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Whose Water? A Critical Analysis of Climate Change, Hydropolitics and Environmental Justice in the Indian Graphic Novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

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Abstract. This study explores the role of Indian literature in addressing socio-political and environmental issues with a primary case study of Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* and investigates how the novel employs narrative fiction to expose not only several interlocking factors contributing to water scarcity and destruction of habitat but also an array of political projections. This novel is deeply questioning the critical issues of population control, environmental justice and economic restructuring. Employing qualitative literary analysis, the research delves into how the novel critiques socio-political structures and underscores the need for urgent changes to prevent further environmental degradation and human suffering. The findings reveal Banerjee's novel urges readers to reflect on their role in the environment, far beyond mere entertainment. The novel disrupts global paradigms, questions established socio-political ideas and proposes a new horizon for life on Earth with full responsibility in respecting our environmental boundaries while pursuing social justice. The study finds that texts such as *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* are important environmental education and advocacy tools inspiring readers to imagine and implement a sustainable society. This research urges for a more inclusive understanding and enactment of sustainable solutions across all the ecologic-social nexus.

Keywords: novel, author's image, concept, interpretation, narrative, genre, composition

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Чья вода? Критический анализ изменения климата, гидрополитики и экологической справедливости в индийском графическом романе «В Викаспури все спокойно»

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Аннотация. Рассматривается роль индийской литературы в решении социально-политических и экологических проблем на примере графического романа Сарнатха Банерджи «В Викаспури все спокойно». Исследуется, как используется повествовательная фантастика, чтобы выявить не только взаимосвязанные факторы, способствующие нехватке воды и разрушению среды обитания, но и ряд политических прогнозов. Роман ставит под сомнение важнейшие вопросы контроля рождаемости, экологической справедливости и экономической реструктуризации. Качественный литературный анализ показывает, как критикуются социально-политические структуры, подчеркивается необходимость срочных изменений для предотвращения экологической катастрофы и человеческих страданий. В результате можно сделать вывод, что Банерджи призывает задуматься о своей роли в сохранении окружающей среды, выйдя за рамки простого развлечения. Роман разрушает глобальные парадигмы, ставит под сомнение устоявшиеся социально-политические идеи, пропагандируя полную ответственность за жизнь на Земле, уважение экологических границ и стремление к социальной справедливости. Такие тексты, как «В Викаспури все спокойно», являются важными инструментами экологического образования и пропаганды, вдохновляющими читателей на создание и реализацию устойчивого общества, призывающими к более инклюзивному пониманию и принятию устойчивых решений во всех эколого-социальных связях.

Ключевые слова: роман, образ автора, концепция, интерпретация, повествование, жанр, композиция

Вклад авторов. Разработка идеи, сбор и анализ исследовательских данных – Рахамат Ниша С; написание и редактирование рукописи – С. Хоризан Прасанна Кумар. Все авторы прочли и одобрили окончательную версию рукописи.

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Introduction

One of the densest countries in terms of demography, India, is inching towards more challenges revolving around its water. The long-term consequences of climate change along with uneven regional distribution have made an unequal access to

water sources even worse, and this has caused far lesser reserves than ever before as well as intensifying socio-economic disparities. This in turn engenders what is called Hydropolitics, linking together contested issues of control and exploitation of the waters to a myriad political, economic and social injustice. The highest stakes are for industries and agriculture – they depend on the country's key river systems: Ganges, Yamuna and Brahmaputra. The culture of the people found within, besides its economy – these rivers are lifeblood for India, a hugely populous nation. However, they are burdened as never before, and people feel the knock-on effect. This suggests that approaches to water governance in India are complex and multi-pronged, necessitating a continuous process of reviewing & tweaking strategies that can be drawn up based on evolving challenges. The at most cause of resistance is originally found due to these natural resources, which include water disputes prevailing not only as disparities between the local but also at state-based international relations. Several states across the country have had water wars and woes, among which the Cauvery River dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka is one of the most fiercely contested over decades. This controversy serves as an apt demonstration of the challenges in governing water resources collectively, which are usually followed by prolonged and bitter conflicts because common people stake their claims (Puthucherril, 2022, pp. 1–73). To mitigate these challenges, the Inter-State River Water Disputes (IRWD) Act was enacted by Indian government in 1956. The Act was enacted to give a legal basis for the obtaining of water from rivers flowing through more than one State. Though the Act has seen several amendments over time, a major intervention by none other than Supreme Court came in 2016 but the usefulness of it to act as an instrument for resolving water conflicts is not that huge. The problems at a structural level are too deeply entrenched in historical injustices, regional imbalances and the existence of diffuse multi-sectoral (and cross-regional) interests. This has left water management in India victim to constant quibbling and mutual acrimony. The repercussions of this feud have had a material impact on our social-economical stability.

The distressed climate due to the threatening sign of global warming does not help, changing weather patterns only worsens rainfall variability making situation worse for water stressed state like most parts in India are. Monsoons, the lifeline for much of India have failed in recent years and weather patterns are volatile with droughts being severe in some parts while floods occur increasingly elsewhere. Water availability, especially in arid regions that are severely water-stressed and experiencing non-seasonal shifts in rainfall patterns. This has in turn turned into a water crisis that prevails through most part of the country distressing agricultural productivity, food security and aggravating socio-economic disparities (Matin et al., 2018, pp. 197–205). The water resources of climate change do not focus solely on quantity; it also affects that in any aspect. There has been widespread destruction of water bodies due to the pollution caused by industrial wastes, discharge of human sewage and increasing agricultural dispel. Millions of people already depend on the nearly dead Ganges River, which is considered sacred in Hindu culture but increasingly defiled by human waste and industrial contaminants. While there have been some attempts to tackle these issues. However, efforts by the Indian government

to address these issues, such as the ‘Namami Gange’ project of cleaning up the holy River Ganges has faced major hurdles. But it has not been implemented in a uniform way and there have been disparate results that simply illustrate the challenges associated with trying to manage such gigantic environmental remediation (Mathur, 2020, pp. 54–64). It is more of a social and economic challenge that endangers the existence of millions, just as an environmental aspect.

According to NITI Aayog’s report, over 600 million people will be under high water stress in India by the year 2030 while cities like Mumbai, Jaipur, Lucknow and Chennai are already facing acute water scarcity (Ghosh, 2021, pp. 131–38). The decline in groundwater, which supplies more than half of urban and rural areas with drinking water, seems to be a worrying point (Sengupta, 2019). Water scarcity in India has a broader impact on national economic growth. Agriculture, the backbone of the Indian economy along with industry, energy generation and domestic use requires water. Ineffective water management threatens to cripple economic growth, perpetuate poverty and increase social inequality. Water scarcity can also result in intra- and inter-community, state, or even nation-state conflict as it increases conflict for a scarce resource. With these challenges comes an urgent necessity for the development of resilience strategies that consider the intricate and inter-linked forces driving water scarcity. Those strategies must also be supported by sound overarching development plans that focus on the effective use of water resources as related to climate change. This calls for a move towards integrated water management that acknowledges the linkages among multiple human uses of water as well as the complexity in governing and managing such an important natural resource. Figure 1 illustrates the feedback loop between poor water governance, environmental degradation and social inequalities, underscoring the need for comprehensive management reforms.

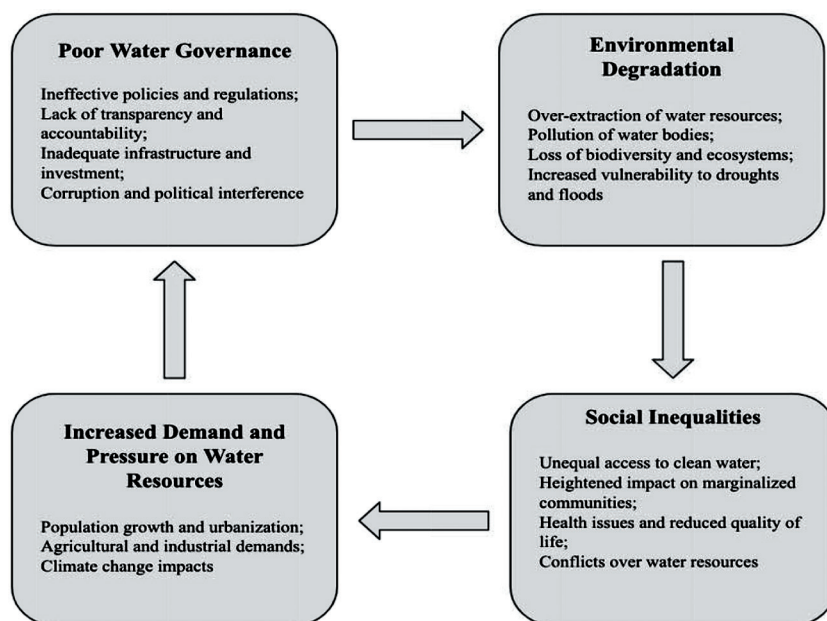


Figure 1. Feedback Loop of Poor Water Governance and Environmental Degradation

Source: created by Rahamath Nisha S, S. Horizan Prasanna Kumar.

Research on water conflicts in India should consider an inter-disciplinary lens and include social, economic, political as well environmental aspects of water management. Specifically, we need to explore our historical legacies and governance agendas that prefigure current practices alongside the power structures around water (Mustafa, 2007, pp. 484–501). These insights can help identify viable and sustainable water management strategies, benefiting all in the country. This calls for an inclusive process, where states participate together with their citizens in making decisions.

The water crisis of India is a complex ecosystem level issue which needs immediate solutions. Rapid climate change, growing national population and excessive industrialization are taxing the water economy in a way that has led to depleting reserves nation-wide, as well inequality. Water scarce countries are particularly vulnerable to lack of clean water for drinking, washing and hygiene in the time of COVID-19. The current unprecedented public health crisis further underscores the urgent need for effective water governance, together with innovative and integrated approaches to managing our limited freshwater resources sustainably. Interdisciplinary research and integrated water management strategies can tackle the issues of water scarcity in India to make sure that its water resources are set up for sustainable development, aligned with equitable growth objectives.

Results and Discussion

Political Ecology and Water Scarcity in All Quiet in Vikaspuri

Political Ecology may be defined as the study on how power relations, economic processes, and social disparities rule the use of natural resources. As such, the topic cuts across various disciplines and provides the framework for analyzing the relationships between environmental issues and politico-social stakeholders. In this regard, such effects could not result from the conservation virtue, as portrayed by Banerjee. It is evident that he has based his story on the negative aspects associated with the water crisis – the recurring scenario. Moreover, he has decided to bring the scenario during dystopian life in the modernist Delhi. The above-described approach demonstrates how the socio-political characteristics led to resource allocation disparities (Greenberg and Park, 1994). Figure 2 represents the relationships between power structures, economic systems, and environmental degradation as discussed in the novel.

All Quiet in Vikaspuri is a graphic novel that discusses the impacts of water scarcity in a negative socio-economic manner. It challenges the current political and economic structures as water crisis is the recurring theme that disrupts urban life (Gupta, 2018, pp. 144–58). All the scientific illustrations have vividly described the effects of the commodity scarcity on the ordinary citizen, who is the classic victim. Moreover, the privatization of the resource has sustained class differences and aspects of environmental conservation. The industry has been criticized for consuming an enormous quantity of water as Banerjee mocks it by saying “mining is a thirsty business” (Banerjee, 2015, p. 11). The author has decried the industry and other organizations’ activity, echoing the environmental justice components

concerning commodity marginalization. This narrative extends comics studies to urban discourse by offering insights into urban inequities and social justice concerns (Sarkar and Bhattacharya, 2022, pp. 697–717). The novel also discusses intersectionality of environmental justice with development by investigating how gendered relations are impacted in the face of water crisis (Madan, 2018, pp. 125–143). The plot of *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* is about Girish, a plumber with some psychic talents who goes on the search for The Saraswati. The novel takes place in a dystopian Delhi where the crisis for water has drained away at its very part of being a society. The title ‘All Quiet in Vikaspuri’ reflects the timbre of much deeper meaning and ‘Quiet’ representing a chilling silence of dry taps. That silence is a metaphor to that of the water which is gone in Delhi. Through Girish’s journey, Banerjee highlights poor urban planning and the catastrophic effects of privatization practices, also elucidates how absurd water withdrawal is contributing to this crisis.

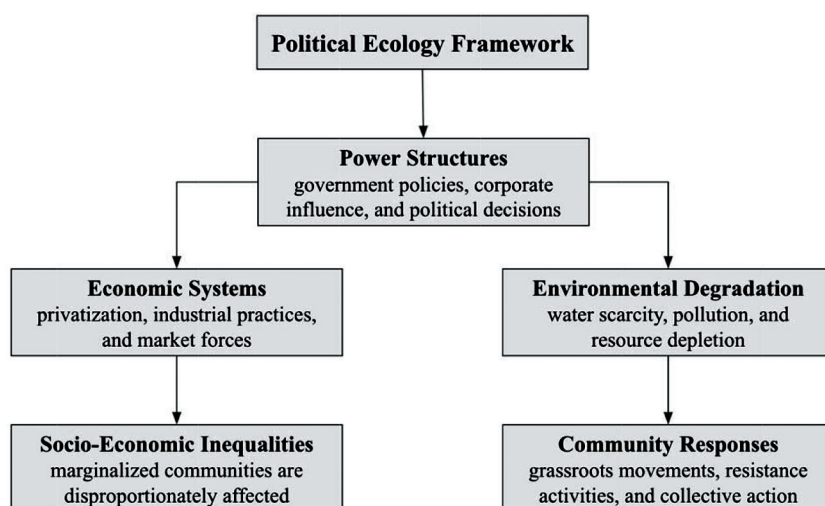


Figure 2. Political Ecology Framework in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*

Source: created by Rahamath Nisha S, S. Horizan Prasanna Kumar.

There is also a broader critique on display in the novel of neoliberal urbanization, including an examination of exactly how profit trumps people, particularly concerning public infrastructure. For Banerjee, the resistance against these policies involves communities organizing for holding group meetings in response to water scarcity. Through a narrative that uses mythical symbolism as well as many languages, Banerjee invites readers to contemplate what it means to create cities and manage resources ethically. It is a persuasive case in how literature can make us lean towards community, collaborative solutions are what the world need to tackle environmental change, and it makes a reader think about his place in promoting sustainability and social justice.

From a political ecology lens, Banerjee’s *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* delves into the psychological and cultural consequences of ecological crises. In the world of novel, cultural ways and practices are tested by scarcity, like a reality where food is hardly available leading them to search for sustenance resulting in poverty-stricken society

struggling against psychological impacts due ecological disturbance. Not only does this approach critique the status quo, but it also helps us to imagine an alternative future where communities are able to flourish by embracing more just and sustainable forms of environmental governance. Emphasizing community resilience and collective action, Banerjee went on to provide a sequence that supports an original environmental justice logic whereby there is arguing for the wellness of all citizens, particularly those most subject to climate change and resource depletion.

In *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, Banerjee uses visual storytelling to ensure that imagining connections of readers with natural resources and metropolitan environments is seen as central.

The novel, with its intricate portrayal of characters and captivating imagery paints a vivid picture of the true nature behind urbanization-driven economic development at the cost of environmental sustainability. Urban life is upended by water scarcity, while environmental damage recasts the social underpinnings of development myths that pass as incontestable. The novel illustrates community responses and resistance acts of marginalized groups that emphasize the urban futures they help create even in a dystopia riddled with systemic limitations and natural destruction. While this interdisciplinary storytelling does more than a great contribution to urban studies, environmental justice and calls for additional research on the ethics of planning. Reading Banerjee today challenges us to think about what role ordinary citizens and stakeholders have in creating a sustainable city that also seeks an egalitarian urbanism. This critique of failed urban planning and governance in the capital, especially as concerned with water management is part of what makes this novel a strong one. No safe passage Banerjee raises several other aspects including water pollution, theft and the impact on poor residents in Patna where corporatization largely sank everything else.

The novel probes into subjects that are no less than a war itself and is reflective of the political turbulence in Delhi during its ruling by Arvind Kejriwal, brought to power with great public elation as well as skepticism. The book also shows how industrial accidents, pollution, overpopulation and the class divide in South Delhi compound to create a living context conducive for water crisis that renders life unbearable on daily basis for residents of the city. Banerjee offers a critique of what is happening by saying this is not just about water scarcity, it's also something related to governance (Connor, 2015). Banerjee concludes the book with a potent image of an empty plate, representative for real change in hunger's wake. What a poignant reminder of the price we pay for environmental destruction and how immediate those measures need be. With this chilling image, Banerjee also highlights the necessity of addressing the underlying causes of effort and implement sustainable improvements which always ensures relief for everyone. In this way, the novel holds itself up as both a warning and almost a manual for how to prevent such collapse, essentially asking readers if they are going to be responsible enough to live in cities that wont transform into 'Captive Cities'.

Banerjee uses multiple point of views to illustrate the frictions caused by water scarcity. The integration of his narrative in global discourses on environmental

justice and water management also highlights, yet again, how the local is a microcosm for the larger scheme of things that include most parts of this interconnected planet (Boast 2020, p. 76). Banerjee documents how the global competition for diminishing water resources is a very local issue although also appears to have an even larger more positional significance. Central to these narratives is the psychological fallout of inhabiting a global landscape where water, once presumed infinitely abundant now functions as an industrial commodity. Characters navigate an environment whose hostility leaves a distinct emotional toll. Understanding this psychological dimension is essential if we hope to comprehend the magnitude of the disaster in its entirety, as it speaks directly to what human deprivation really feels like and how vulnerable, when converted into a commodity that characterizes all primary goods (McLeman, 2013).

All Quiet in Vikaspuri by Banerjee is a scathing narrative of how private interests with massive influence have made Delhi's water woes worse. In doing so, Banerjee critiques the narrative of economic development by revealing the ecological disasters and social marginalization bound up in it. He gives the example of how economic gains usually increase at environmental and social cost, making clear it only exacerbates existing disparities. In that sense, the novel becomes a mirror, because it reflects to society in general what are we doing when profit comes before people and ecosystems (Daiya, 2018, pp. 3–10).

Fiction to Real-Life Socio-Political Implications

The issue of water scarcity is not confined to reality alone; it is also a significant theme in fictional works that reflect real-world concerns. For instance, *Weathering With You*, a 2019 Japanese film's portrayal of excessive rain disrupting daily life mirrors the broader implications of water management and scarcity in urban settings like Tokyo (Amzah et al., 2023, pp. 285–307). This cinematic depiction can be likened to the situation in Banerjee's *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* where water scarcity serves as a central narrative device, underscoring the socio-political ramifications of resource mismanagement. Additionally, the film's narrative of characters attempting to control weather conditions reflects a broader human desire to mitigate climate change impacts, including water scarcity issues (Amzah et al., 2023, pp. 285–307). Similarly, Banerjee's novel highlights the desperate measures that societies may resort to when facing severe environmental crisis, reinforcing the urgent need for equitable and sustainable water policies. Water injustices act as an indicator of diminishing democratic values and the need for more equitable governance (Fioret, 2023). Fioret's linear argument structure explores various philosophical frameworks, and his focus on the broader social and political harms beyond mere distribution issues (Siefert, 2024, pp. 120–23). Power inequities must be addressed through the active inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in resilience-building processes to achieve equitable outcomes. This inclusivity engages transformative impacts, which ensure not only the rights-based resilience are facilitated but also in vulnerable communities (Matin et al., 2018, pp. 197–205).

Banerjee stresses the need for communication, collaboration and conflict resolution processes to manage these tensions effectively. Evidence-based examples which demonstrates that cooperation and shared management practices among nations can alleviate water conflicts. Such mutual activities as co-operative management and conservation projects are necessary for sustainable water resources utilization (Chellaney, 2015). For instance, shared water infrastructure projects of dams and irrigation among downstream countries can increase the supply as well as quality of their water resources which potentially promotes regional stability and collaboration. Typical of many environmental injustices in the world we see multiple communities gathering and fighting to save their environment demanding fair development. *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* is an example of one such grassroots response.

Attention to leadership, community empowerment and inclusive development approaches can motivate mainstream movements demanding equitable environmental policies and practice in real-world settings. What that does, in turn, is it makes the legislators more inclined to pass broadly inclusive policies that can deal with near-future crises like water shortages (Hill, 2017, pp. 827–843). The fictional narrative in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* is a microcosm of those larger socio-political trends and demonstrates how community dynamism can act as an effective counter to state-governmental failure. The storyline calls for strategies that enable marginalized communities to push for environmental justice and their rights, through the policymakers as well as different stakeholders. *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* also echoes the cry of many environmental movements across the world where communities stand to protect their environment and livelihoods. He paints community in a positive light and the importance of collectively working towards social and environmental justice. It is not just the portrayal of a dystopia in fiction, but rather an exclamation mark that seeks to alert readers and get them to realize their own capacity for creating change within community. And yet the story of *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* reveals that however dilatory government action might be, civic initiatives can force our leaders to answer for inadequacies. This discussion of Banerjee's influence as a fictional writer on socio-political outcomes raises questions about the ways in which fiction might motivate concrete real-world activism and spur policy evolution. *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* is a compelling exploration of the potential pollution and political transition related to water scarcity. The novel reveals the urgent requirement for governance in a collective and community-wide context, where inclusive decision-making can pave way to address this environmental injustice. By intertwining fiction and reality, the novel stands as an example to warn us of how our world should start stepping out to solve environmental issues happening which are socio-politico-oriented.

Hydropolitics and Governance in India: Perspectives from Indian Writing

With the enormous diversities in hydrological landscapes and governance systems, there is an important area of research that Indian hydropolitics offers. With a rich tapestry of literature across Indian genres and perspectives on hydropolitics and governance it would have provided an interesting flavor to understanding these

issues. Thus, the water resources of India – they range from monsoon-fed rivers to those perennials in nature with a variety of climatic regions and landscapes – offers a vast expanse for hydropolitics. To also educate citizens on the vast socio-economic implications that water-triggered internal displacement has in local communities, moreover their intersections with broader environmental outcomes of water management policies – some literary works exaggerated their themes or elements.

In Indian literary space, hydropolitics incorporates cultural narrations with political and environmental dimensions. In his graphic novel, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*, for example, Sarnath Banerjee illustrates a dystopic world where water scarcity play, an increasing role. The fast-paced fiction is written against the backdrop of India's endeavors to modernize its water resources whilst capturing some nuances in governance especially with regards on how scarce resource like water can be balanced between allocation and sustainability. For example, he shows the rural version of governments response to water scarcity – a fictional scheme called *Girish Jal Vitaran Yojana* (Girish Water Distribution Policy), attempting make, water distribution fair. All this just show the nitty-gritties of real-world problems that India is facing in water resources management – access and sustainability (Banerjee 2015). Indian literature further stresses how some of the country's major rivers like Ganges, Yamuna and Brahmaputra are culturally as well as spiritually significant. Making them virtually sacred to a civilization that is more defined by these rivers than large parts of the world outside of India it has influenced since the dawn of modern history. Water is also a ubiquitous symbol of collective memory and social values, themes that are frequently integrated by authors as they emphasize water beyond its instrumental role. This vivid depiction highlights the versatile nature of water in every day Indian life, being one part, sustenance and two parts symbolic: purity or godly reverence. In addition, Indian writers critique the role of courts and state governments – as well as government-run regulators like Central Water Commission – in both resolving water disputes among states and generally managing its shared resources. These institutions are shown to be crucial in the conservation of atmosphere, even handed distribution of water and shaping infrastructure. On the other hand, how these systems in some cases are unproductive for progress and can also cause bureaucracy or political corruption (Iqbal, 2015, pp. 25–28). The literature often considers grassroots movements, socio-economic disparities and community responses to water crisis highlighting the wider implications of hydropolitics in India.

Indian novels deal with water scenarios varies from extinction of societies to transformation following a collapse and apocalypse in socio-political dynamics and their stories are cautionary ones, reminders of the dangers that come with not caring about our environment and failing to receive good governance. Non-fiction, in contrast, deal more heavily with environmental impacts on the real world, community responses or policy efficacy at addressing water-related crises. This dual focus on hydropolitics and mythscapes; speculative and factual discourses not only enable Indian literature to access the complex value systems intertwined with them, but also ensures an understanding of the layered realities surrounding these prolonged

conflicts. In Indian discourses on hydropolitics, the entanglement of environmental considerations with cultural storytelling and a particular form of governmental critique creates a complex view not only related to India's water governance challenges. This interdisciplinary perspective not only furthers our understanding of the environmental sustainability and human well-being at stake, but also expands those aligned to discussions on water governance in India. This means that through speculations based on varying levels of fiction and non-fiction, Indian literature calls upon a heterogeneous readers to participate in the discussion about how water is managed in India. Indian literature is integral in understanding the complexities of hydropolitics and governance in India. Comprising a mosaic of cultural, environmental and political narratives, these writings offer approaches into some of the struggles and successes India endures to manage its water resources. In expanding across the intersections of hydrology, governance and society these works have been essential to a wider argument about environmental sustainability in India.

Conclusion

Indian fictions such as *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* explore the nuanced relationship between social and political dynamics of climatic advance impacts. More than just a story, narratives like these offer an in-depth look at the trade-offs every human must make between desires and limitations – ultimately functioning as cautionary narratives for today. Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel is perceived as reflective to balance between resource allocation and social equity built upon the critical challenges of our times. One of the prominent features in this novel is how it looks beyond mere entertainment value and prompts readers to think carefully. By doing so, it effectively motivates and educates its readers to take their individual or collective responsibilities as the stewards of Earth into consideration. The study elaborates on Sarnath Banerjee's critique of the societally debilitating effects by resource depletion and water scarcity, thus underpinning the need for a sustainable solution. In using this qualitative analysis, the relationship between worlds of fiction and real-world action is explored – to help readers think through how a literary imagination can come into play with its politics. What is new about Banerjee's work, however, is the way it weaves a compelling narrative together with a call for action. *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* infuses local narrative with an awareness of pressing environmental issues, the novel asks readers to reflect on their stewardship and alter behavior for a sustainable legacy that lasts beyond. The novel critiques existing socio-political structures, as well as envisions a society whose policies and social norms are such that environmental care and justice is central.

This way of narrative leads the novel into a social realist mode, encouraging readers to do something serious about environmental conservation. The narrative shows how storytelling can act as the driver for meaningful action and public policy, being a form by which good conscience creates ripple effects of sustainable practices. Burning up encourages readers to attract the stories of these characters and develop into protectors for a planet on which environmental limits are revered,

where radical transformation is welcome. In this way, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* and other Indian writings offer not just a critique of the present-day environmental imaginations, they also provide templates around which to conjure new futures. They add to the larger narrative of sustainability by calling for comprehensive solutions that can encompass all aspects from ecological and social elements related to climate change. They harness the power of storytelling inspiring a global movement for climate justice that will remain on this planet well into future generations.

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