

Exploring ‘Earth Religion’ in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* as a Unifying Ideology for Climate Action

Abima M¹, Dr. M. Saji²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Reg. no. 20213154012015, Department of English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamil Nadu, India.) Email: abimajithentra@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Department of English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamil Nadu, India.)

This article examines Kim Stanley Robinson’s concept of ‘Earth religion,’ through which he aims to protect Mother Earth in the era of the climate crisis. The novel *The Ministry for the Future* details ecocentric values and aspects such as the earth being sacred and worthy of respect, framing earth religion as a moral responsibility towards nature, and building an emotional connection with the natural world. The article analyses the deep aspects of the concept in reference to the novel. It explores the root of Robinson’s idea about a new religion and explains the need to stick with the ancient principle of Buddhism which is nature-dependent following humans’ ethical responsibility towards nature that benefits their survival along with the planet’s health.

Keywords: Earth religion, Mother Earth, climate crisis, ecocentric values, new religion, Buddhism, ethical responsibility, nature, survival, planet’s health.

1. Introduction

Religion occupies a vital role in human civilization. Robinson tries to convey this fundamental level of understandable spiritual belief of humans, which connects humanity to their environment to understand the base of civilization, which is nature-dependent. His deep interest lies in projecting a new religion, ‘Earth religion’, for the planet’s well-being. His major motive ties to the fact that by making humanity realize that the climate solution is possible with the flourish of the Earth religion concept. Getting inspiration from Tibetan Buddhism which holds the concept of interdependence, Robinson urges to request taking care of the biosphere. In fact, Buddhism cherishes human nature’s bond by paying huge respect and care to the environment. Notably, in the article “Early Buddhist Vies on Nature” Chatsumarn Kabilsingh explains Buddhism that “Buddhism views humanity as an integral part of nature, so that when nature is defiled, people ultimately suffer” (116). Moreover, he adds, “Negative

consequences arise when cultures alienate themselves from nature, when people feel separate from and become aggressive towards natural systems. When we abuse nature, we abuse ourselves. Buddhist ethics follow from this basic understanding” (116). In diving deep to realize the view of this religion which Robinson admires is its ethics to obey nature and serve it with understanding.

Robinson pours his thoughts on following ‘Earth religion’ based on Buddhism. He believes even climate problems can nullify or bring to moderation by actively involving humans in getting connected to their environment. Because he realizes that the environmental problems on earth require immediate recovery through climate actions for which there is a need for awareness. Probably he suggests earth religion with certain rules and laws. The rules are strictly tied to follow natural ethics. Mary and Tatiana, who belong to a subsidiary body named Ministry for the Future, converse about implementing this religion from an ecological perspective. Also, they believe its future function to be effective in a sense of understanding the reality of the world, which is devastating. Tatiana utters to Mary that “We make a new religion! . . . Earth religion, every family, universal brotherhood” (36). Here, the rule is simple, and that is practicing unity.

Robinson indicates a compulsory ideology requirement for organizing a community. His pure thought over eco and nature stands out to be a perfect base for nourishing a systemized society that makes sense in sustainability. He says,

So we all have an ideology, and this is a good thing. So much information pours into the mind, raging from sensory experience to discursive and mediated inputs of all kinds, that some kind of personal organizing system is necessary to make sense of things in ways that allow one to decide and act. Worldview, philosophy, religion, these are all synonyms for ideology as defined above. (41)

He seeks to frame a new religion as a ‘personal organizing system’ capable of aiding in determining and executing. While deciding on crafting a new theological structure, he dives back to ancient times, as he believes it is the most wanted. He mentions, “we need a new religion” (254), “maybe it’s not a new religion. An old religion. Maybe the oldest religion. But back among us, big time. Because I think we need it. People need something bigger than themselves. . . . They’re always acting for . . . religious reasons. Spiritual reasons” (255). Here, the ancient religion he remarks is nature dependence.

Understanding nature plays a crucial role in self-refinement. The future, according to Robinson, requires immediate climate actions. For which he believes realizing nature’s potential in supporting living things aids. His idea of earth religion highlights harmony, shared responsibility, and worship for the earth. Keeping in mind to protect the earth’s ecosystems as sacred spaces, several climate actions arise. The major one to note is the establishment of the Ministry for the Future. This subsidiary body framed after the Paris meeting 2024 aims to function for future generations. It prominently reflects the point on shared responsibility. It seems to be an institutional form of earth-oriented morals. This morality concentrates on shared stewardship under global governance.

Robinson’s clear vision of the earth and its restoration is visible in his lines, “The pre-existing plenitude of speciation will be restored in less than twenty million years” (44). Also, he writes

the efforts the cooperative society builds to restore the originality of the nature. Originality here is the landscape and its structure before industrialization that cleared the forest areas for business motives. The realization of getting rid of frequent droughts and floods forces humans to restore the valley they failed before to protect. Explaining it, he claims,

Now the necessity of dealing with droughts and floods meant that big areas of the valley were restored, and the animals brought back, in a system of wilderness parks or habitat corridors, all running up into the foothills that ringed the central valley on all sides. These hills had always been wilder than the flat valley floor, and now they were being returned to native oak forests, which provided more shelter for wild creatures. (186)

Robinson's narration on India's success in achieving unity and pollution reduction showcases the results of worshipping the earth for its values. He makes sure that the disaster brings the people together with no variations in caste or race. Notably, "A new party was voted in, a composite party composed of all kinds of Indians, every religion and caste, urban poor, rural poor, the educated, all banded together by the disaster and determined to make something change" (25). This showcases the need to follow an earth-oriented devotion and identity rather than be shattered with different identities that are futile. Robinson highlights the profits sticking to the eco concerned activities stating "All kinds of things began to change" (25). The change he mentions is the "shutting down coal-fired power plants and building wind and solar plants" (25). This is a pure form of worshipping nature. Robinson tries to warn the other parts of the world who always take the earth for granted through his words from the changed India that "change with us, change now, or suffer" (25-26).

Lifestyle changes are essential components in worldwide climate action. According to Vargas Hernandez and Simone Di Pietro in "Urban Green Innovation", having a change in civilization, especially in an ecological dimension is the bottom cause of the modification of "production, distribution, and consumption" (154). Robinson expects implementing carbon tax and financial penalties for emitting greenhouse gases. A similar tax leads to a shift in the global market scale driving up the costs of oil, the non-renewable and a great source of pollutants. Which further makes oil usage and purchase economically unviable. As a result, the world is more eco-friendly by shifting to using more affordable renewable energy sources than non-renewable. In pointing to this, in his narration, Robinson says, "Oil was rare now, therefore more expensive, which meant that clean renewable energy was now cheaper than oil by an even larger margin than before" (342). Moreover, "as the new carbon taxes being levied in every country in compliance with the latest commitments to the Paris Agreement, made at the COP43 meeting, were also scheduled to rise year by year an increasing percentage, price signals were now all pointing toward clean renewables as the cheapest way to power the world" (342). The change that is possible by implementing the new carbon tax concerning Earth is viewed as a successful step for climate action.

Notably, the transport that plays a huge role in emitting vast amounts of carbon changes to electric. This happens with the improvements in technology that support green innovations, especially the hydrogen fuel cells and solar efficiency that aid in successful renewable-powered transportation. Solar energy becomes cheaper and attracts consumers to select the renewable options available. The highlight is the changes happening in the shipping industries which "had shifted already to wind and electrics and hydrogen" (345). More to note is that

“Aviation, under the same annihilating pressure, was shifting to electric planes, and mainly, airships. Ground transport was going entirely electric, and where it still used liquid fuels, was completely committed to renewable biofuels that bypassed fossil sources” (345). There arises the global policies for investing in the electric rail networks and their charging stations that encourage the earth’s path towards pollution-free. Also, people are aware of private transport which consumes energy and changes their behavior toward sustainable transportation choices. Similar to this, Michael A. P. Taylor in the book *Climate Change Adaptation for Transportation Systems* states “urban planners and transportation engineers work steadily on new policies and plans that can integrate land use and transportation, change transport technologies and modify travel behaviour (by providing closer destinations and alternative transport modes) with the aim of reducing carbon emissions” (2).

Robinson cherishes the result of following renewables by indicating it as “Growth! Growth!” (345). He proudly says that “Those who had shorted fossil fuels and gone long on clean renewables were now making fortunes; and fortunes require reinvestment to actually be fortunes. Growth!” (345). He expects the “growth of some kind of goodness” (345) unlike the earlier industrial growth which is money oriented as a blessing and “the world’s current reigning religion” (345). These changes reflect Robinson’s idea about understanding humanity as a single family with collective responsibility.

Paying respect to nature, Robinson frames his narration highlighting the significance of renewable environmental changes. His introduction of a carbon coin to reward carbon reduction showcases the prominent step humanity takes for an ecological balance. His efforts in portraying a massive transformation to renewables indicate a collective responsibility of humanity toward protecting the biosphere. Moreover, these efforts are possible by accepting earth religion. Because these are the acts of veneration toward the earth. This allows the earth to breathe again and makes a sustainable lifestyle possible by accepting nature-centred activities. Thus, earth religion that involves the practice of paying rituals like diminishing pollution and reinstating nature becomes a unifying ideology for climate action.

References

1. Hernandez, Vargas, et al. “Urban Green Innovation.” *Sustainable Development and Environmental Stewardship: Global Initiatives Towards Engaged Sustainability*, edited by Satinder Dhiman, Springer, 2023, pp. 143-164.
2. Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn. “Early Buddhist Vies on Nature.” *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, Routledge, 2004, pp. 116-119.
3. Robinson, Kim Stanly. *The Ministry for the Future*. Orbit, 2020.
4. Taylor, Michael A. P. *Climate Change Adaptation for Transportation Systems*. Elsevier, 2021.