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THE BORDERLESS FLOW OF CURRENTS: HYDRO POLITICS, MEMORY AND WATER IN SARASWATI BY GURNAIK JOHAL

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ABSTRACT: *Water has been a significant element in human civilisation as far as life, belief, memory, identity and political power are concerned. Within recent literature, the advent of Blue Humanities has seen a turn in land-centred criticism towards water-centred approaches. Blue Humanities suggests that rivers, seas and other water bodies must not be considered only as natural contexts, but there are dynamic elements of cultural, political and historical forces that define human existence. This paper reviews the Saraswati by Gurnaik Johal in the theoretical framework of Blue Humanities to explore the role of water as the power of fluidity in the story. The mythical Saraswati River is also re-invented in the novel, both as the icon of faith and a location of ecological memory, nationalism and political struggle. The river turns out to be a zone where belief collides with science and state ideology, and even conflicts. The paper also examines the ways in which water can be used as a cultural geographic identity and belonging, particularly when it comes to the diaspora communities who search for their roots in her imagined geographies. It also explores how the relations between humans and water determine their feelings, recollections and histories. This paper contends that Saraswati brings water out as the source of life and a contentious element through the symbolic and political roles of the returning river and how the fluid landscapes shape identity, power hierarchy and ecological awareness in modern literature..*

KEYWORDS: *Hydro politics, Ecological Memory, Blue Humanities, Nationalism, Diaspora Identity.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

“A pond equals ten wells, a reservoir equals ten ponds, while a son equals ten reservoirs, and a tree equals ten sons” (*Matsya Purana* 154:512).

This ancient verse brings to the fore the cultural significance of water in the Indian mythology in a sacred and civilised manner. Water is not just a material resource, but a power, which keeps alive heritage, ecosystem, and memory. Such understanding has been extended in the context of modern literary research in the form of Blue Humanities, which redirects critical focus on land-oriented ecocriticism to water-oriented perspectives. Blue Humanities challenges the view of rivers, seas and oceans as natural backdrops, and presents rivers, seas and oceans as political and cultural agents that are shaping societies. It is possible to read Gurnaik Johal *Saraswati* (2025) in this theoretical framework. The novel recreates the mythical Saraswati River and uses its revival as a transformational process that influences the national identity, political organisation, and emotional belonging. The point presented in this article, *Saraswati*, is that water serves as flow power. The river returning into hydropolitics, ecological memory, nationalist fantasy and diasporic desire. By using the character of the river, Johal proves that water is a threat to borders, fixed identities, and collective memory. This paper seeks to explore how water is portrayed in the *Saraswati* by Gurnaik Johal in terms of Blue Humanities. It aims to examine the role of the nearby river Saraswati coming back, as a location of hydropolitical struggle, memory of ecology and national imagination. The article also attempts to examine the influence of water as a determinant of culture, diasporic belonging, and emotional memory in the story. In this study, the water in *Saraswati* is not just a symbolic component, but it is a kind of fluid power that is disorienting national borders and the politics of the ecological resources. It supposes that the novel attacks land-based nationalism with the presupposition of the borderless and dynamic quality of rivers.

The article discusses Blue Humanities as a trans-research approach, which studies the cultural, social, and ecological importance of the ocean and its connection to human experience. It provides the term of Oceo-Postcolonialism that introduces the idea of the ocean as a territory that is a product of colonial pasts and postcolonial present. Through the analysis of literary works in different postcolonial situations, the study shows that the ocean serves as a symbol of struggle, resistance, freedom and oppression. It also claims that Blue Humanities provides a novel framework in the interpretation of the interplay of aquatic spaces, colonial authority, and postcolonial identity, prompting the widening of postcolonial literary criticism.

2. BLUE HUMANITIES AND THE SHIFT FROM LAND TO WATER

The ecocriticism tradition has paid much attention to land, forest, and countryside. Nevertheless, Blue Humanities focuses on oceanic and riverine aspects of environmental thinking. Water is in motion, is aloof to containments and crosses political borders. It is movement and not stability. This land-to-water transition is important in the sense that land has traditionally been linked to ownership as well as territorial nationalism, and water is something that complicates these inflexible frameworks. The river is not just a setting in *Saraswati*. It is a dynamic force that shapes characters and political rhetoric. At the beginning of the novel, Johal asserts that “Something that could have been anything becoming one thing” (Johal 6). This sentence represents fluidity in water as well as identity. Water has potential and is unable to maintain a definite meaning. However, it has been tried to be defined and regulated by political forces. The shift between the possibility and this single meaning is also a reflection of the efforts of the state to create a single discourse concerning the river return.

(i) The Returning River and Ecological Memory

The *Saraswati* River, making a comeback, is central to the novel. It is the re-emergence of subjugated pasts and obscured geographies. Ecological memory is a concept that suggests that landscapes have remnants of the past. Although rivers may disappear or dry up, they remain remembered in cultural imagination. The feeling of the coming of the river back is reflected in the

announcement: “To bring the river back! to return to the world our great river. It really is a deal that can’t be better” (Johal 33). This is an indication of how the river turns into a gesture of renewal and pride. The payback, however, is not only ecological but very political. The river turns out to be a witness to the continuation of history and the greatness of civilisations. It implies in the narrative that the river is a memory bank. It relates shamanism to modern politics. *Saraswati* resurfacing conflicts with linear time and reinstates myth in the contemporary state discourse. In such a way, water becomes a channel of entry of the past and the present.

(ii) Hydropolitics: Nation, Belief, and Scientific Conflict

Hydropolitics is the political control and ideology of water resources. The river turns out to be a disputed territory of belief, science and nationalism in *Saraswati*. The novel is a clear depiction of the way in which water is being used to legitimise politics. Johal writes, “The Indus is a border river, a line at our periphery, but the centre of the nation- that, my friends, was the Saraswati. It was the greatest of all rivers, the mother of floods” (Johal 38). This is a nationalist rhetoric that makes the river the symbolic centre of the country. The geographical difference between the border and centre brings out the politicisation of geography. *Saraswati* is a device to forge national identity. Nevertheless, the novel does not portray such a story unconditionally. Johal makes the concept of greatness a challenge by saying that, “Greatness is always an alloy of good and bad” (Johal 67). This sentence implies that there are both nationalistic glorification implications. Although the river is honoured as a source of unity, its comeback also causes environmental imbalance as well as political interference. Hydro politics, therefore, brings out power as being ambivalent.

(iii) Rivers Beyond Borders: Partition and Fluid Identity

The fact that the river does not respect the boundaries of human beings is one of the strongest concepts in the novel. Water flows in spite of political boundaries. Johal attends to this point when he writes: “The rivers pay no attention to partition- the Indus, she just keeps running along” (Johal 294). This is a statement that questions the hardness of the boundaries of nationalism. The issue of partition that caused serious historical trauma seems superficial in comparison with ecological continuity. In this imagery, the novel criticises territorial nationalism. Borders are symbolised by rivers and unite the communities. They display artificiality of political lines. This fluid geography is what Blue Humanities focuses on because the author claims that water erodes rigid ideas of sovereignty. The river shows the boundaries of the state's control of the state in *Saraswati*.

(iv) Water, Emotion, and Diasporic Belonging

In addition to politics, the emotional and cultural aspects of water are also covered in the novel. There is a connection between rivers and power and strength. Johal says, “Strength from rivers” (Johal 243). This is a short but strong sentence that implies that water is a source of psychological grounding. It relates people to the ancestral landscapes. Memory and attachment are the determinants of the diasporic identity in the novel. The fact that cultural belonging is preserved using material things is evident in the line store sentence where the narrator says that “My dear mother embroidered this phulkari. I embrace it again and again with affection” (Johal 335). Rivers serve as emotive anchors just as the embroidered cloth can be a symbol of the memory of the homeland. To the diaspora communities, the river has not merely a physical existence, but also an imaginary continuity. It is difficult to convey the paradox of change and repetition with the help of the lyric: It's always a new river, always the same old train again (Stecher). The river is always and continuously historical. This is the duality that corresponds to the diasporic identity that negotiates the past and the present. Water is used as a symbol of the persistence of culture in movement.

(v) Pressure, Conflict, and Transformation

Geological metaphors are also employed by the author to explain social and political tension in the novel. “Without pressure, we wouldn't have diamonds” (Johal 319). This is an indication that a crisis brings about change. The resurgence of the river puts pressure on society. It escalates ideological discussions and reveals inconsistencies of nationalism. Water, in this case, acts as a catalyst. It makes

communities deal with unresolved pasts and conflicting ideologies. Identity is reemerged by political and ecological pressure, much as pressure makes diamonds. The river, therefore, becomes a change process as opposed to a symbol.

3. CONCLUSION

In this article, *Saraswati* has been explored using Blue Humanities to anticipate the political, cultural and ecological meaning of water in the narrative. Through the examination of how the returning Saraswati River is a point of hydropolitical struggle, ecological memory and national imagination, the paper has revealed that water in the novel is fluid power or an active natural element. The river has turned into the place where belief, science, nationalism, and diaspora identity collide and contradict one another. By means of such intersection, Johal unveils the process of ecological bodies being used in the rhetoric of politics and the formation of memory by water scenery. Although the current interpretations of the novel are rather one-sided and simply look at its mythological and satirical aspects, the work at hand reveals a lack of research in exploring the river with the help of a water-based critical approach.

The presence of *Saraswati* in the context of Blue Humanities allows the paper to broaden the scope of thinking about the ways in which the modern South Asian fiction is concerned with the issues of hydropolitics and environmental awareness. The research area presented in this study creates an opportunity to carry out further research on the aquatic literary criticism, especially concerning the narratives of nationalism, partition and diaspora. *Saraswati* shows that rivers cannot be bound by national boundaries and ideological frameworks. Their flow is perceived to be a defiance against the strict territorial lines and the instability of the state power. Offering water as something sustaining and politicised, Johal emphasises the persistence of ecological thinking in the Anthropocene. The boundless nature of the movements of currents, thus, does turn into an effective reminder that memory, identity and power remain loose, flowing and constantly changing.

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