NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry
Vol. 22 (II) December 2024

e ISSN 2789-4665 p ISSN 2222-570
10.52015/numljci.v22iII.290

Go Back!: Reclaiming Indigenous Visibility in Literary, Cultural, and Environmental Spaces of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received:
August 7, 2024
Accepted:
December 26, 2024

Funding:
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

This paper examines the nexus of visibility and violence in the context of indigenous communities of Pakistan, with a focus on the literary works of Mustansar Hussein Tarar. Through a critical analysis of Tarar's texts, this study reveals how his narratives subvert the dominant autochthonous discourses (surrounding the sociocultural and geophysical spaces of the Indus Valley), reclaim visibility for the indigenous communities, and thus enable their survival. The intersection of literature, culture, and environment has already been explored by many scholars (De Loughery 2015; Mukherjee 2010; Nixon 2011; Huggan 2004), with some discussions also incorporating the perspectives of indigenous peoples (Dove 2006). By drawing upon the nexus of visibility and violence in the context of environmental spaces discussed by Rob Nixon (2011), this research demonstrates how Tarar's works challenge representational bias against the visibility of indigenous communities and shows slow violence inflicted upon them, thereby mitigating the detrimental effects of centuries of marginalization. To illustrate this argument, I have chosen two novels by Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Sorrows of Sarasvati* originally published as *Bahao*, and *Love in the Shade of Death* originally published as *Qurbat e Marg Mein Muhabbat*. Through these works, Tarar traverses both temporally (from the Indus Valley civilization to the present time) and spatially (from Sarasvati to Sindhu), thereby reprobating the current debates of belonging, reimagining the past and present of the Indus Valley through an indigenous lens, and reclaiming visibility for indigenous people within literary, cultural, and environmental spaces in Pakistan. This study contributes to the ongoing eco-critical debates by highlighting the significance of indigenous literary narratives in imagining alternative spatialities.

Keywords: *Indigenous, environment, Pakistani literature, visibility, slow violence*

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(I)

In the intricate tapestry of Pakistan's cultural landscape, the indigenous communities have long been relegated to the fringes. Their voices, stories, struggles and even their lives were erased from the narratives which were dominated by the political and religious debates of autochthony. The country's literary, cultural, and environmental spaces have been complicit in this erasure, perpetuating hegemonic discourses that privilege the fabricated identities over the marginalized indigenous ones. The palimpsestic nature of Pakistani spaces happened to bury the existence of indigenous communities under its layered discourses. Although the visibility of indigenous communities around the globe has grown significantly over the past few decades, prompting international bodies like United Nations Organization (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO) to recognize their existence and establish a charter of their rights (Bellier et al., 2017), yet Pakistani indigenous community is still struggling to be noticed.

The intersection of postcolonial and environmental debates has shed light on the marginalization of indigenous communities, highlighting the historical injustices perpetrated against them and the natural world under colonialism. Scholars such as Jodi and Rothberg (2011), Huggan (2004), and Huggan and Tiffin (2010) have emphasized the need for an environmental perspective in postcolonial studies, condemning the persistent blatant abuse of human and non-human environment(s) and arguing that marginalized peoples have borne the brunt of environmental degradation. Furthermore, critics like Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2010) and Ashcroft et al. (2006) have challenged the erasure of local cultures and indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting the ways in which hegemonic powers have sought to extinguish indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Recent scholarship has continued to explore the complex relationships between indigenous, modern, and postcolonial contexts and the natural world, examining how these interactions mutually shape and are shaped by one another (DeLoughery, 2015; Slovic et al., 2015; Roothan, 2020; Cooke & Denny, 2021).

Against the backdrop of these complex relationships, the definition and characteristics of indigeneity need closer examination, particularly in the light of ongoing efforts to recognize and protect indigenous rights. As Sepulveda and Dumont (2020) note, even the UN's 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples fails to provide a clear definition of indigeneity. Despite this, common traits among indigenous communities include their strong connection to territories and natural resources, as well as their commitment to preserving their inherited environment (Hassan & Seyal, 2017, p. 44). The interdependence between indigenous communities and their natural surroundings is well-established, as Guha and Gadgil aptly describe them as "ecosystem people" (1995, p. 177). Hence, indigenous studies, which have traditionally been rooted in ethnographic and anthropological research, are also an important part of ecocritical studies. Nevertheless, the relationship between indigenous people and the environment is

often limited to an appreciation of their environmental knowledge. In order to understand indigenous communities in the true sense, it is essential to recognize them as integral participants in the sociocultural and geophysical spaces they inhabit. However, this nuanced understanding is often obscured by the dominant narratives that perpetuate the invisibility of indigenous communities.

This invisibility has devastating consequences, including gradual cultural erasure and loss of identities and lives within their sociocultural and environmental contexts. Therefore, this research paper aims to explore ways to increase the visibility of indigenous communities, highlighting their plight and the imperative of recognition. The imperative of visibility is profound, particularly in the context of marginalized communities and ecosystems. As Marsh astutely observes, "the power most important to cultivate, and at the same time hardest to acquire is that of seeing, what is before him" (1864, 15). This notion is echoed in Paolo Freire's emphasis on the critical recognition of oppression as a necessary precursor to understanding its causes and effecting change (1996). However, the question of visibility transcends mere representation, taking on a profound significance when invisibility threatens the very survival of communities and ecosystems. As Leopold poignantly notes, "we can be ethical only toward what we can see" (1934), highlighting the existential importance of visibility. This is particularly pertinent in the context of indigenous communities, whose invisibility not only erases their cultural identities but also imperils the delicate balance of the ecosystems they inhabit. As Arundhati Roy cautioned, "once we get used to not seeing something, then slowly it's no longer possible to see it" (qtd in Nixon 2011, p. 1), underscoring the urgent need to reclaim visibility and acknowledge the intricate web of relationships between human communities and the natural world.

The visibility of indigenous communities in Pakistan is inextricably linked to their very existence and the ecosystem they inhabit. This nexus of (in)visibility and existence is further complicated by the slow violence that threatens their habitats. Judith Butler's work (2004), in another context, illuminates this relationship, demonstrating how (in)visibility can render certain losses "unthinkable and ungrievable," thereby relegating marginalized lives to the status of "ungrievable lives" (p. xviii). Butler argues that dominant forms of representation must be disrupted to apprehend the precariousness of life. Similarly, Kevin Bales' (2004) concept of "disposable people" – later invoked by Rob Nixon (2011) – highlights the (in)visibility of impoverished communities and the slow violence that imperils their existence. These frameworks underscore the urgency of narratives that render visible the lives and struggles of indigenous communities in Pakistan.

Butler's notion of "ungrievable lives" takes on a new dimension in the context of indigenous communities in Pakistan, where the deliberate exercise of power to render them invisible has devastating consequences for their existence and the ecosystem they inhabit. The idea expressed by Haraway (2002, p. 680)— "vision is always a question of the power to see"— holds particular significance in

the context of indigenous communities in Pakistan. Their invisibility is not merely a result of their absence from sociocultural practices, but rather a deliberate rendering invisible, ungrievable, and disposable by those in power. Rob Nixon's concept of the imposition of "official landscape" over "vernacular landscapes" (2011, p. 17) offers a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics of spatial politics in South Asia. Specifically, this concept can be applied to the traumatic remapping of the subcontinent during the partition, as well as the dominant discursive cartographies that characterize South Asian nation-states, including Pakistan.

These cartographies are often marked by ethnic and religious debates that usurp the rights of indigenous communities to exist in their cultural and environmental spaces, effectively creating what Ashley Dawson call a "climate apartheid" (2017, p. 9) that perpetuates their marginalization and invisibility. Furthermore, Rob Nixon's concept of "unimagined communities" (2011, p. 150) is particularly relevant to the Pakistani context, where the production of the nation as an imagined community has led to the erasure of indigenous communities from the national narrative. By applying the insights of Haraway, Dawson, and Nixon to the Pakistani context, it becomes clear that the invisibility of indigenous communities is a deliberate act of erasure, perpetuated by those in power.

This understanding of the relationship between visibility, recognition, and belonging underscores the need for a nuanced exploration of the ways in which indigenous communities in Pakistan are rendered visible or invisible. As Sepulveda and Dumont (2020) observe in their online article, visibilization often occurs at the cost of maintaining some invisibility, particularly the stigmas attached to indigenous communities. This perpetuates "territorial stigmas" (Sepulveda & Dumont, 2020, n.p), reducing indigenous communities to the status of what Ulloa terms as "ecological natives" in the title of her 2005 book. “Ecological natives” refers to a marginalized position that denies their agency and rights within the ecosystem. Pakistani writers challenge this paradigm by subverting the autochthonous claims of South Asian nation-states and reprobating the marginalized (in)visibility attached to territorial stigma. By centering indigenous communities in political and spatial debates, these writers reclaim visibility for indigenous populations in literary, cultural, and environmental spaces in Pakistan.

Pakistani writers are playing a crucial role in reclaiming indigenous visibility and challenging dominant discourses that have historically marginalized indigenous communities. Through their fiction, these writers center indigenous voices and experiences, subverting the erasure of indigenous histories and cultures. This literary endeavor resonates with Arundhati Roy's critique of the Indian state's treatment of indigenous communities, highlighting the significance of visibility in the struggle for indigenous rights. Furthermore, Pakistani writers' work intersects with Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," exposing the environmental degradation and marginalization faced by indigenous communities. By creating a

counter-narrative that celebrates indigenous diversity and resilience, Pakistani writers are resisting the intersecting forces of dispossession, invisibility, subalternity, and erasure, ultimately reclaiming indigenous visibility in literary, cultural, and environmental spaces.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" (2011) provides a crucial lens through which to examine these intersections, revealing the insidious and often invisible nature of environmental degradation and its devastating impact on marginalized populations According to Nixon, slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional silence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 5). While Nixon focuses the entire global South and Roy's main concern is indigenous communities of India, they both highlight the invisibility of "ungrievable lives" and "disposable people," emphasizing the power structures that deny visibility to these populations. Nixon argues that there is a "contest over the administration of difference between those who gain official recognition as sufferers and those dismissed as non-sufferers because their narrative of injury deemed to fail the prevailing politico-scientific logic of causation" (p. 47). At the heart of Nixon's argument is the question of visibility, which he poses in several keyways:

> What happens when we are unsighted, when what extends before us—in the space and time that we most deeply inhabit—remains invisible? How, indeed, are we to act ethically toward human and biotic communities that lie beyond our sensory ken? What, then, in the fullest sense of the phrase, is the place of seeing in the world that we now inhabit? What, moreover, is the place of the other senses? How do we both make slow violence visible yet also challenge the privileging of the visible? (p. 15)

These questions provide a critical framework for examining the intersections of visibility, violence, and environment in the context of indigenous communities which need further study in the context of Pakistan. As demonstrated in the preceding theoretical review, the concepts of slow violence, resistance, and environmental degradation offer a crucial framework for understanding the experiences of indigenous communities in Pakistan. The scholarly work of Rob Nixon, Arundhati Roy, and others provides an essential toolkit for analyzing the complex relationships between power, environment, and marginalized communities. Critical analysis, as a methodology, enables us to excavate the subtle yet pervasive forms of violence and marginalization that are often obscured by dominant narratives. By applying this critical lens to Mustansar Hussein Tarar's novels, this analysis aims to uncover the ways in which Tarar's fiction challenges the erasure of indigenous identities and highlights the devastating impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities.

In Pakistan, the indigenous population comprises various groups, including the Kochi, Rabri, Baluch, Bakarwal, Kehal, Jogi, Kabutra, Sanyasi, and Kalash (Cultural Survival report, p. 1). These communities face numerous threats to their survival, including subjugation, forced conversion, limited access to education, and disempowerment (Cultural Survival report, pp. 2-4).The erasure of indigenous identities is further perpetuated by the use of terms like "tribe" instead of "indigenous," which serves to diminish their visibility and undermine their claims to land rights (Dove, 2006, p. 191). Despite the growing field of indigenous studies, there is a notable gap in research focusing specifically on the experiences of indigenous communities in Pakistan. This oversight renders these communities triply invisible– as part of the global South, as the poorest of the poor, and even as unseen among those impoverished populations. Rob Nixon's work emphasizes the need for writers to actively challenge this invisibility of marginalized communities, particularly indigenous populations. He argues that a key representational challenge lies in devising "arresting stories, images, and symbols" to render these communities visible (p. 3) and studies the example of Roy, who as writer-activist took active part in the movements of environmental justice and used her celebrity visibility to subvert the invisibility of indigenous communities of India. In the context of indigenous visibility, Mustansar Hussain Tarar occupies the same position in the Pakistani literary landscape for his socially and environmentally conscious writings. While both authors have made significant contributions to their respective regions, Tarar's work is particularly notable for its nuanced exploration of Pakistan's complex environmental, cultural and literary spaces.

(II)

Tarar is a celebrated Urdu writer, renowned for his travelogues and pioneering work in television morning shows. His novels, deeply rooted in the history, geography, culture, and ethnicity of the Indus River plains, offer a nuanced exploration of the region and its people. Tarar's magnum opus is his cyclic tetralogy, comprising *Sorrows of Sarasvati* (originally published as *Bahao*), *Khas so Kahshak Zamanay* (The Desolate Time), *Rakh* (The Ashes), and *Qurbat e Murg Mein Muhabbat*[3] (Love in the Shade of Death). These novels, interconnected through their themes and narratives, not only draw the political and social history of the regions they are situated in, but also delve into the catastrophic consequences of environmental degradation, fueled by the slow violence of neoliberal development and oppressive power structures, resulting in the loss of 'ungrievable lives'. While *KKZ*[4] spans across continents and decades, the other three novels focus on the three

[3] *Qurbat-e-Marg me Muhabbat* is an Urdu novel. All translations of excerpts used in this paper are my own and were done specifically for the purpose of this paper.
[4] *Khas o Khashak Zamanay*

main rivers of the Indus plains: the Indus in *QMM*[5], the Ghaghra/Sarasvati in *SoS*[6] and the Ravi in *Rakh*.

Tarar's fiction is distinguished by its deep-rooted connection to local spaces, with indigenous characters consistently occupying a central position in his literary works. This is evident in novels such as *Rakh*, which features Burgita, the daughter of an indigenous sanitary worker, as its female protagonist. Similarly, in *Khas o Kahshak Zamany (KKZ)*, the family history of the Sansi community and their experiences with neoliberal development structures underscore the complexities of indigenous erasure and resilience. However, for this analysis, I have selected two novels, *Sorrows of Sarasvati (SoS)* and *Qurbat e Marg Mein Muhabbat (QMM*), which foreground the lives of indigenous people, their interconnectedness with the natural environment, and the devastating impact of slow violence on both their habitats and lives: "Sarasvati had dried up, Ravi had been drying, and the Indus was yet to dry up" (Tarar, *QMM,* p. 729). Through his innovative employment of temporal subversion, Mustansar Hussein Tarar challenges the slow violence of temporal displacement, effectively positioning his novel *Qurbat e Marg Mein Muhabbat (QMM)* as a precursor to *SoS*, despite the latter's chronological precedence in the tetralogy.

QMM narrates the story of Khawar, a television artist who, disillusioned with his urban existence, retreats to the banks of the Indus River to spend his final days. There, he develops a profound connection with the ecosystem and its inhabitants, including Sarwar, Pakkhi, and Mama Jaffer. The novels recount last days of Khawar in love and awe of the Indus River and its concomitant landscapes. the futility of his urban life is juxtaposed to the meaningfulness of Indigenous lives through flashbacks. Tarar utilizes Khawar's narrative to foreground the intricate, interdependent relationships between the indigenous community and the Indus River, highlighting the devastating impact of the river's desiccation on their lives. By exploring the deep-seated emotional bonds between the characters and the Indus, Tarar illustrates what he terms "love in the shade of death," a poignant metaphor for the imperiled existence of these ecosystem people and their ecosystems.

Tarar, thorough his novel, provides a platform for the voices of indigenous characters, including Mama Jaffer, Sarwar, and Pakkhi, to be heard, thereby addressing what Rob Nixon terms the "representational challenge." By drawing upon the question of the writer-activist's role in fortifying embattled socio-environmental memory, Tarar crafts characters that embody a deep connection with their ancestral past. For instance, Pakkhi's physical appearance is described as having a "Dravidian face," "animal-like wide jawbone," and "wide nose with big nostrils" (p. 683), drawing parallels with her Dravidian ancestors. This narrative

[5] *Qurbate Murg Mein Muhabbat.* Henceforth, I use *QMM* as an abbreviation of the full title.
[6] Henceforth, I use *SoS* for *Sorrows of Saraswati in this paper.*

strategy enables Tarar to establish the indigenous community's claims as the original inhabitants of the Indus delta, mitigating their historical invisibility in society and fiction.

Furthermore, Tarar's portrayal of his characters highlights their intrinsic connection with the natural environment. Rather than being depicted as separate entities, they are shown to be an integral part of the ecosystem, much like the air, water, animals, and birds. This is evident in Tarar's description of Sarwar's attire as "just a piece of cloth, which too was unnecessary as he looked more natural without it, like some animal's abdomen is wrapped up" (p. 694). The indigenous characters' relationship with the Indus River is particularly noteworthy, as they reverence it as a sacred entity, referring to it as "Sindh Saieen" (Saint Indus), "benefactor," "provider," and "livelihood" (p. 687). Their sense of identity is deeply intertwined with the river, as they describe themselves as "Poong" (p. 701), meaning fish larva. Tarar underscores the beauty of this symbiotic relationship, stating that they were beautiful because "they were a part of their elements, not separate from them, they were children of water, and this lifestyle was mixed in their blood, this thing made them beautiful" (p. 713).

Through his portrayal of the intricate relationships between indigenous characters and the natural environment, Tarar critiques the tendencies of combats the tendencies of some Green movements toward Western liberal universalism and "[white] middle-class nature-protection elitism" as noted by Huggan (2004, p. 702). Instead, Tarar asserts the indigenous people's rightful claim to natural resources and their unique capacity to protect them. As the primary custodians of the land, indigenous people are often the first to notice the slow violence inflicted by powerful capitalist interests. Moreover, they are the first to respond to these environmental injustices, as evident in Sarwar's vocal critique of motorboat fishing in the Indus. Through Sarwar's character, Tarar verbalizes and visualizes the environmental degradation of the Indus, highlighting the destructive impact of capitalist powers of accumulation. By doing so, Tarar not only makes the indigenous concerns for the landscape visible but also establishes their rightful claim to be the heirs of the land.

Tarar's narrative underscores the fundamental difference in approaches between the ecosystem people and the resource omnivores, an opposition coined by Guha and Gadgil. This dichotomy is exemplified in Sarwar's argument with Khawar, where he convincingly articulates the flaws in the motorboat attitude towards the Indus and its ecosystem. By juxtaposing these two worldviews, Tarar illuminates the need for a more nuanced understanding of environmentalism, one that prioritizes the perspectives and knowledge of indigenous communities:

> No Sir, these are mean people, men of business, when they come to river, they bring destruction for the fish and the birds, and they take them to the city for money. They live somewhere else, they live on the land and come

> to the Indus just for their lust, they are not the children of water like us, they are selling the water… they are untrustworthy.
>
> 'Everybody strives for livelihood'.
>
> No sir. . . it is okay to do this for sustenance but they destroy the Indus for other's bellies. Almighty has bestowed so much sustenance to the Saint Indus that it can never diminish, we and the birds and the fish live alike, but these outsiders, it is not their home, they don't care if it is destroyed, the number of fish is declined. (pp. 725-6)

Tarar does not only put the indigenous people from the margins to center of his literary spaces, but he also establishes their ownership of the central space of the environment. He draws upon George Perkins Marsh notion of the hardest skill to see what is before them and draws by sketching indigenous characters whose closeness with their environment can see things what other cannot see or do not want to notice, in different ways. Mama Jaffer is the first one to notice decreasing the Indus water without any scientific equipment.

> But the boat was now stuck from the bottom. It never stuck in these waters. Water was abundant in this season. What happened today? It looks impossible but it is…the Indus water is decreasing.
>
> Waters are less in these season . . .
>
> Are you teaching me about waters? Here, where I stand in this season, I always stand here for the fish. Last year in the same seasons, the same days, it was touching my knees. But now… strangely, it is too low. No Sarwar, I think the Indus is drying. (p. 845)

And reminding the readers again of Guha and Gadgil's "ecosystem people", Mama Jaffer when asked about the probability of drying Indus water as Sarasvati dried up in the past, narrates almost the story of *SoS*, when he tells: "Nay Sir, it is our benefactor, provider and Saint, how can it dry up? If it dries up by the will of Almighty, we are going to dry up with it" (p. 726).

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" highlights the representational bias against environmental degradation and its disastrous impact on what constitutes a casualty. Nixon argues that the casualties of slow violence—both human and environmental—are often rendered invisible and disregarded as "lightweight" and "disposable" (Nixon, 2011, p. 13). Similarly, the targets of these casualties are marginalized as "ungrievable lives" and "disposable people." Mustansar Hussein Tarar's narrative in *Sorrows of Sarasvati (SoS*) resonates with Nixon's ideas, as he manipulates temporalities to expose the consequences of environmental degradation. By subverting the temporality of the same geophysical space, Tarar portrays a dystopian future rooted in the past, thereby challenging the dominant visualization of the present. Through *SoS*, Tarar raises critical awareness about the

gradual environmental degradation of the Indus basin, emphasizing the need for visibility and ownership of indigenous communities. His narrative illustrates the disastrous consequences of persistent environmental degradation and the marginalization of indigenous identities. Tarar contends that the capitalistic attitude of rendering indigenous identities invisible can lead to the destruction of the landscape and a catastrophic shift in Pakistan's geophysical spaces, resulting in the loss of lives and civilizations. The novel begins where *QMM* left off, when Parushni the female protagonist of the novel starts noticing the lowering level of Ghaghra/ Sarasvati. As an indigenous woman closely tied to nature, Parushni is the first to notice the change and marks the land where the water level once stood.

In *SoS,* Mustansar Hussein Tarar crafts an imaginative narrative that recreates the vernacular landscape of the Indus Valley, subverting the dominant, officially sanctioned landscapes imposed by invaders, empires, colonizers, and nation-states. Tarar has imagined the life and culture of a civilization before the annihilation of Mohenjo Daro. Unlike other novelists and writers who have imagined past with a focal point in Mohenjo Daro, Tarar has situated his stories in the margins. Through the lens of a rural village, "Basti," Tarar foregrounds the intricate relationships between the natural environment and its inhabitants. The narrative centers on the lives of Parushni, Virchan, and Samroo, indigenous characters that embody the interconnectedness of human and natural landscapes. He portrays how the cost of urban development and exploitations is being paid by indigenous communities, echoing Ashley Dawson's "extreme cities" (2017, p. 1). As the story unfolds, Tarar poignantly portrays the devastating impact of slow violence, particularly climate change, on the Basti's residents, illustrating how the gradual degradation of their environment ultimately leads to their demise, mirroring the fate of the dying Ghaghra River. The story unveils how all human and non-human indigenous lives fade away from the fabric of existence with the drying of river Ghaghra and its dependent ecosystems. Parushni, the protagonist resists the change and refuses to leave her land and through her sda demise, Tarar points out the invisibility of both indigenous lives and their efforts to save the planet.

Rob Nixon and Mukherjee emphasize the importance of exposing the hegemonic powers of dominant nationalism, colonialism, and capitalism. In contrast, Tarar's primary focus is on rendering indigenous communities and their concerns visible. Acknowledging the limited understanding of indigenous communities regarding the larger powers driving their destruction and the depletion of natural resources, Tarar refrains from imposing these debates on his indigenous characters. Nevertheless, he subtly incorporates the issues of capitalistic slow violence through hints of historical knowledge. For instance, Tarar critiques religious nationalism through Virchan, the indigenous protagonist, who dismisses the Rig Veda as a "story of these invaders who have captured the cities situated on the banks of the seven rivers. Now they are moving downstream because they have used up the greenery and water of those areas" (*Sorrows,* p. 239). He portrays Virchan as an "insider", "indigenous", "son of soil", "anasa" and "rural" (pp. 90-110).

This narrative strategy allows Tarar to underscore the complex power dynamics at play without imposing external knowledge on his indigenous characters.

Tarar exposes the power narratives through the character of Puran who was an invader and an urban resident of Mohenjo Daro in his dialogue with Virchan, the rural farmer when he visits the city. Puran degrades Vircahn by saying that "all the progress is made in big cities; it owes to the people of these cities. Who cares what small village on the edge of a small drain you dwell!" (p. 104). Through the conversations of Dorga, a kiln slave representing the industrial workers of the city, with Virchan, Tatar uncovers the neoliberal structures of socio-economic deprivation, uneven spatial development, rural and urban division and erosion of indigenous communities and their cultural and economic traditions, thus causing an ecological vulnerability for those spatialities that were remapped in the name of development and nationalizing as suggested by Saba Pirzadeh (2019, pp. 99-100, 104). Dorga states that how the curses of urbanization seep through the whole spatiality be as "when the people of the city are oppressed to live in agony for thousands of years, then the rotting odour of wickedness and cruelty makes its ways to the villages where there is no oppression [. . .]" (*SoS*, p. 148). The novel's chapter titles— "The Vanishing Jungle", "the Peacock Goes Bald", "The Vanishing River", and "The Marching Sand"—also suggest how indigenous ecosystems were paying the price unnoticed by those in powers. Some of the titles suggest how Basti suffered from drying Ghaghra. Even thousands of years later, power discourses remember the magnificence of Mohenjo's urbanities and there are no account of thousands of villages likes Basti and their indigenous lives. Naming indigenous village as Basti, a common noun for rural residential areas, Tarar protests against the erasure of these rural civilizations and reclaims a central space for them.

Tarar offers another instance of environmental degradation, attributing the drying up of the river to glacial movement. He narrates this story through a sapling that "got stuck in the narrow gorge as the snowy rock stooped down. The passage was blocked . . . it got stuck there" (p. 270). By alluding to the "low stooping white mountain of ice," Tarar hints at the current debates surrounding environmental injustices, which cause geomorphic damage and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Moreover, Tarar highlights the link between environmental degradation and so-called "development," which deprives urban areas of their natural environment. He critiques deforestation in the name of urban development, questioning that "[. . .] there is not a single tree in Mohenjo Daro. Isn't it strange, Virchan?" (p. 103). Tarar not only challenges the discursive spaces of urban development but also centralizes the (in)visibility of indigenous people in cities. Virchan's reply underscores this point: "Because you have removed yourselves from trees, greenery, and water. You know, only a few of us live in your cities. We cannot. We find it difficult to breathe in these congested environs. We need open air" (p. 104).

Sorrows of Saraswati stands out among Mustansar Hussein Tarar's other works, as it is a comprehensive narrative about indigenous people's claims to the land, culture, and history of the region. In a region marked by political division and turmoil, various ideologies assert autochthony and compete for control over territory and cultural spaces, often demanding that opposing parties "go back." Consequently, indigenous people's rightful claims to these places and spaces have been marginalized, rendering them virtually invisible. Through *SoS*, Tarar reverses the claims of neighboring nation-states to the Indus Valley, revitalizing the narrative of the region's possession. By centering indigenous people in the debate, Tarar establishes a compelling argument that challenges dominant narratives. The readers experience the Indus Valley civilization through the eyes of Virchan and Parushni, reliving the prehistoric era through Tarar's masterful storytelling.

Virchan's debates over the drying Ghaghra river, his arguments against the religionization of Indus Valley's history and environment, and his concerns about climate change—all underscore the indigenous people's deep connection with the region's culture and environment. Parushni, the protagonist, is a complex character awaiting further exploration. Unlike Pakkhi, a secondary character, Parushni embodies the multifaceted nature of contemporary women in Pakistan, maintaining her unique indigenous identity. Tarar's narrative trajectory traverses from the dried Ghaghra river in *SoS*, where Parushni, embodying the river Ravi, succumbs to slow environmental degradation perpetrated by hegemonic powers, to the Indus River, where he endeavours to render these powers visible. Through intertextuality, Tarar connects the two novels, amplifying the visibility and relevance of the lives and plights of indigenous communities in contemporary Pakistan. Rob Nixon's notion of the "representational challenge" of highlighting slow violence, which is "dispersed across space and time" (2011, p. 2), is mitigated by Tarar's narrative, which navigates both spatially and temporally. Having centred Parushni and Virchan in *SoS*, the readers are prompted to reevaluate *QMM*, now perceiving Pakkhi and Sarwar as the central characters, rather than Khawar, who serves as a spokesperson for those outside the indigenous world.

(III)

As the analysis of texts under scrutiny shows, Mustansar Hussein Tarar's works, particularly *Sorrows of Sarasvati* and *Qurbat e Marg Mein Muhabbat,* demonstrate his prophetic sensitivity to climate issues and class disparities, long before they became pressing global concerns. Through his narratives, Tarar masterfully excavates the intricate relationships between indigenous communities, the environment, and the hegemonic powers that perpetuate slow violence. By centering the lives and plights of marginalized communities, Tarar's works underscore the imperative of visibility and representation in the face of environmental degradation and social injustice. In this global moment, marked by escalating climate crises, Tarar's focus on the intersections of environmentalism, class, and indigeneity is more crucial than ever. As the world grapples with the

consequences of colonialism, capitalism, and climate change, Tarar's narratives offer a powerful counter-narrative that prioritizes the voices, experiences, and knowledge of indigenous communities. By amplifying these voices, Tarar's works provide alternative spatialities and remind us that struggle for environmental justice is inextricably linked to struggle for social justice, and the futures of marginalized communities are intimately tied to the future of our planet.

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