

## Human-Nature Bond in Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati*: An Ecocritical Critique

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### Abstract

This research paper is intended to explore the human-nature bond depicted in Tarar's novel, *Bahao*, one of the magnum opus of Urdu literature, rendered into English translation as *Sorrows of Sarasvati: The Lost River*, by Safeer Awan. It reveals that Tarar's novel focuses upon the significance of nature in human lives, highlighting how our existence and goals are inseparable from the natural world. Different characters of the novel interact with nature, depend upon natural resources, and manifest love with nature. They display friendly attitudes towards nature, acknowledging nature as a supreme entity. The theoretical framework of the research paper is Ecocriticism which sheds light on the interconnectedness between humans and the environment, recognizing the inherent rights of all creations in the universe and the reciprocal influence between humans and nature. The findings of the study substantiate that there exists a strong connection between humans and nature world and humans are dependent on nature. Moreover, this research paper provides valuable insights into the importance of ecological sustainability, and the need for a more conscious and respectful coexistence with the natural world.

**Keywords:** Bahao, Tarar, Human-nature Bond, Natural Resources, Ecocriticism, Environment

### Introduction

Mustansar Hussain Tarar is a highly acclaimed Pakistani writer of Urdu literature. He is known for his ability to captivate readers with his travelogues, and novels. His novels include *Bahao* (*Sorrows of Sarasvati*), *Raakh*, *Qurbat-e-Marg Mein Mohabbat*, *Dakia aur Jolaha*, *Prinday*, *Khas-*

*o-Khashak Zamanay*, and *Ay Ghazaal-i-Shab (Lenin for Sale)*. Tarar received numerous awards for his significant cultural contributions. *Bahaois* is a famous novel by Tarar, translated by Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan in English as *Sorrows of Sarasvati: The Lost River*.

*Sorrows of Sarasvati* is a thought-provoking and universal piece of literature. Translated by Muhammad Safeer Awan, the English version preserves the indigenous language and cultural ethos, allowing a wider audience to appreciate Tarar's work. *Sorrows of Sarasvati* offers multiple interpretations through various lenses. It is a historical novel, describing Pakistan's Dravidian past and the struggles faced by the Dravidians as they are overtaken by the Aryans.

*Sorrows of Sarasvati* is a complex tale that invites multi-dimensional interpretations. It is a novel of occult lore, mystical apprehension of the universe, philosophical pondering over big cosmic questions: fear of the unknown, and the nature and evolution of the concept of deity. Moreover, it deals with polyandry and the status of women in Dravidian cultures along the ancient Indus and its tributaries, the shift from old to new means of production, slavery and colonization of the local, dark-skinned races by the foreign white Arian invaders. It also takes up the clash of cultures and the emergence of hybrid cultures, the cultural origins and heritage of present day Punjabi, Seraiki, Sindhi, Urdu and scores of other languages in Pakistan and India, ancient myths, seasonal rituals, marriage customs, rituals of birth and death and burial rites. (Awan, 2021, pp. 12-13)

Human-nature is a fundamental aspect of our existence. From the earliest moments of our history, humans have relied on nature for sustenance, survival, shelter, and for inspiration. We are inherently connected to the natural world. And it is a fact that we derive solace, relief, beauty, and a sense of belonging from nature. "Human-nature harmony has gained significant attention in contemporary times due to the pressing environmental issues and social concerns. Literature is a powerful medium that can bring attention to this issue and inspire change" (Shagufta et al., 2023, p. 474). This research paper examines how the novel, *Sorrows of Sarasvati* deals with the interconnections between humans and the natural world. One can witness the theme of human-nature bond in Tarar's (2021) thought-provoking novel, *Sorrows of Sarasvati*. Different characters of the novel interact with nature, depend upon natural resources, and manifest love with nature. They display friendly attitudes towards nature, acknowledging nature as a supreme entity. Parushni embodies the theme of human-nature bond, engaging enthusiastically with nature, praising its beauty, and deriving spiritual and transformative insights from it. Her connection with nature is illustrated through her interaction with sacred

trees, her encounters with the deer Pindroo, and her sensitivity to the environment's rhythms. Similarly, Samroo and Gagri represent this bond through their craftsmanship using natural materials and their reliance on nature for sustenance. Virchan, too, emphasizes the need for humans to maintain a close relationship with nature. The novel focuses on the significance of respecting and preserving nature for the well-being of all living beings.

### Research Questions

1. How does Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati* depict the theme of human-nature bond?
2. To what extent does the ecocritical perspective enhance our understanding of the bond between human and natural world in *Sorrows of Sarasvati*?

### Research Objectives

1. To examine Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati* depict the human-nature bond.
2. To assess the ecocritical perspective's influence on understanding the human-nature bond in *Sorrows of Sarasvati* through analysis of ecological themes and symbolic representation of nature.

### Literature Review

Ecocriticism deals with the interplay between humanity and the natural environment, accentuating their innate interconnectedness and reciprocal reliance. It advocates for nurturing human-nature bond for ecological balance. It seeks to create a harmonious and balanced relationship between the human world and the natural world. "Throughout the history of literature, the bond between humans and nature has been a recurring theme. From Wordsworth's critique of materialistic tendencies to Steinbeck's exploration of interconnectedness, authors have delved into this relationship in various ways" (Mohsin, et al., 2023, p. 536). Bertens (2008) holds that ecocriticism, having green agenda, focuses on "the many and widely different ways in which the natural world – wild and domestic animals, landscape, the wilderness – and our relations with that world are represented in our culture" (p. 207). Throughout history, all forms of literary works, from poetry to drama, have explored the theme of nature, covering topics from the tiniest grains to the celestial bodies. Nature has consistently been a source of inspiration for writers, each of whom interprets it uniquely based on their individual worldview (Iqbal, et al., 2022). Gordon JL Ramel's poems depict the theme of relationship between humans and nonhuman entities. Ramel's poems evoke empathy and appreciation for nature and emphasize the importance of environmental preservation. Ramel is a keen observer of the natural world, capturing its beauty and vulnerability within his verses and offering symbolic representations of nature and nonhuman entities (Calvin, et al., 2021).

Tarar's novel, *Bahao* is a famous novel. It is a portrayal of economic concepts, highlighting themes including poverty, inequality, social mobility, and globalization's impact on local economies. (Iqbal, et al., 2022). *Bahao* focuses on the life around the lost river Ghagra (Sarasvati) in the Cholistan region during the pre-Harappan age. It offers descriptions about the cultural, social, and economic aspects of the region, and enhances our understanding of the Cholistan region's past and its relationship with the Ghagra River (Nawaz & Kumar, 2016).

The above literature shows that there is the absence of ecocritical analysis of Tarar's novel, *Sorrows of Sarasvati*. This gap calls for a comprehensive analysis of Tarar's portrayal of the human-nature bond, nature's impact on characters' existence, and the representation of ecological themes in the novel.

### Research Methodology

This research paper employs qualitative research approach to examine the theme of human-nature bond, embedded in Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati*, using Ecocriticism as theoretical underpinning. Specific passages and instances, which highlight the human-nature bond, will be selected from the novel and interpreted in the light of Ecocritical theory.

### Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism, also known as environmental criticism, is a literary theory and interdisciplinary field of study that examines the relationship between literature and the environment, including how nature and ecological issues are represented in literary works. Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural environment, and how human beings interact with and perceive nature. (Singh. 2023, p. 1706)

Emerging in the late 1980s in the United States and as 'Green Studies' in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, Ecocriticism is a critical approach that addresses environmental issues. Advocates of Ecocriticism believe that humans are largely responsible for the degradation of the environment. Therefore, the main goal of Ecocriticism is to safeguard and defend nature against all forms of disaster (Mohsin et al., 2023). The inception of ecocriticism can be traced back to the meetings of the Western Literature Association in the 1970s. Although William Ruckert's (1978) essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* is often credited as the initial work in the field, the terms 'Ecocriticism' and 'Green Studies' gained popularity in the 1980s in America and the 1990s in Britain (Barry, 2002). Ecocriticism examines the significance of nature in shaping individuals, studies various cultures and languages, and explores the impact of nature on society. One of its key objectives is to expose human

actions that harm the environment, such as industrial waste, factory pollution, and the destruction of the ozone layer. Ecocritics emphasize the need to reshape human perceptions of nature and assert that nature is an active and communicative entity within the universe, playing a vital role. Despite its diverse areas of inquiry and varying levels of sophistication, all forms of ecological criticism share the fundamental belief that human culture is interconnected with the physical world, influencing and being influenced by it. Ecocriticism, having green agenda, focuses on "the many and widely different ways in which the natural world – wild and domestic animals, landscape, the wilderness – and our relations with that world are represented in our culture" (Bertens, 2008, p. 207).

Eco-criticism is a branch of literary studies that examines the connections between human and non-human environments as depicted in literary texts (Iqbal, et al., 2022). Ecocriticism focuses on the interconnections between nature and culture, particularly within the realms of language and literature. It straddles both literature and the natural world as a critical standpoint, and as a theoretical discourse, it navigates between the human and the non-human worlds. "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). Glotfelty (1996) also distinguishes between the prefixes "eco" and "enviro," noting that "enviro" centers on humans and places them as the focal point, while "eco" focuses on the interconnectedness of nature and culture, considering it the primary aspect of the Earth's ecology. Buell (2009) defines Ecocriticism "the environmentally oriented study of literature and arts more generally, and the theories that underlie such critical practice." (p. 51). Ecocriticism lays focus on how we imagine "relationship between humans and environment" (Garrard, 2004, p.1). Ecocriticism focuses on how literature conveys values and ideas related to nature and the environment (Iqbal, et al., 2022). There have been debates regarding the inclusion of human culture within the physical environment. Despite the wide range of perspectives, all forms of ecological criticism maintain the core idea that human culture and the physical world are intertwined, mutually influencing each other. Basu (2020) points out that Ecocriticism focuses on "the inexplicable bond between the nature and human" (p.1353). Hence, Ecocriticism recognizes the importance of both humans and the ecosystem, acknowledging their deep connection. It balances its critical stance between literature and the land, while also negotiating the relationship between the environment and man.

Rowe (1994), an ecologist and advocate of ecocentrism, argues for a perspective on the environment that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living beings and natural systems. According to Rowe (1994), it is crucial to move away from a human-centered view that perceives nature merely as a means for human exploitation. Instead, embracing an ecocentric outlook is necessary, which recognizes the integral value of all

biotic entities. Rowe (1994) highlights the significance of comprehending natural cycles, processes, and the intricate interactions among various species and their surroundings. By acknowledging the interdependence of all creatures, man can foster relationship with the natural world in a sustainable way. According to Rowe (1994), the Ecosphere, in its entirety, holds greater importance and impact compared to the human world. It is characterized by being "more inclusive, more complex, more integrated, more creative, more beautiful" (pp. 106-107).

### Analysis and Discussion

Tarar (2021) thematizes human-nature bond in narrative of the novel through different characters' affiliation with nature. In the novel, *Sorrows of Sarasvati*, for example, Parushni, as a character, embodies the essence of cultivating love and fostering a deep bond with nature. Through her actions and interactions, she exemplifies the significance of this relationship and highlights the transformative power, it holds for both individuals and the natural world. By immersing herself in nature's embrace, she opens herself to its teachings and gains profound insights into the delicate interplay of life. She embodies reverence, gratitude, and awe in her every interaction with the natural world. Through her actions, she inspires others to develop a similar connection and to embrace a more harmonious and responsible way of living. For instance, "Facing the sun, Parushni entered the clump of trees and made her way through their dense shade" (p.27). This line signifies Parushni's active engagement with nature, positioning herself in direct alignment with the sun, the ultimate source of energy and life.

Tarar (2021) pinpoints that "Many of the tree trunks had been hollowed out but no one could dare touch them as they believed Yakshina and Yakshini, the omniscient spirits, inhabited them" (p. 27). This line emphasizes the cultural and spiritual beliefs attached to nature. The presence of spirits in the hollowed tree trunks symbolizes the reverence and respect, humans hold for the natural world. It highlights the acknowledgment of a sacred bond between humans and nature, where certain elements are regarded as inhabited by divine entities, fostering a sense of awe and protection. Trees are considered sacred in some societies. Tarar (2021) comments:

When she reached the tree considered sacred by the infertile women, she stopped for a while. The branches of this peepul tree and its bulky and towering trunk were wrapped in numerous colorful threads. Each of the threads had been twined by a woman who was barren and craved for fertility... (p. 27)

The above lines illustrate Parushni's profound bond with nature, capturing her active engagement, spiritual reverence, intuitive connection, and acknowledgment of nature's transformative power. They emphasize the



reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world, where nature provides solace, guidance, and fulfillment, while humans cultivate respect, awe, and trust in return.

While visiting the lake Parushni, "she would often encounter this brown deer with white belly roaming in its surroundings. She had named him Pindroo" (P. 28). The encounters between Parushni and Pindroo highlight the depth of the human-nature bond. Through their interactions, a sense of mutual respect, understanding, and companionship is established, emphasizing the interdependence and shared existence between humans and environment. Tarar (2021) weaves the beauty of nature through figurative language:

Surf was floating above the waters like white birds in the sunshine. The sound of roaring waters was still audible in places these surf laden currents were originating from. A warm air touched the stiffened and frigid body of the plant for the first time. The flood water also smoothed and stretched its span like a weary traveler who relaxes after covering a long distance. Here, it flowed without any hindrance for days and nights; the distinction between day and night had become clearer by now. The sun would rise, and its warmth would penetrate the water until it was blunted by its coldness; but as the darkness of night descended, coldness would re-emerge on the surface. On its path, numerous small streams would merge into its expanding course; but one night, there was an unusual surge in the roar of the inflowing waters. (p. 42)

The passage highlights the interconnectedness, dynamism, and power of nature. It conveys the insightful bond between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the need for a deep understanding and respect for these forces. It also serves as a reminder of our role as custodians of the environment, urging us to protect and preserve the delicate balance of nature for the well-being of both humanity and the planet. Similarly, Tarar (2021) describes beauty of nature, and Virchan connection with nature:

The sun rose and the morning breeze stopped blowing with his head dropped, he kept on walking. The sun rose higher and colourful birds flew from within the reeds in the marshlands of Sindhu, Virchan heard them twittering and observed how their wings reflected brilliant silvery hues. (p. 104)

In her encounters with the natural environment, Parushni demonstrates a heightened sensitivity and attunement to the subtle rhythms and intricacies of the world around her. She engages in deliberate acts of observation, listening, and contemplation, allowing her to forge a deep connection with the elements. Parushni's deep connection with nature is skillfully painted in the following paragraph:

She bent down and adjusted her ear with the flow; she was trying to listen to the river through hall of her body. Yes. In the long distance, she could hear a mild roar of rushing waters. The river was speaking, but in just a gentle babble yet. The long-awaited big waters were coming She leapt out of the water like a black deer and reached the riverbank... (p. 44)

The above passage illustrates Parushni's profound bond with nature, showcasing her ability to perceive and interpret the signs and messages that emanate from the environment. It exemplifies her intuitive connection and responsiveness to the rhythms and changes within the natural world, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Likewise, Samroo's bond with nature and urge to have communion with it is pictured by the novelist as:

Samroo looked at the flow of river. He felt an urge to commune with the water. But what would he say, that was the question? The water was stretching its span around his feet while he was lost in his musings. (p. 66)

Tarar (2021) emphasizes the human-nature bond through Samroo's artistic skills and his use of natural materials:

He used to engrave shapes of birds, deer, and fish on the stone stamp seals so deftly and masterfully that they seemed to be living and moving. The villagers used to fasten the stamp seals to their arms and hang on the mud walls of their thatches. He had exquisite skill in designing different types of hoes and scrapers of stone. (p. 46)

The above passage highlights the intimate connection between human creativity, craftsmanship, and the natural world. Samroo's artistic skills and his use of natural materials exemplify the human capacity to engage with and celebrate the beauty and resources offered by nature. It highlights the cooperative relationship between humans and their environment, where the natural world serves as both inspiration and medium for creative expression. This intimate connection between his living space and his craft signifies the fusion of human existence with the natural world. The materials used in constructing his thatch are derived directly from nature, emphasizing the interdependence and utilization of natural resources by humans. His skill in carving and crafting intricate designs on these natural materials demonstrates a profound understanding and harmony with the unique forms and textures offered by the sea-shells and conches. By adorning themselves and their dwellings with Samroo's creations, the villagers express a deep affinity for the beauty and vitality of nature.



While entering the city Virchan is wonderstruck to see that "There is not even a single tree in Mohenjo Daro" (p. 88). "Really, there is not even a single tree in the whole of Mohenjo," Virchan spoke with wonder. "Why is it so?" (p. 88). Here, there is an allusion towards deforestation, which is taking place rapidly. And Virchan comments on indifference of city dwellers towards natural world:

Because you have removed yourselves from trees, greenery, and water. You know, only few of us live in your cities. We cannot. We find it difficult to breathe in these congested environs. We need an open air. I won't live here for long, I'll move to the fields of Hari Yupia for farming. (p. 89)

Tarar (2021) emphasizes relationship between the natural world and humans specifically regarding the pursuit of food and sustenance through the character of Gagri, who addressing Cheeva, says that "you know that I've killed many bhookars. (p. 67), "by tracing the claw marks and droppings of the bird, the place where it would sit" (p. 58.) Gagri "could be credited as the only consummate bird hunter (p. 58). Gagri "had to sit motionless as if turned to stone so that the bird might not notice her presence" (p. 58). Normally, the villagers depend on "wheat and vegetable such as peas and green beans as their staple food, the fish meat also formed an important part of their daily food intake" (p. 58). Too, "they would relish the meat of a migratory bird as a rare delicacy" (p. 58). Here, the mention of the villagers' usual consumption of wheat, vegetables, and fish highlights the importance of diverse food sources which spring from nature. The villagers "would beg Gagri to hunt for them, with the promise of a bowlful of wheat for her at the harvest time" (p. 58) because Gagri, being a skilful hunter, could "hunt down a bird with a cane" (p. 59). The villagers' reliance on Gagri to fulfill their craving for the bird meat further highlights the bond between humans and nature. They depend on her expertise and promise her a reward of wheat at harvest time in exchange for her hunting prowess. This exchange reflects the interdependence between humans and the natural world, where resources are shared and appreciated.

Despite her success in this skill, Gagri experiences a deep sorrow when killing a bird, revealing the conflicting emotions that can arise from the act of taking a life for sustenance. Gagri "was filled with profound sorrow while killing a bird" (p. 59) and "something inside her that implored Gagri, "Do not hit, do not kill" (p. 61), and "she could not hit. It had never happened before" (p. 61). Here, Gagri's hunting experience, highlights a profound shift in her relationship with nature and her internal conflict regarding the act of killing. This internal voice, which Gagri cannot fully comprehend, challenges her previous actions and raises questions about the ethical implications of her hunting activities. This sudden hesitation and reluctance to harm the bhookar bird represents a significant shift in Gagri's

perception and relationship with nature. It signals a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all living beings and a deeper empathy for the creatures, she once targeted without hesitation.

While hunting, when Gagri felt thirsty, "she stopped by akatran shrub, removed sand around its bottom and plucked a root of it. She soon resumed her walk while chewing the cleaned root to quench her thirst" (p. 63), recognizing its potential as a water source. Here, Gagri's resourcefulness and deep connection with the natural environment is evident. "Gagri was chewing the root of katran and its intoxicating aroma was pervading her whole body" (P. 66). Chewing on the cleaned root of the akatran shrub, she takes advantage of its natural properties, allowing the plant's moisture to alleviate her thirst. This action showcases Gagri's adaptability and reliance on the resources offered by the natural world. Further, her ability to identify beneficial shrubs and utilize their properties demonstrates a deep bond and reliance on nature for survival.

Water is a necessary source of life and life is impossible without it. Prushni points out that every creature is to depend on water for survival and sustenance because "Nothing survives without water" (p. 68), and no creature can "thrive without water" (p. 68). Gagri, too, says that "water sustains life." (p. 68). Virchan, addressing Parushni, says that "Trees, animals, and water breathe like us, but what they do not have is the free will. We are free to move. We should not confine ourselves to one place, one village, and one riverbank" (p. 72). Further, Vichran says that human bond with nature is inevitable and even natural. Tarar (2021) elaborates this idea beautifully:

Why should human beings uproot themselves from their dwellings? Isn't it? Virchan, we human beings, animals, trees, and plants-are more alive when we stay closer to each other. When one of us departs, it enervates the others. We all-humans, animals, trees, and plants-are like measuring weights that remain constant when we stay together otherwise.... (p. 72)

Massive cutting of trees is taking place. "The trees from the banks of Sindhu were being used to fuel these kilns; their number was fast depleting" (p. 84). And, "all the kiln owners used to send their hired men to cut the trees for fuel" (p. 99). The advent of kilns results in excessive cutting of trees and the extinction of wild animals. Tarar (2021) comments:

Before kilns were built, the banks of Sindhu were surrounded by large patches of thickly dense jungle where light could not penetrate. Elephants and rhinoceros used to roam the impenetrable jungle once. That is why the shapes of these wild animals had been appearing on their stamps for centuries.... because of the shrinking woods. (p. 100)

Moreover, kilns are giving invitation to air pollution. The writer points out that "The sky was streaked with smoke that was emitting from the kiln" (p. 132).

### Conclusion

*Sorrows of Sarasvati* beautifully depicts the profound bond between humans and nature. Through different characters in the narrative of story, Tarar (2021) highlights the significance of this relationship and its transformative power. Characters interact with the natural world, depend on the natural resources, and find consolation in the natural world. They manifest friendly attitudes towards nature, acknowledging nature as a supreme entity in existence. Their interactions with the natural world exemplify their reverence and awe, inspiring others to develop a similar connection and embrace a sustainable lifestyle. For example, the encounters between Parushni and the brown deer, Pindroo, establish a sense of mutual respect and understanding, highlighting the interdependence between humans and the natural world. The ultimate point highlighted in Tarar's (2021) novel *Sorrows of Sarasvati* is the profound significance of the human-nature bond and its delicate interplay throughout the narrative. Through characters like Parushni and Gagri, the novel exemplifies the transformative power of cultivating a deep connection with nature, emphasizing themes of reverence, empathy, and responsibility towards the environment. Tarar's (2021) use of figurative language vividly depicts the beauty and power of nature, reminding us of our role as custodians of the environment. In a nutshell, *Sorrows of Sarasvati* presents a rich tapestry of human-nature bond, emphasizing the need for reverence, understanding, and responsible stewardship of the environment.

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