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Urbanisation and Gentrification: An Eco-Critical Study of Hydrological Cycle, Environmental Degradation, and Climate Change in Sarnath Banerjee's Graphic Narrative *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

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Abstract

*This study analyses the consequences of urbanisation through text and image activism, focusing on the consequences of unsustainable development and over consumption. As global discourse on sustainability and environmental issues gains momentum, the relation between art, literature, and the environment has become an important area of research. Sarnath Banerjee's artistic excellence in graphic narratives functions as a tool for environmental justice. He transcends conventional ecological rhetoric methods. His graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* emerges as a compelling case study within eco-criticism. This study investigates the water crisis, socio-economic issues, and sustainability illustrated in the text *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*. This study examines the impacts of rapid urbanisation and resource scarcity. Thus, the study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on ecocriticism by demonstrating how graphic stories foster ecological awareness, environmental ethics, and justice during adverse climate change.*

Keywords: Urbanization, Gentrification, Hydrological Cycle, Water Scarcity, Climate Change and Graphic Narratives.

Introduction

Indian culture consists of diverse traditions, myths, spirituality and folklore, deeply rooted human relationship with nature. In recent years, graphic novels have emerged as a hybrid medium to visualise ecological issues. Persepolis and Maus reject conventional literary norms and showcase the potential of the graphic novel to educate readers about human rights and history. In the Indian context, graphic novels are emerging as a new type of literature drawing on the rich cultural heritage of the country to confront contemporary socio-

environmental problems. Graphic novelists such as Amruta Patil, Sarnath Banerjee, and Orijit Sen have adopted graphic storytelling techniques, to display the connected themes of ecology, climate, water scarcity, and deforestation. Sarnath Banerjee's works *Corridor*, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, and *The Harappa Files* are recognised for their autobiographical elements and representation of the human experience.

All Quiet in Vikaspuri is a satirical graphic that highlights Sarnath Banerjee's talent as both a novelist and a social commentator. Banerjee blends humor with critique, text and art, and symbolism to reflect the struggles of the environmentally vulnerable people in a rapidly changing space. His graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (2015) portrays a fictionalised account of conflicts and war over water resources. It was set in Delhi, where a dystopian urban battle ensues, civilians take up arms and become involved in warfare, families become divided, real estate agents assume the role of warlords, and familiar locations transform into battlegrounds. Girish, known as the Psychic Plumber, sets out on a journey to the Earth's core in search of the legendary Saraswati River, believed to be the solution to the water crisis.

Utopian and Dystopian Transition of Urban Landscape



Figures 1 & 2 Sarnath Banerjee's *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* representing the transformation of the urban landscape

The researcher has selected two comic strips from the text to demonstrate the transition in the ideal city. The first comic strip showcases a utopian town that has good sanitation, well-maintained roads, entertainment, sports facilities, top-notch medical care, job security and excellent educational facilities. Additionally, the availability of leave, travel and concessions represents stability and improved quality of life. The sudden increase in global copper prices creates a shockwave in the company. Subsequently, the workers are disgruntled, leading to hartals and strikes, while a trade union fights for the rights and welfare of the employees. The newly appointed minister of disinvestment has decided to privatize the company as a solution. Consequently, the company is put up for lease through a bidding process, attracting the attention of a multinational firm from Australia.

The second comic strip depicts the town that deteriorate under corporate control. It represents the slow transformation of a utopian town into a dystopian landscape altered by unmonitored privatisation and unsustainable urban practices. From an environmental justice perspective, this dystopian town demonstrates that policy changes under the influence of global market pressures may result in degradation and social instability.

The negative effects of privatization interfere with the health of the residents of the town. Rob Nixon, for instance, attributes slow violence to a drawn-out consequence that takes a long time and an extensive area to fully reveal itself. Nixon contends that this kind of ecological violence poses an enigmatic challenge because it does not reside within the boundaries of legal violence. By coining the term “slow violence,” Nixon seeks to highlight neglected and overlooked forms of damage that occur over time and are not appreciated within the cruelty of violence, which is always depicted as brutal and alarming.

Anuja Madan has also observed that within the fictional topography of Tambapur, this subtle form of slow violence allows undivided attention to the multifarious facets of environmental exploitation and its many consequences for human society and the ecosystem. The plot follows as the number of industrial accidents escalates, which leads to a rapid deterioration of the condition of the hospital, sanitation, and drainage facilities. The quality of water available gets so bad that it becomes poisonous, leading to an outbreak of numerous diseases.

Bharat Copper Limited’s excessive expenditure on employee welfare left Sir John astonished and caused him to faint. The shareholders and board members discovered that this led to the public sector undertaking being burdened. Consequently, for the following two years, their sole focus was on making a profit, which ultimately resulted in a deterioration of the ideal industrial city. Hence, in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, there is a clear contrast between the situations prior to and following the enforcement of the neoliberal economy, illustrating the consequences of economic ideology and its adverse effect on the water table.

Urban Hydrology and Gentrification

Urban hydrology deals with water resource management and distribution in urban areas. In literary works, water has been used extensively and has deep cultural, spiritual, and ecological meanings. Recently, water has been used to represent environmental degradation, the socio-economic consequences of water scarcity, contamination, and climate change in fiction. The legends, myths, traditions and rituals are closely linked with water bodies. Indian literature uses water to represent indigenous knowledge systems, themes of purity, rebirth and cultural practices. The novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* illustrates the challenges of accessing clean water in urban environments. It also highlights the urgent need for sustainable water management in contemporary urban landscapes.



Figure 3 The depiction of excess groundwater extraction using GABOR-HKV22x. in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

Banerjee delineates that the accelerated urbanization resulted in a disparity between resource availability and population. The author illustrates that to resolve this water deficit, groundwater was extracted, which resulted in an overexploitation of groundwater resources. According to Somitra Ghosh, there is a possibility that the water cycle in India could be altered because of climate change. In relation to this, A.K. Gosain has stated that one of the potential negative consequences for Delhi due to climate change is the depletion of a small glacier. This could affect the inflow of water into New Delhi, situated in the Yamuna basin.

This graphic novel demonstrates the correlation between unsustainable development, climate, and social justice, incidental with water scarcity. The author satires the existing unsustainable groundwater extraction through a fictionalised plot. For example, the protagonist has exceptional skills as a world-class plumber. Rastogi had become aware of Girish's expertise in extracting groundwater. This prestigious organization, Pataal Jal, which had recently released its annual report, started providing funding for extraction.

According to the report, scientists strongly advised expeditions into the Earth's core in order to prove the existence of the mystical Saraswati River. So, Girish was hired by Kailash Bishnoi, one of the great water experts who was excellent at locating water sources, to complete several tasks that involved his traveling to the dry wastelands of South Delhi, abandoned construction sites and the dense kikar forests to search for signs of water. He eventually reached a momentous breakthrough, and he started the drilling process with a hint of skepticism, using the advanced drilling machine known as the GABOR-HKV22x.

In *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, Banerjee illustrates the water inequality in Delhi, connecting it to hydraulic citizenship and refugeeism. He also points out the systemic injustice that exists in water supply. For example, Rastogi, the antagonist, is from a refugee settlement. Through his character, the author depicts the impact of historical marginalization, drought, and resource deficiency on criminality. He manipulates the public and creates conflict regarding water access by increasing anxieties.

Banerjee also examines the moral aspects of water usage through Girish, a plumber who accidentally discovers the dark side of Delhi's water crisis. His journey to Pataalpuri depicts the problem of overconsumption at all levels of social strata. The corruption in the face of water scarcity is illustrated through Rajan, a tanker mafia who sells water illegally to the rich and corrupts government officials. The novel depicts that the cities of Mumbai and Delhi allocate water that favors residents of the state, making migrants and informal settlers more susceptible to human-made scarcities together with climate-driven shortages.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that Banerjee addresses the socio-economic issues associated with the problems of water scarcity and anthropogenic activity using a powerful visual narrative. The illustration of a transition from a utopian to a dystopian landscape captures the paradoxical existence of water; it is essential for life but also used as an object of conflict. Banerjee represents how the combination of rapid urban growth and overconsumption of water resources leads to a degradation of the environment. The author situates the water crisis within the distinct patterns of spatial discrimination, depicting how refugees alongside the urban poor are excluded from hydraulic citizenship. Thus, the novel presents a rich description of hydrology that provides a new perspective on the complexities of urban life and the urgency of sustainable water management practices in growing cities.

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