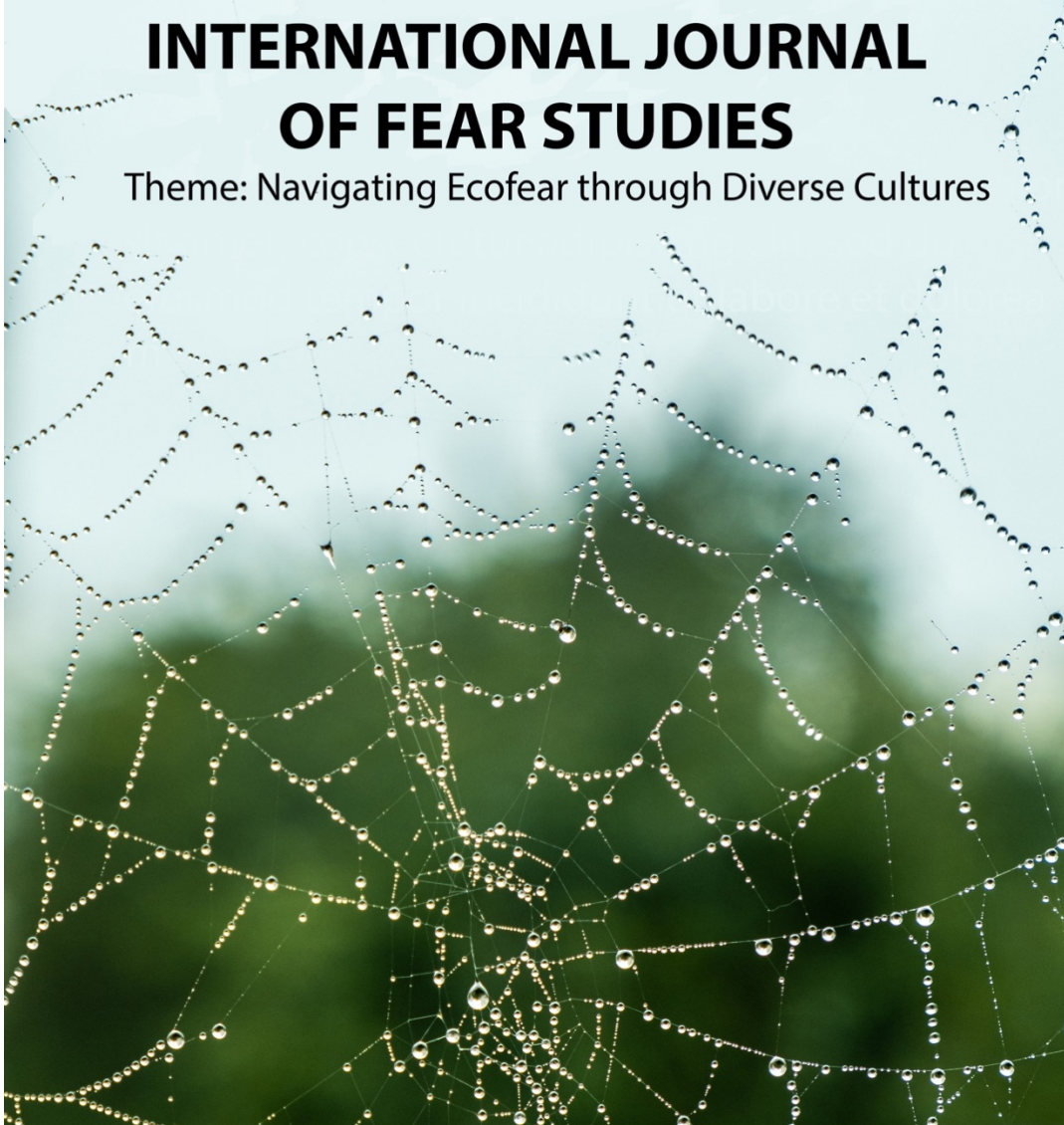


VOLUME: 3

ISSUE: 1

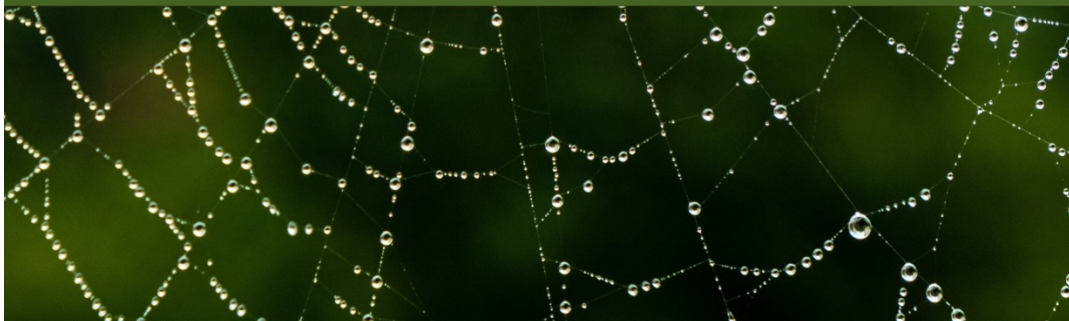
# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FEAR STUDIES

Theme: Navigating Ecofear through Diverse Cultures



Guest Editors: RAYSON K. ALEX, SACHINDEV P. S.

Senior Editor: R. MICHEAL FISHER



## *Editorial*

# **Naturecultures, Ecofears, Cultural Texts**

**Alex, Rayson K. & P. S., Sachindev**  
**(Guest Editors, from Goa & Hyderabad, India)**

“Is there one central fear like the trunk of a tree, though it has many branches, and if you could understand that single root of fear you have understood the whole network of fear? How do you approach this, from the periphery or from the centre? If the mind can understand the root of fear then the branches, the various aspects of fear have no meaning, they wither away. So what is the root of fear? Can you look at your fear? Please look at it now, invite it.”

J. Krishnamurti

In a divided world of humans and environments, ecological humanists and social scientists are trying to establish an imagined culture of integration—an integration of nature and culture. In ecohumanities and ecosocial sciences disciplines, theoreticians challenge the established epistemology of the divide between nature and culture, pointing to a better world for diverse organisms to live and flourish. Donna Haraway’s naturecultures is one such scholarly inquiry which “recognizes their [nature’s and culture’s] inseparability in ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed” (Malone and Ovenden 1). Naturecultures to Haraway is an integrative philosophy of life and place that constitutes mutuality (Brown 217). There is a sense of inclusivity here which is not based on elements of separation or duality.

*“Disconnection with the environment is the cause of fear.”*

The overarching and dominant epistemology of duality is based on fear. A feeling of connection to a place nullifies fear. However, familiarity plays an important role in nullifying this fear. In her popular article titled “Nature and Culture” Jules Pretty, while discussing the natureculture interconnections of the traditional Kogi Indian community with respect to their immediate environment, says “disconnection leads to feelings of biophobia and a fear of the outdoors, perceiving it to be a wild and unfamiliar environment” (Pretty).

The argument of Pretty can be extended to other contexts as well. Disconnection with the environment is the cause of fear. It is this human fear that creates dichotomy, duality and disconnection with nature. For example, a conflict between a dog and a cat/human is a confrontation—a “life or death” conflict. Such kinds of conflict situations are fear-based. Whether there is violence or avoidance of it, both are fear-based. The conflict might be for various reasons—power, instincts, natural resources and so on—but everything originates from a fear-induced context. Even though R. Michael Fisher defines ecofear as “Human-Nature-Fear (*aka* Eco-Fear Problem)”—a fear that human and other beings experience due to a hyphenate relationship between them, ecofear, unlike the concept of naturecultures is based on an epistemology of disconnect between humans and the rest of nature (Fisher, “Eco-philosophy of Fearism and Ecocriticism”11). As much as the ecofear and ecophobia theorists believe that these feelings or

conditions should be overcome, Fisher thinks that fear is a useful construct in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to understand the fear-experiences of human individuals and communities, and of other beings (Fisher, “Fearanalysis and Ecocriticism” 10). Ecofear, in that sense, is a critical framework (read Fisher’s concept of Fearanalysis) to analyse cultural texts. In various cultural contexts, concepts such as *oikophobia* (fear of home, as defined by Roger Scruton who coined the term in his 2004 book titled, *England and the Need for Nations*) and *ecophobia* (proposed and popularised by Simon C. Estok; see his 2018 book titled *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*) can be employed as theoretical frameworks for literary and cultural analysis.

Ecofear is a culture-specific trope. The spectrum of fear may vary according to the agencies, context of interactions, and the various reasons for the fear, depending on the cultures in discussion. The fears that connect/disconnect humans from nature have various dimensions that could be studied from a multi-, inter-, and/or transdisciplinary approach—sociological, cultural, economic, political, philosophical, theological, artistic and of course, psychological lens. These fear-dimensions that could be understood through diverse disciplines explore multi/transmethodologies to arrive at realistic conclusions. For instance, the film *Crawl* (2019), set in Florida, a hurricane-prone state, contextualizes a world where natural disasters are an accepted reality but the antagonist(s) (alligators) engage in a “war” with humans—an explicit human-animal conflict that is primarily caused by fear (of various kinds) and also invokes fear in the audience. Augustina Baztericca’s novel, *Tender is the Flesh: If Everyone Was Eating Human Meat, Would You?*, which many readers assert as the most horrifying novel that is set in a world where cannibalism is normalized after a global epidemic which wipes out the animal population. The film as well as the novel, could be read as an aftermath of human anxiety situated in a world that they are actively destroying. Fear is at the centre of both the works. Ecofear propositions by R. Michael Fisher, and/or Desh Subba and Simon C. Estok provide a befitting framework to analyse such literary and cultural texts.

*“...there is certainly fear in the air...slow-fear.”*

The recent Farmer’s upheaval is another mega-event that could be analysed from an ecofearistic angle. There are a few dominant and explicit agencies in the protest scene such as various organizations of the farmers, onsite governmental machineries such as police and military, groups and individuals with solidarity to the farmers, media persons and so on. Though there is certainly fear in the air, the conflict which is not evident, we would refer to as slow-fear. Fear may not be evidently visible (in most cases) in the form of conflict/violence. However, slow-fear has only a thin line between “peace” and violence. Quite invisible and implicit are the corporate agencies such as Reliance and Monsanto in the Farmer’s protest scene. The political ideology and power are also invisible and in most cases deceptive. Ironically, the fear that these subtle agencies induce are enormous, immediate and evident. This is fast-fear. The entire event of the farmer’s protest could be primarily looked at from an environmental crisis framework. The defence to Disha Ravi, a climate activist who was arrested in connection with the Greta Thunberg toolkit case, said “There’s a cause of environment, of agriculture and interlink between them” (“Disha Ravi says”). That the government officials are not commenting or making public statements is yet another slow-fear inducing factor. Along with the cultural texts aforementioned, social “texts” such as this could be looked at from various ecofearistic points-of-view.

This Issue of *International Journal for Fear Studies* focuses on various kinds of ecofears experienced by humans and other animals in different cultural texts and contexts apart from the various explorations of the consequences and manifestations of ecofear, and the several ways to attain ecofearlessness. The issue is divided into two parts: Part A: Critical Essays and Part B: Creative Works. In the Critical Essays part, the editors have included ten critical essays from a humanities' point-of-view. Two experiential fictional stories, three poems and a film constitute the Creative Works section.

Meera Baidur's essay titled "Ecofear as Visible and Invisible: Conceptual Underpinnings of The Southern Reach Trilogy by Jeff VanderMeer" looks at the posthuman scenario of relationship between nature and fear through an ecocritical reading of Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy (2014) titled *Annihilation, Authority, and Acceptance*." In stark contrast, the essay titled "Ecoanxiety: A Philosophical Investigation from the Early Buddhist Perspective," written by Gyan Prakash, explores the "Buddhist ethical perspectives of ecoanxiety, with special reference to early Buddhist thinker Buddhaghosa" to argue that Buddhist ethical teachings are beneficial in understanding ecoanxiety. Two essays that critique the representation of ecofear in film texts are Tiffany Deater's "Navigating Women Scientist & Unnatural Selection Though: *The Nest* (1987) and *Splice* (2006)" and Praggnaparamita Biswas' "Narrativizing Ecoterrorism in the Indian Film *Irada*." Deater's essay discusses an ecofeministic fear and argues that "the stereotype of female scientist as portrayed in *The Nest* and *Splice* is destructive to the cultural progress of women. In addition, [she argues that] both the films assert that women scientists are at fault for changes in the natural world and thus have a negative effect on humanity's ability to survive." Biswas, in her essay, employs the concept of ecoterrorism to "map the nonhuman agencies which operate in the socio-economic environment" of the 2017-Bollywood film *Irada*. Sinjini Ray, Sanchar Sarkar and Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Ramji Timalisina have written about Bengali and Nepali communities' fear of natural elements such as land and water. Ray's essay titled "Rivers as the Site of Fear: Flood and Drought Through the Lens of Ritwik Ghatak's *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*" contextualizes the severe droughts in history of Bengal to discuss the ecofear in "Ritwik Ghatak's film *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam (A River Called Titas)* for its portrayal of people's dependence on the river with their fates tied up with that of the river."

Sarkar's and Rangarajan's essay, "Of Devouring Waters and Unforgiving Lands: An Analysis of Premonition Ecology in two Wetland Narratives from West Bengal" "articulate[s] the pervading sense of 'ecopremonition,' a term [they] have coined to describe the anticipatory fear of ecological collapse caused by rapid and unpredictable changes in the geomorphology of places like Sundarbans and East Calcutta." The last three essays employ indigenous ecofear to throw light on a reverential fear that aids an interconnection between humans and naturecultures in specific cultural contexts. Sadhana Swayamsidha, in her essay titled "Trepidation of Change: Analysing the Somatic De-recognition of Mother Nature in Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*," "explore[s] how somatic de-recognition [inability to experience a sense of belongingness with place] with a place forms the locus of indigenous ecofear" "...which [the community] fear[s] would lead to the gradual degeneration of human beings." In the essay titled "Culture of Fear and Conservation of Nature: Critiquing the Construction of *Sarppakavu* in Kerala," Monisha Mohan and Gigy J. Alex critique William Logan's *Malabar Manual* to argue that "*sarppakavu* in Kerala is an epitome of human-nature-culture co-existence practised among non-indigenous communities, managed through the culture of fear-appeasement." Rithwik Sankar A. in his essay titled "An Analysis of Reverential Ecofear in Theyyam: A Ritualistic Performance of North-Malabar" examines the case

of Theyyottukavu, a sacred grove in the district of Kannur, Theyyam and certain Theyyam myths in the light of the concept of ecofear.

A section of Creative Works that, implicitly or explicitly, deals with fear and ecology are added to the volume. Two experiential fictional stories, one by S. Susan Deborah, titled “Hydrophobia—The Water That I dread!” a first person narrative of a companion dog named Feni and his fears, and Vidya Sarveswaran’s titled “From Dust to Dust...,” narrating her own fearistic experiences of living in the desertic landscape of Rajasthan where she teaches environmental humanities. Along with the stories, there are three poems: Nithya Mariam John’s titled “Precaution,” Harishankar Muppirala’s and Asrani Manisha’s titled “The Bird’s Plight, Takes a Flight” and Shourya Pathak’s “The Lock-down Burg.” A recent short film directed by Tiffany Deater titled “Tornado Lake” also features in this section to stimulate the readers’ viewing fear-experience.

This volume, though it presents a rich consortium of ecofears in various cultural texts and other contexts, is a continuation of the prominent works done by fearologists such as R. M. Fisher and Desh Subba, and ecocritic Simon C. Estok. The volume is evidence to the expansion of the theory of ecophobia and ecofearism, particularly in the Global South. It is the need of the hour for Fear Studies/ Ecophobia Studies to be the centre of humanities and social sciences scholarship across the world to address the growing ecological crisis in the Anthropocene. Let all the readers of the Issue begin/continue to work on Fear studies within their primary disciplines to further expand the scope of the area.

## References

Brown, Steve. “Enmeshed in Naturecultures: A Personal-Global Journey.” *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2017, pp. 216-228.

Pretty, Jules. “Nature and Culture.” *Resurgence & Ecologist*, issue. 250, 2008.  
<https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article2629-nature-and-culture.html>.

Malone, Nicholas and Kathryn Ovenden. “Natureculture.” *The International Encyclopedia of Primatology*, edited by Agustin Fuentes, 2017, pp. 1-2. DOI: 10.1002/9781119179313.wbprim0135.

Fisher, R. M. “Eco-philosophy of Fearism and Ecocriticism: In an Age of Terror.” *Werkhund School of Education Research & Publications*, Technical Paper No. 68, 2017, pp. 2-13.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/110035> Report.

Fisher, R. M. “Fearanalysis and Ecocriticism in the Light of Terrorcriticism.” *In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute*, Technical Paper No. 69, 2017, pp. 2-23.  
<https://st11.ning.com/topology/rest/1.0/file/get/1996016?profile=original>.

“Disha Ravi says if highlighting farmers’ protest is sedition, it’s better to be in jail; court reserves order on bail plea.” *The Indian Express*. 20 Feb. 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/disha-ravi-bail-hearing-greta-thuberg-toolkit-case-farmers-protest-delhi-police-7197022/>.