

Kashi from a “Boat-ride Along Ganga”

Shubham Kumar

Research Assistant, Department of English, DAV PG College, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, India

Email: davskr1999@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3928-9129>

Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 17 Mar 2025</p> <p>Revised on: 12 Apr 2025</p> <p>Accepted on: 20 Apr 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Kashi, Daruwalla, Intentionality, Phenomenology.</p>	<p>The Paper launches a phenomenological inquiry into Banaras's cultural and spiritual representation by the poet Keki N Daruwalla in his poem “Boat-ride Along Ganga”. It studies the phenomenological intentionality of the poet in relation to its cultural and spiritual representation of the city. The Paper parallelly argues about the state of the objects of the city portrayed by Keki N Daruwalla. The objectives of the paper are to study the representation of the cosmos of the Kashi in the poem and compare it with the current state of the city. The poem serves as a means of understanding the essence of a city, focusing on how urban space is experienced, imagined, and lived through poetic language. The paper also seeks to uncover how the poem mediates the reader's experience of the city, from its physical architecture and rhythms to its symbolic and cultural resonances. Daruwalla's poem is utilized as a unique order of presenting reality (Hayden White) in studying cultural representation.</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper tries to discover the representation of Banaras in poetry. The oldest living city with age-old traditions, Kashi has been the cultural and spiritual center of India, and it is a home to different religious sects. The panorama of ghats possesses an image of Kashi and represents its ways of life in the intertwining lanes. Keki N Daruwalla in his poetry Collection dedicates several poems to Kashi, but the first poem, i.e., Boat Ride Along Ganga, poses a beautiful critical picture of Banaras, which does not singularly inform of the Sublimity of Banaras but also offers a realistic picture. Observing the object with realism is a subject of another study but understanding the intentionality of the conscience of the observer or the poet will give us a unique understanding of the cultural aspects of the city. The poet indulges in dissecting the happenings around him when he is riding a boat. The poem also becomes a tool for understanding the difference between the mythical Kashi of the Puranas and the

real Kashi of the modern-day world. The poem was a part of a poetic collection from 1976, but the imagery created by Daruwalla transcends time, and the representation offers a harrowing narrative of the unique city of Banaras. Although the poems of Keki N Daruwalla do not focus on Kashi as a subject (except for a few poems), his deep interest in Indian culture and mythological themes becomes an object of interest. The poem deals with the descriptive imagery of Banaras and also reflects upon the philosophy of life and death. In fact, philosophy assumes a central position in the poem, and the critical undertones remain on the outskirts. The poet's view of Kashi also becomes an object of analysis as it represents the daily lives of the people of Kashi. The peculiarity of the city also takes part in the discussion, and the contrasting themes of life and death hook the poet's imagination.

The objective of this paper is to understand the aspects of Banaras through the poem of Daruwalla and also conduct a phenomenological analysis of the

text. The Phenomenological analysis of the text will help in understanding the essence of Kashi, focusing on how a dynamic urban space is experienced, imagined, and lived through poetic language. The objectives also include exploring the role of the poem in capturing the sensory, emotional, and existential dimensions of city life.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The existing research on the poem Boat-ride along the River Ganga takes its stance from the perspective of deep ecology, landscape, nature, and passion in poetry. There have also been studies to understand the postmodern trends in the poetry of Keki N Daruwalla.

The presence of ecological aspects in the poem is highlighted frequently as Daruwalla appears to question the hygiene of the Ganga. The critique reflects the concern posited for the river. Victor observes in the poem that a sense of Shame is brought out in these lines.

"Hygiene is a part of my conscience, and I curse it
And curse my upbringing, which makes me queasy
here."

Victor observes that the poet feels uncomfortable about the lack of hygiene, and when the poet crosses the pyres and fires, he is met with a horrible feeling. He is discomforted by the fact that people are bowing their heads to the "finality of fate" (Daruwalla).

He deduces that the poet feels the vibration of death in the river, and the pollution around the river is rampant. He also marks the ending lines of Daruwalla as how other philosophers, scholars, or poets would be uncomfortable and confused by this vision of two fires

Rahaman talks about the unfurling of hypocrisy infused in the blind beliefs of Hindu rituals and customs. He looks upon this piece as a postmodern art. He discusses that Daruwalla objectively looks at the Ganga and becomes dumbfounded because he beholds both banks of the river, he understands and notices the peculiar coexistence of the performing of sacred rituals and the ugly sights of the river. At a loss, the poet is, and therefore Rahaman quotes Daruwalla

"Dante would have been confused here

Where would he place this city

In Paradise or Purgatory or lower down"

Rahaman establishes Daruwalla's realism and points out the contrasting images discovered in the poetry of Daruwalla. He calls Daruwalla a "Hard-Core Realist" for depicting true pictures of the river where the poet can only find death, disease, deformity, and staleness. The poet expresses his awkwardness.

Rahaman comments that the poet is at a loss to view the juxtaposition of corpse fires and cooking fires and concludes that Daruwalla singularly aims to unfold the bitter truth. He discusses the amazement of the poet as he forwards to witnesses the cooking fires and the corpse fires burning side by side. He seems to express his disappointment with the treatment of the river and the unavailability of conscience in the people to revive, restore or conserve the holy Ganga. He argues that the holiest river has turned into an unholy place and Varanasi has become a picture of the filth and poverty of post-independent India. He singularly affirms the critical nature of Daruwalla. He also discusses Daruwalla as a poet of Landscape and applauds him for the scenic representation of Ganga. The central theme of the book is Ganga (Vrinda Nabar), and He argues that the poem Boat-Ride Along the Ganga in Crossing of Rivers alters the perspectives in a way that here the land is seen from the river and not the other way round. He concludes that, based on this poem, it would not be an exaggeration if it is said that Daruwalla is a poet of Nature and Landscape. He goes on to observe the presence of objective correlative in Daruwalla's poem. In this chapter, it is observed that in the poet's death is no lament. He argues that the poem Boat Ride Along Ganga is about Death and the river, and Varanasi serves as a context to be viewed concerning death.

Maharana argues that Daruwalla has created a sense of God's presence through the portrayal of surrounding landscapes in a certain manner. The treatment of landscape is an integral part of Daruwalla's poetry. He observes that in the selected poem, the landscape imagery brings in the beautiful

image of death as such. He terms the images being transcended and validates the synecdochic function.

Alam discusses the problems of modern sophisticated man affirming traditional beliefs, and the tone that is set in motion continues to be satirical

Alam states a remark of Prasanjit Mukherjee as the poem marks a break from the urban middle-class syndrome and reaches towards a different plane of experience, elemental, bordering very near myth itself.

Alam compares with Boat-ride Along Ganga, Daruwalla's other poem, The Parijat Tree, he remarks that Daruwalla used highly eloquent suggestions and picturesque expressions in the poem Boat-ride along the Ganga. ALAM remarks on a kind of poem replete with images of death, disease, and distress. He also argues that the poem becomes ironic at several stages when Daruwalla exposes age-old superstitions that have created utter confusion in the city of Varanasi.

Jha observes Boat-ride along Ganga as a poem where the poet is engaged in sustained dialogue with the myth and reality of the holy river Ganga.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research employs Phenomenology to interpret and understand the essence of consciousness. The reading of the poem will be done in a way that would encompass hermeneutic phenomenology, imaginative variation, essence seeking, and intentionality. The eidetic reduction will also come into play while analyzing Keki N Daruwalla's poem Boat-ride along Ganga.

The purpose of employing this methodology is because the objects of phenomenology are absolute data grasped in pure immanent intuition. The traditional phenomenology of Husserl, along with the later theories of the phenomenology of Heidegger, will also be considered in the analysis.

The phenomenological reduction would include the reduction of the experience of the poet to its essential elements by analysis of the layers of consciousness. Whereas hermeneutic phenomenology would be employed to inquire into the meaning-making as it happens while reading. These methods explore the language, metaphors,

and symbolism, creating layers of meaning over time, shaped by both the text and the researchers' response. Imaginative variations seek to understand the experience of readers with different cultural and social backgrounds. Essence seeking and Intentionality are the basic traditional methods of employing a phenomenological approach in which the study would seek out the central themes or feelings that define the experience of the poem, and in the later analysis, about what- it is always directed towards objects or phenomena. The city, which will be considered as an object, would amount to the definition of noema (the objective entities that correspond).

IV. FINDINGS

Kashi which serves as noema or the objective entity that corresponds to the essential structure of the acts also known as noesis. The noesis is several kinds of awareness the poet possesses to interpret the imagery in front of him. The literature serves as a history of Banaras and depicts the cultural understanding of the poet. The phenomenon of observing the imagery of the river and broadly of Kashi results in Daruwalla's poem Kashi from Boat-ride along the Ganga

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The hermeneutic phenomenology encompasses the analysis of language, metaphors, and symbolism, and researchers had already paid heed to these elements, but to inquire about these elements and understand them in terms of the object here, which is Kashi, there is a need to revisit. The poet describes the dusk at the beginning of the poem and the boats scattered around, comparing ghats with nocturnal flowers. It appears that the river, which becomes the carrier of this imagery, facilitates the poet to move forward, and the dusk acts as a contrast to those gloomy flowers that the poet calls dusk. The panoramic view of the ghats provides a panoramic view of Kashi, where many things are set in motion in a single moment. The myths also become visible, which lurk around every stair descending towards the ghats and the panda offering his legendary talk. The sewers, which act as the basis of ecological criticism, are a struggle to

trust the eternity and coexistence of Kashi, which in this case has been badly damaged. The merits and punyas that the poet accrued, though, appear to be a satire, but it gives the reader a peek into the world of spirituality and attainment. The dismissal of these ideas comes under the trial of phenomenology. The passing of the poet's boat around Manikarnika changes the tone and understanding of the poem. The satire and the realism take the backseat, and the reader tries to experience the warmth of eternal fire. The life scattered around the ghats gives us an understanding of the city's dynamic nature and its peculiar ways of working. The philosophy of life is reflected, and it leads us toward an understanding of Kashi.

If we apply Imaginative Variation in understanding the poem and try to understand our object, that is Kashi, keeping in mind the ethnography. We would achieve varied results. Earlier research would find a position alongside the phenomenological understanding of the poem. The object here in this phenomenological study is viewed and associated via the lenses of the poet, but if the researcher assumes the observer position, he would be able to realize that the Banaras, which appear to have such lofty philosophical ideologies, function in the basal understanding of those ideas. Banaras to Banarasi is very ordinary and simple, but it is *alaukik* (outworldly), not in terms of its complexities but in terms of simplicity. The simultaneous burning of fires is in contrast to a poet who observes the object from the outside, but to the researcher and the natives, it's the truth and a simple way of life.

If we assume the "I" of the poet and seek the conscious central theme, it would be very similar to the analysis of the earlier researcher, but the take and understanding according to phenomenology would make a slight shift. The object here becomes very important as it gives the dichotomy that the Poet is seeking of the two fires burning together. The working and visualisation of life and death on similar grounds and the assimilation of the one truth of life appear to be a common occurrence in the city of Banaras.

The intentionality could be studied in the manner of several kinds of awareness that the poet experiences, and then only would be able to deduce the

intentionality of the poet. The poet possesses a certain kind of temporal awareness, and it is within his stream of consciousness that keeps on developing and disrupting due to changing scenery and experiences as the boat rows. The phantom that is experienced by the poet is the grandeur and chaos appearing around the bank due to ferrying boats. The spatial awareness, which is perceived by the poet adds to the understanding of his experience. This awareness defines the object clearly as the sand, the stairs, the ghats, and the water that all exist and communicate. The poet who moves with the water understands the importance of connecting lives. The spatial awareness is also questioned as the poet exclaims that he is experiencing reality on other planes. The feeling of surrealism surpasses the poet and draws us to a picture of life in front of the ghats. The poet also depicts the awareness of his own experience as he cannot forget the sight of the sewer mouth amid all the legends and grandeur of Kashi. This awareness shapes the perception of poet in the later part of the poem and also shapes his experience on the later part of the journey. The fire he compares it with is the fire of purgatory, and even projects the object below purgatory. The self of the poet in the act of thinking paints the picture of his intentionality and the feeling he associates with the images placed in front of him.

VI. CONCLUSION

The phenomenological analysis throws light upon the experience of the poet and develops a perception of Kashi. The imaginative variation offers the justification of perception of the poet as well as the reader. The intentionality confirms the experience of the poet through temporal and spatial awareness, which yields a cultural picture of Kashi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author(s) extend their sincere gratitude to Dr. Mahima Singh, who is also the coordinator of the Project of which this research is a part. This research is funded by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alam, Faraz. The Poetry of Keki N Daruwala A Study in Theory and Vision. n.d. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/132941>>.
- [2] Perf Daruwalla, K N. Collected Poems 1970-2005. n.d. —. Crossing of Rivers. 1976.
- [3] Jha, Menakshi. The Poetry Of Keki N Daruwalla. n.d. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/485534>>.
- [4] Maharana, Satyananda. Revisiting the Landscape Tropes in the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N Daruwalla. n.d. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/474544>>.
- [5] Rahman, Md. Ataur. Postmodern Trends in the Poetry of Keki N Daruwalla. n.d. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/509139>>.
- [6] Victor, Pansy Evangeline. Deep Ecology Oikopoetics and Social Ecology in the Selected Poems of Keki N Daruwalla. n.d. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/564589>>.
- [7] Woodruff, David. The{Stanford} Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018.
- [8] Spiegelberg, Herbert and Biemel, Walter. "phenomenology". Encyclopedia Britannica, 23 Aug. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/phenomenology> . Accessed 26 September 2024.
- [9] Husserl, Edmund, and Dermot Moran. Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology. Routledge, 2012.