as a science fiction and speculative novel, speculates on a future when bio-centrism is erased and there is no ecologically balanced system. It also portrays both the merits and demerits of geoengineering, and technological and scientific development. While discussing the merits and demerits of geoengineering, and technological and scientific development, it focuses on its contribution towards the ecology. This novel also criticizes the materialistic aspirations of the characters present in the novel *The Ministry for the Future*. Since their focus is entirely on materialistic things, they forget to safeguard nature. This shows an ecological imbalance. It is a dystopian speculative fiction. As a dystopian speculative fiction, it primarily focuses on the sufferings of the people caused by heatwaves, sea level rising.

Frank May flew from Jacksonville, Florida, to Uttar Pradesh, India, to work. On a sunny morning with a heat of 103 Fahrenheit, all the people were suffering because of the extreme heat and no power was available so Frank May advised them to be inside air-conditioned places or stay within generator powered schools. He also suggested people to seek refuge in the lake to be relieved from the heat. Many people die as the water exceeds body temperature. He contacted the Headquarters in Delhi about the extreme heat but no

immediate solution was provided. He set up an air conditioner in his clinic and town people came to his clinic. Soon the air-conditioned unit and the generator unit were stolen by a mysterious gang.

Article 14 of the Paris Agreement is a periodic review of global carbon emissions which paved the way to create a new agency named The Ministry for the Future in January 2025. This agency aims to work with the IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations Agencies, and Government and its main focus is to protect both human and non-human beings. The new agency was established at Hochstrasser, Zurich, Switzerland near the Eidgenossische Technische Hochschule (ETH) to access the geotechnical expertise and near the Swiss banks for financial resources. Mary Murphy, an Irish diplomat was the head of the Ministry for the Future. In the meantime, the Indian government planned to make solar radiation management by injecting sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere with the help of an air force similar to the Pinatubo volcanic eruption that happened in 1991. This was planned to lower the global temperature because the extreme heat killed many people in India. This was found to be against the Paris Agreement. Mary Murphy made a conversation with Chandra Mukajee, Head of India's delegation to the Paris Agreement to withdraw the plan but they are ready to execute the plan for the benefit of human beings. Mary Murphy discussed the geoengineering project of India with her colleagues but they did not come up with a solution.

Frank May suffered from Post-traumatic stress disorder so he went to his home town. In his hometown, he was kidnapped by the children of Kali to whom he narrated the sufferings he had undergone from the extreme heat in India. He escaped from them and went to Switzerland. In Switzerland, he met Mary Murphy and discussed the extreme heat wave in India and other environmental issues. In Geneva, a meeting was hosted by Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research where the researchers focused on the sea level rise caused by the melting of Antarctic ice. At Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica, a practical experiment was made but that was a failure. The researchers predicted that the Arctic Ocean's ice would be melted in 2032 so the Ministry for the Future agency decided to spray sea water into the air to make the ice thicken. In Switzerland, a new innovative idea was formed by a 2000-watt society to reduce the energy consumption of a person from 5000 watts to 2000 watts. In Switzerland, Frank May helped many refugees but one day a Swiss man attacked a refugee and Frank opposed him so the police came and arrested Frank May because he did not have a Swiss identity. After his release, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor and passed away.

Environmental devastation led to climate change which was clearly portrayed by Kim Stanley Robinson by mentioning about the heavy rainfall at Gabriel Mountain caused a flood in Sierra Madre, Los Angeles. Mary Murphy arranged a meeting and announced her retirement and declared Badim as the head of the Ministry for the Future. Then she went to CCCB – Climate Coalition of Central Banks to discuss the environmental issues with the elites and turned their attention to safeguarding mother nature. Then Mary went on an airship voyage with Captain Arthur Nolan to enjoy nature and she went to Antarctica where the

pumping stations have slowed down the glaciers. Finally, the protagonist joins the 2000 watts society in Zurich.

In Uttara Pradesh, people suffer a lot because of the high heat waves emitted by the sun. Heatwaves are prevalent in India. During summer, the newspapers are filled with news regarding heatwaves and heat strokes. Uttar Pradesh is known for its harsh sunny climate. The temperature might shoot above 48 degree Celsius. The novel *The Ministry for the Future* features one such place with severe heatwaves. Frank May asked the people to be inside the Air-conditioned rooms and submerge their body inside the lake. He tries to save human beings but he fails to save the environment by using Fridge, AC, and Generators which emit Chlorofluorocarbons which affect the Ozone Layer and cause changes in weather patterns and climate change. The Ozone Layer protects living beings from the harmful Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. This shows the act of human which devastates the environment for their own purpose.

Sound of generators, rumbling exhaust into the superheated air, powering air conditioners he presumed. He suppressed a cough. It was too hot to cough; sucking back in air was like breathing in a furnace, so that one coughed again. Between the intake of steamy air and the effort of coughing, one ended up hotter than ever. People came up to him asking for help. He said it would be coming soon. Two in the afternoon, he told people. Come to the clinic then. For now, take the old ones and the little ones into rooms with air conditioning. The schools would have A/C, the government house. Go to those places. Follow the sound of generators. (Robinson 16).

The use of generators polluted the air and it mixed with the heat so the town looked like smoke. This shows the devastation of the natural environment. “Gray air lay on the town like smoke. It was too hot to have a smell, there was just a scorched sensation, a smell like heat itself, like flame.” (Robinson 19)

A New Agency named The Ministry for the Future was established in January 2025 at Honchstrasse, Zurich, Switzerland near the Eidgenossische Technische Hochschule (ETH) to access the geotechnical expertise and near to the Swiss banks for financial resources. Mary Murphy, an Irish diplomat was the head of the Ministry for the Future. In the meantime, the Government of India decided on solar radiation Management (SRM) by injecting sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere to reduce the global temperature.

They came half an hour ago. Our geoengineering people are saying that if they do it as planned, it will equate to about the same as the Pinatubo volcanic eruption of 1991. That lowered global temperature by about a degree Fahrenheit, for a year or two. That was from the sulfur dioxide in the ash cloud that the volcano shot into the stratosphere. It will take the Indians several months to replicate that boost of sulfur dioxide, our people say.”

Do they have the capacity to do it?

Their air force can probably do it, yes. They can certainly try, they've got the necessary aircraft and equipment. A lot of it will simply reconfigure aerial refueling technology. And planes dump fuel all the time, so that part won't be so hard. The main problem will be getting up as high as possible, and then it's just a matter of quantity, the number of missions needed. Thousands of flights, for sure. (Robinson 35)

Mary Murphy called Chandra Mukajee, Head of India's delegation to the Paris Agreement to cancel their plan but she was so stubborn because many Indian people lost their lives because of the extreme heat. "You can't be sure that there won't be other effects" (Robinson 36). This was the statement of Mary Murphy. She has some concerns about the environment and all the living creatures because solar radiation management will cause damage to the entire ecosystem and there will be some changes in the monsoon, and climate. This shows the biocentric perspective of Mary Murphy. In the future, the Indian Government is ready to cancel the treaty signed with other developed nations to save the environment.

Chandra Mukajee focuses only on the human well being and does not take care of the environment which was devastated by humans for their own benefit. "Millions of people have just died. We'll never even know how many died, there are too many to count. It could be twenty million people." (Robinson 36)

In the World Economic Forum at Davos, a gathering of world elites, people discussed about the human based things like wealth distribution, and political power and they did not discuss about the other living beings which shows the anthropocentric nature of man.

Some of the private industries focus only on their financial growth by devastating the sources from mother Nature. They do not care about the environment; this highlights the concept of Anthropocentrism. "The owners of these fuels were sometimes private individuals who had gotten fantastically rich, but many times they were nation-states that had claimed ownership of the fuels found within their boundaries as assets of the state and its citizenry." (Robinson 292)

Article 14 of the Paris Agreement focuses on global carbon emissions by giving a periodic review. The 2023 global stock take showed the failure to meet emission targets. So, a new body aimed to work with IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change, United Nations agencies, and Government. This body focused on protecting all living beings. A New Agency named The Ministry for the Future was established in January 2025 in Zurich, Switzerland. The new agency's motto of protecting all living beings reflects the biocentric view.

This new Subsidiary Body is furthermore charged with defending all living creatures present and future who cannot speak for themselves, by promoting their legal standing and physical protection.

Someone in the press named this new agency “the Ministry for the Future,” and the name stuck and spread, and became what the new agency was usually called. It was established in Zurich, Switzerland, in January of 2025. (Robinson 32)

Cinzia hosted a party on her property at the lakefront in Brissago, near Lake Maggiore, Switzerland. Many people came and a light show happened. A man was staring at the partygoers so Edmund questioned him. The man accused them for devastating the nature. *“You fuckers are burning up the world with your stupid games.”* (Robinson 104) *Edward mocked him so the man stabbed Edward which led him to death. This shows the biocentric worldview of focusing on the environment.*

Frank wishes to stop the heat wave and does not want any future recurrence. He shows some concern towards Mother Nature “I want to help to stop it happening again. The heat wave, and things like it.” (Robinson 133)

“The world is careening along toward disaster, and we can’t get it to change course fast enough to avoid a smash.” (Robinson 140). *This statement shows concern towards the mother nature which is going to be completely devastated and people need to come up with a few solutions to avoid a huge disaster and to protect the future living beings.*

Indians gave more importance to agriculture and organic products and use solar power which are less harmful to pollute the environment. This shows their priority for ecological health.

Certainly its work so far has been admirable. Since sweeping the elections, the national Coalition government has completed the nationalization of all the country’s energy companies, and set to work decommissioning all coal-fired plants. Completing the clean electrification of the country is being accomplished by construction of massive solar power arrays, and then electricity-storing facilities, and a refurbished national grid. This again has been labor intensive, but India has lots of people. And lots of sunlight. And lots of land. (Robinson 162)

“We have to live, we have to give this place to the kids with the animals still alive and a chance to make a living.” (Robinson 304) This shows the concern of the human beings for their future generation as well as non-human life’s well being and this also focuses on safeguarding the natural ecosystems.

Anthropocentrism focuses on the well-being of human beings. This paper focused on studying the novel *The Ministry for the Future* through the anthropocentric lens. From an anthropocentric view, the novel speaks about the intervention of proper government policies, scientific and technological inventions to protect the well-being of human beings. A part of the paper was based on anthropocentrism, meanwhile it also studied the novel *The Ministry for the Future* from a biocentric perspective. While the novel focuses on the well-being of human beings, it is also inclusive of other living beings in the world. The combination of anthropocentric and biocentric perspective offers valuable insights to know about the ecological issues narrated in the novel *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson.

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