Dom(e)inating India's Tomorrow(s)? Global Climate Change in Select Anglophonic Narratives[1]

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Abstract: Politics, technology, and nature constitute an inseparable triad in India's fictional futures. This paper focuses on the deployment of technology – as the "dome" – and its relationship with environmental degradation and social marginalisation within select Indian English narratives. It ascertains how the dome responds, negotiates and/or precipitates otherisation and global climate change within an Indian context. Using the framework of Janet Fiskio's "lifeboat" and "the collective" narratives, it compares the varying textual/contextual topographies of the dome in *Leila* (2017), *Domechild* (2013), and "Rain" (1993).

Keywords: Climate fiction, Indian science fiction, Domechild, Leila, Rain (short story), climate change, Dome.

1.   Introduction

The film *2012* (2009) begins at the fictional Naga Deng Copper Mine, and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) premiers with a UN conference on global warming in Delhi. Clearly, India is no stranger to environmental apocalypses – at least not in recent Hollywood disaster films. For Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler, climate change has "made its way towards the mainstream in recent years, on both the screen and the page, and has now eclipsed nuclear terror as the prime mover of the apocalyptic and dystopian imagination" (1). However, India's own film industries

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[1] This paper may source its objects of study from Anglophonic Indian fiction, but does not view them as sole (or even major) representatives of Indian climate fiction and science fiction (primarily due to India's linguistic and literary diversity). Moreover, the dome does not appear in most contemporary Indian SF in English (which propelled me to undertake this endeavour).

have not paid much attention to climate change or considered environmental degradation as a subject worthy of constant depiction on the silver screen, although its speculative fiction has.

With 22 "official" languages alone, India has had a robust speculative fiction tradition (especially in its regional languages) that shows a marked affinity towards exploring the relationship between humanity and the environment. For example, Jayant Narlikar's "Ice Age Cometh" in Marathi, "The Runaway Cyclone" by J. C. Bose in Bangla, and Arvind Mishra's "Ek Aur Kraunch Vadh" in Hindi are either driven by anthropocenic concerns or are premised on global climate change (GCC) or environmental disasters.

In a South Asia where clean air and potable water are becoming a new *de facto* currency in light of their monetisation and commoditisation, linking such scenarios with India 2020 becomes essential, especially in light of Ursula K. Heise's assertion that "ecological issues are situated at a complex intersection of politics, economy, technology and culture" ("Hitchhiker's" 514). Currently, parts of India are in the throes of drought *and* flooding. The government think-tank NITI Aayog reports that by 2030 Indian's "water demand is projected to be twice the available supply, implying severe water scarcity for hundreds of millions of people" (15). India's air quality has also become so hazardous that "air pollution is now the third-highest cause of death among all health risks", according to the Centre for Science and Environment, a public-interest research and advocacy organisation based in Delhi, and the "life expectancy [of Indians] has reduced by over 2.6 years" ("Briefing" 13).

In an attempt to trace the "prehistory of fictional representations of climate change", Trexler and Johns-Putra "turn first to science fiction" and then to genre thriller (186). Contemporary Indian English-language SF is also conscious of what humans are doing to this planet. For example, Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (2001) features an acute shortage of water among other issues (exacerbated by a deeply divided society);[2] Shovon Chowdhury's *The Competent Authority* (2013) depicts armed struggle for the control of resources after a nuclear war; and Manjula Padmanabhan's short story "Sharing Air" (2004) presents a world inhabited by only two million people, all "concentrated in the few remaining areas where the atmosphere is thick enough that the stars don't show in the daylight" (89). The works of Amitav Ghosh and Vandana Singh highlight similar quandaries.[3] This resonates with Janet Fiskio's assertion that "any effort to engage with GCC as a phenomenon of meaning and politics, rather than merely a biophysical problem, requires engagement with the texts and images that reproduce these axiological narratives" (13).

This paper deals solely with three Indian (Anglophonic) texts that operate at the intersection of technology (dome), politics (otherisation), and environmental degradation. It ascertains how a technological totem (such as the dome) plays with

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[2] To quote from Suparno Banerjee's doctoral dissertation *Other Tomorrows*: "*The Last Jet-Engine Laugh*, however, he assigns the cause of this dreadful condition to chemical warfare – the Pakistani army sprays the glaciers in northern India with toxic chemicals to cut off the main source of water for the Indian army" (104).

[3] I steer clear of debating whether these texts are SF or clifi. Instead, I adopt the umbrella term of speculative fiction to focus on environmental degradation and climate change manifested by these works –even though one can argue (like Siobhan Adcock) that clifi is not speculative fiction any longer (since it now has a mimetic backbone).

India's futures, and identifies how and why domes function in these narratives.4 The epistemic framework of the dome emerges as a logical entry point into the materiality of environmental degradation, the depletion of natural resources, and the marginalisation of certain groups.

The choice to use the domes to comment on GCC is a conscious one, since they have appeared across multiple formats outside India. From *Doctor Who*'s Gallifrey (television) to the Gungan Underwater City in *The Phantom Menace* (cinema); from the floating domed cities in Scott R. Sanders' *Terrarium* to the Glasshouse inside New Crobuzon in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*(fiction), domes exist within various ideatic frameworks. In "Adventures in Science Fiction Cover Art", Joachim Boaz mentions:

> Glass-domes against pollution, the ravages of evil space creatures, the vacuum of space (April, 1954 edition of *If*), adverse climates/atmospheres (*The Sands of Mars, Trouble on Titan*)? Or, nagging fears that something might come — whatever it might be. And of course, to keep people in (*Eight Against Utopia*). Some of these seemingly fragile domes contain devastating weapons (*The Lunar Eye*), or are part of a vast computer network (*Matrix*), or contain the last remnants of a previous metropolis (*The Years of the City*).

Domes build on each other: before Kim Stanley Robinson's domed city of Terminator, before Stephen King's *Under the Dome*, R. Buckminster Fuller had already envisaged a dome over Manhattan as early as 1960 to control atmospheric conditions. The "designers of Arizona research facility Biosphere 2 and radical artist Tomás Saraceno" have also negotiated with this tradition, which embodies "contradictory, yet symbiotic elements: protection, freedom, potential utopias" (Squire et al). The dome not only becomes a symbol of humanity's mastery over nature using cutting-edge technology, but simultaneously emerges as a hermetically sealed, sterile space whose physical topography precipitates marginalisation. Not everyone has equal access to these arks/domes, with entry implying life and failure to enter meaning certain death. For example, *2012* treats its massive arks as floating domecities, bastions of defiance against nature's onslaught.

The easy access – or the lack thereof –for common people to such life-saving infrastructure in the face of an apocalypse comments on multiple paradigms. As Fiskio argues, "GCC discourse draws on the genres of utopia and dystopia to imagine the alternative futures, but in doing so it perpetuates a set of dichotomous narratives about human nature and the kinds of societies we can sustain" (14). Fiskio borrows from Rebecca Solnit's "social Darwinism" and "mutual aid" (from *A Paradise Built in Hell*) and comes up with the "lifeboat" and "collective" as two opposing narratives in GCC discourse. The first "lifeboat" (borrowed from Garrett Hardin's "Living on a Lifeboat", *Bioscience*, 1974) takes a "neoclassical economic view of humans as rational agents who make choices to further their self-interest"; it "imagines human behavior in a monolithic way (as a struggle for survival) and ignores historical, cultural, economic, and political contingencies" (14). Despite ruthless decisions, it "holds out the

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4 There is a sizeable creative and critical mass regarding the dome outside Indian speculative fiction; much global SF/clifi has engaged with the scientific, social, and psychological dimensions of the dome. However, Indian English speculative fiction has not. Thus, drawing connections between dome narratives within and without India is beyond the purview of this paper, as it views domes in an India-specific context (while being conscious of their interconnectivity with the global epistemes *à la* Heise). Consequently, it eschews any sustained theoretical engagement with dome criticism and theory.

possibility of creating a sustainable, if exclusive, society" (14). In the second narrative ("the collective") Fiskio imagines humanity to be "essentially courageous and generous in the face of climate chaos" and further agrees with Solnit that "unjust social institutions are the problem, and climate change, like other disasters, offers the possibility of creating new modes of politics and new communities" (14).

I investigate the domes of the selected texts, especially as their *raison d'être* sheds light on current political, environmental, and socio-economic discourses. Aware of Trexler and Johns-Putra's exploration of how "authors represent climate change as a global, networked, and controversial phenomenon" in which "they move beyond simply employing the environment as a setting and begin to explore its impact on plot and character, producing unconventional narrative trajectories and innovations in characterization" (185), the following sections study domes within the rubric of the political and environmental futures portrayed in Indian speculative fiction.

2.   The Dome as a Capitalist "Lifeboat": *Domechild*

> *Far above the tallest spires, the setting sun filtered through the Dome, losing none of its light and warmth, yet devoid of the ultraviolet rays and other radiation that had once caused such widespread problems.*
>
> *Domechild*, p. 14

Shiv Ramdas' *Domechild* (2013) is set in the future; humanity – or what is ostensibly left of it after an "information epidemic" – lives cocooned inside a massive domed city which is regulated and maintained by machines: "the Dome kept them alive, protected the city like a gigantic, almost invisible carapace. Outside the Dome, all was death" (15). Heise asserts the dual importance of the global and local to comprehend environmental problems (*Sense* 59), and *Domechild* is driven more by the socio-political reordering of a post-apocalyptic society than by GCC. The "two major themes" Ramdas discusses in *Domechild* are the "way we look at AI and its development" and an "examination of capitalism" (Personal Interview). Politics and technology unite to create a dome that tries to overshadow nature – and fails.

The novel focuses on Albert, or Citizen 3481, who lives alone (like other Domechildren), and has been denied the luxury of not only family and friends, but of human interaction entirely. Albert is caught in a fixed, regimented socio-economic order. There is no place for family in a "perfect, progressive world where every person was truly emancipated" (7). The reason behind the anonymous, identical lifestyles, cubicles, jobs, functions, etc, and uniformity in general stems from a "Technological Revolution" that has "made human occupation superfluous" (3).[5] Angst slowly builds up in Albert, and is accentuated by the mindless drudgery of the Employment Department. Soon, Albert begins to – in the words of *Westworld* (2016) – "question the nature of his reality", and misses the last transport back home. On his way back, he is ambushed by the Outliers, "a society within a society, yet outside it, peopled by the broken, the unwanted, the hopeless and the homeless – victims of the past who now sought others to victimise" (16). He is saved by the lawbots, who brutally cut down

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[5] This seemingly innocuous "Technological Revolution" closely resembles Vernor Vinge's technological singularity (Vinge).

his assailants despite their being mere children. Horrified, Albert takes a survivor (Theo) home, gives her refuge, and joins a group of rebels who fight against the Dome.

Albert seeks asylum in Sanctuary, a human colony outside the Dome that still resists and repels machines in every possible way. Through a series of conversations with Father, the charismatic leader of the sanctuary, Albert realises that the Dome is not the protected space he was made to believe; in fact, quite the opposite. The Dome was not built to unify "all mankind under one roof" and "one world, one city" (266), nor was it as old as he had believed. He finds out that the information epidemic destroyed thousands of years of human civilisation within 48 hours (291). After the epidemic, with the apocalypse in sight, a plan was set in motion by the world's largest – and only – industrial conglomerate, which controlled everything.

> All retrievable AI units of all description would be recalled to build and run a special stronghold – a fully self-sustaining residential township for the privileged select few- sealed off from the outside world.... A fortress called the Company Dome, the Dome for short. (285)

The Dome was designed less to keep people in than to keep others out (285). It was to be a symbol of the apotheosis of technology, as it furthered the hegemony of Bosquanet family, whose patriarch was "born into a world where everything was a product … all over, societies, cultures, individuals, every single person, whether by creation or consumption was driven towards one thing – better, faster, *more* technology" (270). This can be seen in light of Donna J. Haraway's reference to capitalism and the "unleashing of the motors of endless growth, extraction, and the production of ever-new forms of inequality", which constitutes a "vastly destructive process" for social and natural systems (Haraway). This greed for more technology precipitates the singularity.

The Dome emerges as laboratory where humans are denied their basic rights. It negotiates Fiskio's "lifeboat", where human behaviour is motivated by self-interest and the politics of exclusion is complemented by a stringent set of rules to which the insiders must adhere. Parallel to Fiskio's second aspect of lifeboat –"organisation of the society" (19) – the Domechildren are conditioned to adhere to a code of conduct that neutralises their individual identities, and makes them feel thankful for protection (from the supposed void outside). This individualistic self-interest is deflated as the novel progresses: Albert, along with other characters, moves towards the values of "the collective"; but again, the lifeboat narrative is reinforced later by the revelations about the gory nature of the Sanctuary, which, rather than a collective, becomes a lifeboat of its own.

The sanctuary hides its own power mechanics: lust for power becomes the driving force for its leaders. Thus, while the Dome becomes a "lifeboat", its anti-thesis, the pastoral settlement of Sanctuary, does not automatically become a "collective". For example, Vail's speech against immigrants (which mirrors the antipathy of Domechildren to outsiders), the otherisation within the Sanctuary against mutants and other marginalised groups, and the power struggle between various factions for personal gains are three reasons why a binary between the lifeboat and the collective does not work. The only way for Albert to survive emerges through a fusion of nature and technology, of lifeboat and collective, which somehow eludes Domechilren and residents of the sanctuary alike. *Domechild*, therefore, exhibits traits of both "the lifeboat" and "the collective", but ultimately moves away from both of them.

3.   The Dome as an Environmental Cocoon: "Rain"

> *He longed to get away from the city, enclosed in its captive dome, which*
> *isolated it from the rest of the world – the real world, as Jeehwaen saw*
> *it.*

<div align="right">Doyle, p. 243</div>

Kenneth Doyle's "Rain" makes nature – after humanity is done with it – the ultimate other. "Rain" is divided into two sections; the first is set in India's agricultural hinterland in the past, or perhaps even the present, and focuses on the farmer Tilak Ram as he waits for the monsoons to rejuvenate the land. The second, located in the future, traces the tragic (mis)adventures of Jeehwaen Koumor in a utopian future, a time after a "dark-era" that "is dated at the end of the 21st century" (245).[6]

In the initial part of the story, Tilak Ram surveys the parched, cracked land, and reminiscences about his childhood, when he did not have to worry about "the crop, the harvest, fertiliser, the market, fluctuating prices, and the dreaded money lender" (242). Doyle uses Tilak Ram as a representative of the Indian farmer: the endless wait for rain, agrarian crisis, and the role of climate in shaping agricultural produce. This section highlights the plight of farmers in India, and their near-total dependence on rain. It ends with thunder and lightning – "jagged streaks of fire" – tearing "through the black clouds" as it starts to rain (243). The cracked land of a few weeks ago stands "transformed" after the arrival of the monsoon and the beneficent rains. The aftermath is pleasant and full of life:

> tiny shrubs grew everywhere, and most of the field wore a lush, green coat. The entire
> landscape looked fresh and clean, and the birds, nesting in the trees, sang a paean of
> praise. The soil had awakened to the call of life – rain, the life-giver, had returned to
> open a new chapter in the book of nature. (243)

The very notion of benevolent precipitation is turned on its head in the next section, which is set in the future. All the great cities of the world are now "enclosed in gigantic domes, their inhabitants living under an artificial sky, bright by day and dark by night, breathing artificial air, mouthing artificial commonplaces as they went about living artificial lives" (244). Jeehwaen Koumor is a bored, frustrated, and angry teen who detests the monotonous nature of his existence, and the "polite socialising and cloying artificiality" that had become the hallmark of his times (243). Like Albert from *Domechild*, Jeehwaen wants to get away from the city, which is "enclosed in its captive dome" and "isolated from the rest of the world" (243).

He digs up past archives and finds out that inter-connected issues – such as overuse of fossil fuels, ozone-layer depletion, water and air pollution, climate change, global warming, melting of polar ice-caps – had transformed the 20th and 21st centuries into the "dark ages". Humanity found a solution in the "Biosphere-II" experiment (another reference to Biosphere-II)[7], which led to the "construction of

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[6] The wordplay is obvious: "Tilak" may be homage to Tilak Mahato, who was a crewmember of the Biosphere II project, and Jeehwaen is a variation of "jeevan", which is the Hindi word for "life".

[7] The Biosphere experiments generated a great deal of speculative fiction in the West (a recent example is T. C. Boyle's *Terranauts*); however, Anglophonic Indian speculative fiction (of which "Rain" is an example) did not exhibit the same zeal of engagement within the same timeframe.

crude but efficient self-contained habitats, from which the present-day domecities evolved" (245).

Full of ennui, and fascinated by the "real" world outside the dome, [Jeehwaen] decides to slip outside his protected domecity to find out more about the earth he had read about. He steals breathing equipment from a lab and makes his way outside. In *Domechild*, the residents were told there was nothing outside the Dome – but there was. In "Rain", the residents are told there was nothing outside – and there actually isn't; here the land that stretches before Jeehwaen is "completely lifeless as far as the eyes could see" and there are "no signs at all of the vegetation referred to in the library" (Doyle 249). He realises that he is in a (post-apocalyptic) desert, and the sky is "dark, menacing and quite unlike the warmth comfort of the dome" (249).

Sophia David avers that "climate change sits outside inherited modes of thinking" as it "renders previous modes for defining these as obsolete" and makes one "rethink *a priori* knowledge, terms and habits" (265). Before Jeehwaen can explore more, something stings his hand: "tiny droplets of liquid were falling from the sky, and they were dissolving the fabric of his thermal suit" (249). The nourishing metaphor of rain mutates into an angry, all-consuming monstrosity that now heralds death and destruction. As the acid rain dissolves Jeehwaen's body, the narrator remarks that the "rain had once again come to visit the earth, marking the beginning of a new cycle in the timeless oscillation between birth and death" (249). Knowledge, attitudes, and perception about external reality are reassessed with GCC – since even the rain can turn malevolent because of the toxic environment in which it is produced.

In *Sense of Place*, Heise's "eco-cosmopolitanism analysis" locates how and why "both local cultural and ecological systems are imbricated in global ones" (59), and is able to reveal the means through which "individuals and groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere" (62). Jeehwaen's relationship with the dome – and what it represents – is again contoured by his positioning between the local (domecity) and the global (human history); this dome, again, questions the distinction between lifeboat and collective.

The dome here may represent the apex of technological innovation; however, it does not lead to political otherisation or social marginalisation of those outside the dome, as there is *nothing* outside. The dome emerges as the first and last line of defence against the elements, which have been robbed of their munificent charm. Its residents are not oppressed in the traditional sense (they dislike the artificiality, not the state's high-handedness), nor are they there as a result of others being excluded (since there is nothing out there in the first place). Jeehwaen is sick of the "artificiality" of human relations in a time when the only way to survive is through technology and by being united (like the collective), as nature has turned virulent. The dome, a symbol of humanity's resistance against a nature gone awry, emerges as a physical habitat that provides hope – since humankind has effectively killed everything outside it. Technology becomes the shield that protects humanity from the mutated, vengeful aspect of nature, and any deviation or harking back to a golden pastoral past is met with instant death. However, while "Rain" may be read as a Faustian warning against exploring the frontiers of (scientific) knowledge, rather than as a celebration of the dome (and associated technologies that protect humanity), the story laments that with GCC nature itself has turned against humanity. This technology simultaneously limits human beings and makes its Jeehwaens question the conditions of their solitary existence. "Rain" seems equidistant from both the lifeboat and the collective narratives

perhaps because in a world afflicted with such a (colossal) tragedy, both "self-interest" and "collective aid" would be rendered utterly futile and meaningless.

4.   The (Sky)Dome and the City's Topography: *Leila*

> *As the East Slum petered out I saw what was being sold. On a panel towards the top of the wall – high enough to be seen from the flyroads – white text stood on the sky: 'Must Your Children Share Their Air?' Centre of the last panel, again in white letters, the corporation's name, Skydome.*

Akbar, p. 163

Prayag Akbar's *Leila* (2017) is outwardly a mother's search for her daughter in a quasi-fascist India of the 2040s, but harbours within it a critique of environmental and political issues. [8] The "reliance on sophisticated technologies to engineer specific ecologies and conditions can, however, leave these spaces smacking of technofetishism and anti-democratic tendencies" and the "history of these ventures is often tied up in imperial ambitions and class perspectives" (Squire et al). This India of the future has regressed to a highly centralised, communal, casteist, and patriarchal police state where the elites live in technologically advanced, plush sectors, and the poor in impoverished slums or dilapidated, run-down ghettos where air and water are more precious than gold.

Fiskio writes that "cultural productions, such as speculative fiction, have the capacity not only to interrogate the mainstream environmental movement, but also to express the complex relations of race, class, nation, and modernity" (13). This is evident in how the city has been divided into various sectors – each belonging to particular caste/community/religion – and mobility, both physical and metaphorical, is limited by one's birth. Order is maintained by the Council, which is driven by the slogan "Purity for All". Caste and religious divides have become insurmountable after a new legal and political system comes into existence. All aspects of life are controlled by the state. For example, exogamy is prohibited; political dissenters are persecuted; and anyone who oversteps the boundaries set by their birth (which then determines worth) faces swift reprisals.

This India reels under a scarcity of natural resources and widespread air pollution: air picks at one's eyes (11), the landfill ignites every summer, the clouds are so thick the birds desert the air (212), and sulphur clouds maraud through the skies like battleships (225). Water is at a premium after the crisis: "every year the temperatures rose and the water condition worsened" (86). However, no-one follows the rules as construction booms and factories take the groundwater almost to zero (88).

In this scenario, a young woman (Shalini, a Hindu) marries her childhood sweetheart Riz (Rizwan, a Muslim). This is an act of rebellion against dominant discourses, and is a reference to the trouble that mixed couples must endure in contemporary India. Shalini and Riz are able to escape the claws of a regressive society and the wrath of a purity-obsessed state owing to their class privilege. The couple moves into a sector (East-End) where the newly established boundaries are not as

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[8] *Leila* is now also a web series on Netflix.

reified as they are across the city; Riz gets "permission from the neighbours to have the lawn to ourselves" for a party, and he pays a "preposterous bribe to the water officials so they would fill the pool" (121). However, Shalini and Riz cannot withstand communal forces for very long. When their party is in full swing, a gang of thugs known as "repeaters" are guided to their location. The gang assaults the party goers, kills Riz, and (ostensibly) kidnaps Leila, which then sets the event of the text in motion.

Shalini, too, is detained, sent to a reconditioning camp, and then moved to a labour settlement. Throughout the novel, she pursues her daughter, forms alliances, fights to survive, and ultimately traces Leila to her former maid (Sapna), who has now adopted Leila. In an inverse imaging, Sapna's husband, who was formerly of a lower class, is now a part of the establishment, and this empowers Sapna to live the privileged lifestyle Shalini enjoyed before Riz died. Shalini also finds out that Rizwan's younger brother, Naz, was in league with the repeaters; this revelation positions the novel as a criticism of the religious right, in general, and not just of a particular community or ideology.

Tom Cohen asks "how the *aesthetic*" has been programmed in a (biopolitical) way that it is "no longer sufficient to address" where contemporary (economic or archival) models "appear to be reaching self-generated limits" (84). For Trexler and Johns-Putra, this leads to a "complicated situation in which climate change is both of our culture and beyond it at the same time" (194). In *Leila*, this (climate) change is both of the state and beyond it. The sectors of well-off communities, castes, and religions have an ambivalent relationship to scarce resources and environmental degradation that is outside of their sector, yet within their polity. Models of governance and behaviour reach their limits, though it is difficult to say where those limits are.

Moreover, the dome in *Leila* operates at two levels. The usual purpose of the dome, which is to insulate its occupants from external threats – from nature due to GCC and from humans who are the others, as earlier supplied in *Domechild* and "Rain" – is met with walls "fifty-nine feet high and two feet thick" that surround individual sectors. Movement between these wall-guarded sectors is closely regulated, and only those with special access can use the flyways that connect them. Moreover, it is the presence of a "skydome" in *Leila* that makes the class war more apparent:

> When you build a roof you keep something outside. You put huge air conditioners, pumping cold air into each of the domes. Don't you know what happens behind an air conditioner, what comes out of its ass? … One hut caught fire, then another. Soon the whole road was burning. That's how they lost their homes. (236)

The Skydome corporation becomes a symbol the elite trying to make their lives better at the expense of the have-nots. Such skydomes are installed alongside relatively poorer sectors, which then bear the brunt of the elites next door taking all their (clean) air and water. The technology behind the gigantic walls is nothing novel; what is new is how Skydome is envisioned to make specific sectors of the city, harbouring select communities, to secure the lion's share of dwindling resources. In a world already reeling under GCC, the skydome seeks to ameliorate living conditions for the rich by making the poor even poorer and increasing their squalor. "Must you share their air?" becomes the ultimate symbol of "aspirational otherising". A utopia for some – for reasons logistical rather than conceptual – can only be accomplished by creating a dystopia for many.

The "rich" sectors become examples of Fiskio's lifeboat, "where human nature is motivated solely by self-interest" (18). The other element of the lifeboat narrative is

the organisation of society (19). This second element "involves, first, the exclusion of outsiders and, second, the regulation of behaviour on the lifeboat to avoid the tragedy of commons" (19). This exclusivity (called "purity") is evidenced throughout *Leila*, with its emphasis on sectors, gated communities, passes, permissions, and patterns of rationed consumption. However, despite the characters' being driven by self-interest (even Shalini is driven by the desire to meet her biological offspring, rather than by any revolutionary fervour to take down an oppressive order), the people do not "ignore" the "historical, cultural, economic, and political contingencies" (14). On the contrary, this lifeboat is built on those very lines: on the quest for purity, on ideology, and on the consciousness that previously existing structures needed to be dismantled to create a new world. *Leila* comes across as more of a lifeboat than any other text; however, it doesn't fully adhere to the lifeboat model. With its equal emphasis on ideology as well as on self-interest, it rocks the "lifeboat" – despite being onboard one.

5.   Conclusion

Domechild, "Rain", and *Leila* negotiate the "lifeboat/social Darwinist" and the "collective/mutual aid" narratives as propounded by Fiskio and Solnit, respectively. *Domechild* deploys both lifeboat/dome and the collective/sanctuary modes of behaviour and thought, and finally punctures them both. With its lack of the human other, and a utopian materiality that swings to artificial societal harmony, "Rain" is equidistant from both of these narratives. *Leila*, despite the minor presence of (progressive) counter-forces that seek to question the axiological walls/domes, and despite its characters being contoured by "historical, cultural, economic, and political contingencies" alongside self-interest, fits the lifeboat narrative. Its dystopia challenges the very possibility of any collective effort.

As Fiskio writes, "in both of these narratives, the collapse of civilization following the apocalypse of climate change allows for the rebirth of society as a Utopian community" (14). What happens in these three texts is the exact opposite, and they are critical of societal issues like hypercapitalism, communalism, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, and the depletion of resources. They foreground GCC and marginalisation so as to bring about a more nuanced environmental consciousness while also spearheading social critique – and vice versa. By constructing worlds rife with pollution, resource shortages, and an even wider gulf between the rich and the poor, Ramdas, Doyle, and Akbar address immediate environmental, ethical, and socio-political concerns that India – and perhaps the world – grapples with.

As to why there are not as many dome narratives in India's English-language SF, one can only speculate that perhaps "domes" – as ideas, as technological manifestations, and as utilitarian constructs – have never been as deeply a part of Indian scientific, literary, or popular culture as they have been abroad. However, since radical times call for radical changes, it wouldn't be surprising if domes come up in tomorrow's India – on paper and without.

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