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Particular Reference to Orijit Sen's *The River of Stories*

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**Inducing of Readers' Empathy through the Representation of History in
Graphic Narratives with Particular Reference to Orijit Sen's *The River of
Stories***

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Abstract:

The present paper aims itself as an investigation whether a historical graphic narrative with the help of its engaging representation of history might be able to induce a reader's empathy or not. It attempts to highlight and explore the empathic details in Orijit Sen's historical graphic text, *The River of Stories*. Though it is a debatable issue whether every work of art should have an objective or not, the reader finds Sen's social and political purpose of making people aware of the details of the protest and its horrific and crude consequences against the construction of a dam on the river Narmada and the consequent inducing of empathy into them. Hence, heart-rending details of their protest and the adverse effects which induce readers' empathy are portrayed artistically and proficiently by Sen through the entire gamut of the story.

Keywords: *empathy; social-realism; history; aesthetic; experience; visual-narrative; interdisciplinary; humanity.*

Introduction:

In this age of post-modernism and technological development, there is an increasing trend to interpret art and literature from interdisciplinary perspectives. The widespread and

interdisciplinary use of the term “empathy” in the nascent of the century has a tremendous impact on the evaluation of literary and cultural texts. Susan Lanzoni (2014) comments, “At the turn of the twentieth century, empathy was best known as an aesthetic theory that captured the spectator’s participatory and kinesthetic engagement with objects of art” (p.5). Numerous studies regarding empathy have already been done related to several disciplines such as neuroscience, philosophy, social psychology and so on. Yet, research work on empathy from the perspective of literary studies remains unexplored to a great extent till date. Graphic novel that is “visual-verbal literacy” (Hirsch, 2004, p. 1212) is a rising phenomenon in cultural studies which have recourse to images accompanied by words and captions. As a form of dynamic representation, graphic medium has been increasingly developed in India since the 1990s. Its use of dual media of the verbal and the visual makes things more pertinent, authentic and credible. It helps people to think deeply, and to feel an excitement while experiencing the facts and incidents visually. The dominant mode and its “visually interesting textures” (Reynolds, 2016, 9) match up easily to the cognitive demands of the subject-matter for a learner, and because of that it becomes increasingly motivating. These graphic narratives have been gradually flourishing as a novel literary genre in global literature ever since the publication of the American cartoonist and comics advocate Art Spiegelman’s groundbreaking *Maus*. In India Orijit Sen’s *The River of Stories* (1994) is a pioneering text to introduce the graphic culture in literature though he gained recognition after the publication of Sarnath Banerjee’s *Corridor* (2004). Mimi Mondal in an interview with Orijit Sen on this book, on Kindle Magazine (Backlisting, 1 November 2013) states:

Graphic novels in India have a chequered and not very long history. The medium came into widespread appreciation only after the publication of Sarnath Banerjee’s *Corridor* in 2004 by Penguin Books India. It was around the time when people started asking about *River of Stories* again, Sen tells me, but when he wrote and published the book—more than ten years before—there was little awareness and lesser to look forward to.

The present paper aims to analyze Sen’s *The River of Stories* which is noteworthy as an influential graphic presentation of history. Though Sen sets the text within a critical historical juncture of the 1990s, the paper focuses that the text could be fraught with empathic details while one tries to grapple the significance of such moving and poignant commemoration of the past, and to entail the text as a rich empathic one. Analysis of genre, form of literary texts and close reading of the same may help a reader in this respect to learn whether the book pertains to induce empathy or not.

Sympathy and Readers’ Empathy:

Empathy is an umbrella term that encompasses diverse opinions. To put the term simply in relation to art and literature, it means feeling with others that may take place within literary spectrum or as a necessary result of reading literature. Lyuten et al. express same views

regarding the relation of arts and empathy in their article "Participant Responses to Physical, Open-ended Interactive Digital Artworks: a Systematic Review":

Listening to your favourite song can make your day, while a modern art sculpture can provoke thoughts on ethics or the lightness of being. In non-interactive art, the artist is the creator. He/she shapes his/her ideas until he/she is satisfied, and then shares them with the world. The spectator, in turn, looks at the work and interprets it.

Among various significant reasons regarding the inducing of empathy or the effect on it, the socio-historical situation and crisis deserves critical concern. Though the concept of empathy is deep rooted in different arenas other than literature, the relationship and connection between literature and empathy is almost a new phenomenon. The term "sympathy", derived from the Greek *sumpatheia*, means "suffering together" which is conceived as the precursor of the word "empathy". In English it is only in the eighteenth century that sympathy is theorized by influential critics such as Adam Smith and David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and "The Theory of Moral Sentiments" (1759) respectively. While according to Hume, sympathy signifies internal experience of a person of others' passion which induces "an equal emotion, as any original affection" (p. 368), Smith argues that it is the necessary consequence of "changing places in fancy with the sufferer" (p. 4). The concept of sympathy began to flourish in relation to diverse disciplines including art and literature. On one hand, sympathy was the focal point to the moral value of literature to the Romantic Poets, and sympathetic instinct was so common in the nineteenth century fiction. So, sympathy was not merely a device of literary endeavour; it rather appropriately proves to be a vehicle of literature dealing with the contemporary social evil. Afterwards the term sympathy is replaced by "empathy" which comes from German *einfihlung* meaning "in-feeling" or "feeling oneself into", and Robert Vischer made the initiation of the use of the concept in 1873 in his *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics* though Edward Bradford Titchener translated the German term and coined "empathy" in 1909. One can find difference between the two terms as Hammond defines these in his *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* that sympathy means "feeling for" and empathy stands for "feeling with". I. A. Richards, Rebecca West, Edith Stein, Sigmund Freud and the like are some influential critics theorizing empathy during the butt end of the century. In the twentieth century empathy has broadened its arena as it has been discussed not only in philosophy, phenomenology and psychology but also in neuroscience, arts and literature. Empathy is such a faculty of the mind and consciousness which may be divided as the lower and higher level of empathy; higher level of empathy is defined as "perspective shifting" while the lower level type is called simply a "mirroring" one.

It is almost impossible to endow "empathy" with a straitjacket interpretation. An Austrian-American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut identifies it as a kind of "vicarious introspection" coupled with "active participation" of the subject although his contemporary psychoanalyst, Christine

Olden states empathy is identification of the other with the self. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker gave useful definitions of empathy. Both of them observe that reading literature helps one to cultivate positive qualities and to empathize with others. The understanding of empathy becomes facile and helpful with the discovery of mirror neurons in the 1980s and the scientific research flowing parallel with its literary exploration. Negative connotations of empathy come in the forefront too. Since empathy studies often neglects the marginals and the poor and prefers ableism, it is sometimes conducive to social and political estrangement and the like as Ann Russo and Cherrie Moraga put forward in their study. Lauren Berlant and Richard Delgado express same views too. However, in recent decades studies show that literature and empathy have been intricately related to each other. While reading a piece of literature, one certainly faces the issue of perspective taking or role taking. To observe others' viewpoint is central to this periphery where narrative empathy is prioritized. Suzanne Keen (2012) is noteworthy in this arena who defines the term as "the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition" (p. 2). The connection between literature and empathy is critical. In this connection, it deserves mention that form and style, method and genre of narration are so significant in probing through the relationship.

A significant critic Wayne Booth made a survey in *Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* about the effect of reading literature on the readers. Wayne studied whether reading a piece of literature helps readers to reorient their actions or reactions or these are for sheer entertainment. Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* further developed the study and made a significant contribution to the evolution of the theory of narrative empathy. Many instances of the past of banning several novels or texts of other genres fix our conception that reading of literature may have a bad impact on the society. Similarly, it can be inferred upon after numerous empirical studies that reading perhaps instigates its reader to do something valuable. Character identification is necessary for that purpose though the character need not be human in every case. Keen (2012) observes, "empathy for fictional characters may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization" (p. 69). Aristotle described the role of tragedy in inducing pity and fear; pity and fear may be described to be the precursor of the feeling of empathy. In this respect Aristotle is the forerunner of the attempts to investigate "how we feel for art, and how we respond to the feeling of others" (Martin, p. 2). Kristy Martin (2013) makes valuable comments in the discussion of sympathy which might be equally pertinent in the context of observing reader's empathy:

It seems to bind the nature of our attention to art to ethical benefits in the world: through feeling for literature we might learn to feel for more people, be prompted to help others, or be enabled to contemplate moral decisions more clearly and tolerantly. (p. 2)

Though Bertolt Brecht's epoch making theory "alienation effect" does not go at par with the idea of Brigid Lowe (*Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An alternative to the*

Hermeneutics of Suspicion) or Suzanne Keen (*Empathy and the Novel*) or Wayne Booth (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*), readers find it difficult to agree with him. Emotion is something which a reader cannot be bereft of. Noel Carroll (2001) insightfully defines that emotions are “intimately related to attention” (p. 225). Kant's view of the exercise of emotions in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is a little bit different to Carroll. He is of the view that emotions have nothing to do with morality; it is only actions which is associated and responsible for a person's ethical conduct. Nussbaum is directly in opposition to Kant's anti-emotion responses. Nussbaum's view of forming one's ethical attitude corresponds to or depends upon one's feeling for others. Nussbaum emphasizes on the power of literature capable of humanizing a person; it teaches us “how to live.” She (1990) says:

...there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it [...] that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional prose [...] but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. (p. 3-4)

According to Nussbaum, literature refines one enabling him or her understand other's pathos and illuminates him or her to the darkness of other's mind. Nussbaum states in his *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (2001) that with an exposure to mere subtle amount of morality must “make room for mutual respect and reciprocity; that it should treat people as ends rather than as means, and as agents rather than simply as passive recipients of benefit” (p. 12). Keen (2007) says too supporting her in *Empathy and the Novel*, “novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world” (p. xv). Feeling for others is central to this discussion which is vital to human beings and literature helps this to grow within them. Christopher Butler's *Pleasure and the Arts: Enjoying Literature, Painting and Music* (2005) recounts this further. Audrey Jaffe adds to these a valuable perspective from the standpoint of Victorian fiction and Victorian spectators. She observes that sympathy or fellow feeling is associated with or corresponds to spectatorship as she states that it “is inseparable from issues of visibility and representation because it is inextricable from the middle-class subject's status as spectator and from the social figures to whose visible presence the Victorian middle classes felt it necessary to formulate a response” (8). She emphasizes that a sympathetic spectator is of immense importance in the exercise of feeling towards others but from a distance. Martin is in direct confronting to Jaffe as the former shows that not only vision is of sole importance in the exercise of compassion but also all the senses are involved in that exertion. Probably that is why the showing or exploration of empathy towards others differs from person to person. It is a debatable issue whether ethics is related to respect and care of others or not. An American psychologist Carol Gilligan correlates the two positively: “...ethics should be based on the idea of mutual human dependency, of care rather than justice” (Martin, p. 9). Empathy is as if like sympathy, “a distinctively human mode of understanding that dissolves the boundaries of the self, and unites humanity” (Lowe, p. 222). Empathy is such an abstract quality which may be defined as a shared sentimentality grounded on interchangeable necessity.

Empathy is necessarily distinguished from other forms of abstract qualities of human beings such as sympathy, altruism, compassion, pity and the like. Sympathy may be defined as the precursor of empathy and similar point of comparisons exist in the discourses corresponding to sympathy and empathy. Yet a subtle distinction may be found between sympathy and empathy. Keen observes while sympathy is “feeling for” others, empathy is “feeling with” others. Empathy is a recent term came into use in the early twentieth century, and previously authors use those terms interchangeably. British literary critic John Carey makes a debatable comment while arguing in the context of modernist literature that literature in the modern times has been dissuaded from its exploration of humanity. Carey (1992) comments:

...the principle around which modernist literature and culture fashioned themselves was the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity. (p. 21)

Michael Whitworth’s observation is worth mentioning in this context:

Modernist writers distinguish between abstraction and empathy, often claiming to prefer the former. In the novel, the means by which earlier generations of writers would have allowed readers to identify with a character are eschewed or radically revised; in poetry, the identifiable speaking voice of lyric poetry is avoided, or framed in unfamiliar contexts. For example, in narrative, the use of complex time schemes tends to disrupt continuity and thus disrupt our identification with a character. If events which belong late in the chronological sequence are presented earlier in the narrative, then the reader views the chronologically earlier events with ironic detachment, knowing more than the participants. In some writers, notably Wyndham Lewis, the narrator’s language may also block empathy, presenting the characters as cultural constructs rather than as free agents. (quoted in Martin 12)

In direct contrast to these observations, Martin (2013) empirically proves that “modernism does indeed offer original descriptions of particular forms of feeling that emotion matters to modernism” (p. 12). Irish American philosopher Shaun Gallagher suggests that to show empathy on others one should know the very person’s mind which may include their beliefs and customs, rituals, emotional shape and so on. But another set of critics such as British writer Vernon Lee and others assume that this theory is not sufficient as one person needs to learn more in order to understand others. Empathy has a delicate sense which might be capable of apprehension or comprehension of others’ mental state. Different complex philosophical theories develop regarding the interpretation of one’s mind. Among these the most influential ones are “Theory Theory” and “Simulation Theory”. The first theory explicates that a human being should have a general perception or consciousness of how mind functions in different situations. By the help of these general formal rules and trajectories one may be able to perceive others’ mind. Simulation theory is more reasonable than the previous one which describes that by recreating others’ experience or feeling one might be able to understand the person’s emotional states. Revamping of others’ experience is central to this latter philosophy, and theory of empathy is close to this

Particular Reference to Orijit Sen's *The River of Stories*

one. That emotion is a higher faculty of our mind is empirically proved and accepted by Nussbaum. In her *Upheavals of Thought*, she states that emotions are not mere "energies" or "impulses" rather they are "cognitive", fraught with ethics, logic, and reason. There is a necessary connection between rationality and emotion. Hence emotion in fiction proffers a reader a form of knowledge.

The River of Stories, an Empathic Text:

The compelling narration of *The River of Stories* centers round the 1989 Narmada Bachao Andolan. The book is written and illustrated by Orijit Sen, an artist, designer and founder of the iconic People Tree brand, and is hand-lettered by Amita Baviskar. *The River of Stories*, a sixty-two page long book with gripping narrative, was published with a small monetary assistance from Kalpavriksh, an NGO on environmental issues. The text is an upshot of the author's direct involvement in the Narmada Bachao Movement which was a protest against the construction of a dam over the Narmada River. Hence, this semi-fiction is an invaluable text representing the historical truth within the garb of a graphic narrative that is through the correlation of images and text. Making use of the dual medium that is verbal and visual, Sen tries to register and imprint the historical fact into the readers' mind: "the visual dimension of the graphic novel contributes substantially not only to our understanding of history but also to a larger question of how history can be represented" (Nayar, 2016, p. 14). Sen is not the only one graphic novelist to make use of a historical situation stirring readers of graphic texts. Srividya Natarajan, Durgabai Vyam and S. Anand deal with the lives of the subaltern in their groundbreaking graphic text *Bhimayana* (2011) which is primarily built on the life of the social reformer B. R. Ambedkar who campaigned against the discrepancies against the dalits. Other well-known instances are Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm* (2010) which enlivens the Emergency period in the 1970s; Malik Sajad's *Munnu* (2015) based on the critical situation in Kashmir and so on. In the recent times fraught with the breakthroughs of technological modernism, artists and writers are continuously searching for new media that can reach to the readers in the most effective and efficient way possible. Probably the retake or representation of history and developing the narrative empathy through the entire gamut of it is one such way. In modern times while critics are bent on discovering the subtle connections of empathy and literature, one can surely find the author's attempt to induce reader's empathy through the heart-rending narrative of the social, environmental and political issues pivoting round the construction of the controversial dam on Narmada. In the context of the relation between empathy and literature, Colin G. Johnson comments in his article "Fitness in evolutionary art and music: a taxonomy and future prospects":

An important aspect of many works of art is their engagement with the outside world – artworks frequently comment on the world, either in a very direct way, but also via indirection, connotation and allusion.

The Negotiation of Reader's Empathy in Sen's *River of Stories*:

“*River of Stories* is a succinct and visually sumptuous work on the subject of the Narmada Bachao Andolan,” says Monidipa. Nayar (2016) eulogises that Sen’s text “possesses all the qualifications of a literary text (the construction of self-contained worlds, character development, plot, metaphoric use of visual and verbal language, among others) but adds the visual dimension to the narration” (p. 7). Two narratives within the guise of a single story grow side by side, and they are intricately related to each other. With the help of the frame narrative the main story develops and reaches the climax. Mohor Ray beautifully portrays:

Within the book, two distinct streams of story and style merge, in response to the crux of the Andolan’s questions on two developmental models—one indigenous and self-sustaining, the other modern and large-scale.

Vishnu, probably the fictional representation of the author’s self, is a Delhi-based young journalist; he is about to start a new journey to Ballanpur to cover a story regarding reactions and after-effects of the protest. The book opens with a prologue which is subtitled “A Dream”. The opening of the book aptly portrays the contemporary situation of India, its progresses and failures as Vishnu while watching the television swings the channels and listens to the Republic Day lecture delivered by Khapi K. Soja, the Minister of Sports and Youth Welfare. “The Prologue” itself is a satire towards the prevailing circumstances of the country as it brilliantly posits two pictures of upgrades and degradation: the first one is characterized by the indifferent speech of the minister while the people outside Vishnu’s window berating scathingly who are suffering due to their wretchedness despite the so called improvement of the nation characterize the second. Sen’s magnum opus looks back to the crucial period in the past when people of the country went under great torment due to the government’s rash decision and the consequent great environmental hazards. Sen deftly depicts by the help of his skilled graphic art the suffering of the all and sundry against the prevailing government. “The Prologue” epitomizes the significance of a river and the dependence of the original habitat of that county on it. Sen satirizes the view of the government to abolish the “adivasis” with a highly advanced social life by making a dam on the river replacing the natural habitat there. The government ignored completely the agonizing situation of the villagers that they have to endure after the construction of the dam. The building of the dam does not only mean the abolishing of adivasis and the deprivation of their lands but it also prospects of some far-rooted and dangerous consequence of it such as their economical hazards. It must be questioned, and Vishnu seems to appear as a saviour of them. Sen’s satiric style of portraiture strengthens the reality of the people under great threats. In the context of using individual style of portraiture and painting, Heijer and Eiben cogently comments in their article ‘Using scalable vector graphics to evolve art’:

When we take a wider view, and regard different artworks of centuries, it is evident that artists over centuries have experimented with art materials, layouts, subjects, techniques, etc. All this has resulted in a wide variety of visual output.

The Minister continues his lecture emphasizing on the advancements the country has made in the previous years in different fields - social, political and economic. Vishnu murmurs on the darker side of our country in spite of the so-called civilization and life: "But then I keep on hearing of people who are hungry, jobless...illiterate" (p. 5). This dark reality is of much significance in order to understand the real situation of every people in this country. The government certainly neglects this as is understood by the words of Soja: "It's all a matter of national priorities...If we all wait for every adivasi to leave the jungle and adopt a civilized way of life we shall be left far behind in the global race" (p. 5). Soja's remarks satirically show the unempathetic situation on the part of the government: "In any case, it's only a question of time! You say they need food and water? We'll give them potato chips and Pepsi cola..." (p. 6). There is not a single effort by the government to understand the need of the common folk and to fulfill them. On the other hand, Vishnu, a young journalist grows more and more empathic towards their situation.

Part One is entitled "A Spring" emblemizing the juxtaposed ancient and modern world. This part is divided into "Kujum Chantu" and "Relku's Story". Sen weaves those stories by the help of indigenous myths and stories. Malgu Gayan in the first section sings with the help of "God's wisdom" and "a rangai" the story of the making of the world, its inception. Kujum Chantu made the world out of the dirt rubbed off her chest, and then made trees, lizards, tigers, bears, snakes, birds, and humans in succession: "And so, the entire world, with all its creatures, with enough food in it for all, she created" (p. 12). This section symbolizes that the ancient world was lavish and abundant, plentiful and copious. The other section of this part introduces the main story of Relku. Vishnu as a journalist is going to cover a newspaper report on migrant workers, Relku seems to tell the whole story while giving the interview to Vishnu. Relku's description terribly brings out the deprivation, dispossession and withdrawal of their whole tribe from their native land. The poignant description leaves readers baffled and perplexed. The central story pivots round the village of Jamli, near to Ballanpur and by the bank of river Reya where Relku lived. Nature was fresh there and rich with trees and birds. They made their livelihood often by hunting. The forest department took the horrible initiative to make an end to their living in that area as "The very existence of people living in such a primitive way is an obstacle for modernizing the country" (p. 15). The adivasis are deprived of their rights, of cultivating land, grazing cattle, taking wood and hunting on forest on that area as the "sarkari people of Ballanpur" made the declaration that these are "the lands which belongs to sarkar" since the government has already declared the area as a reserve forest. It is satiric that development may only worsen their situation; it cannot evolve their condition as an adivasi protests to the scheme of government, "This land is our mata. She gives us food and shelter. She takes care of our needs. We worship the trees, the river, the hills..." (p. 16). But as the jungle has come to develop, the roads are being completed, and shops are being built, the people gradually began to lose their homes, the right on their land. A fine symbol of snake for road is used here to represent how vicious the situation began to turn afterwards when the place gradually developed. They have been now stooped to "landless labourers with no money or possessions." Life has been

synonymously used here as a river. Alongwith these fictional voices, the protests of factual characters like Khursheo are quoted by Sen here:

“Our village will be submerged forever....The government says they will resettle us. But our community will be broken up. For countless generations, uncles, cousins, clan relations have lived close to each other....When they shift us to different places, we will all be cut off from each other. Our ancestors and spirits, who reside in the forests and hills, will be abandoned. Our music, our festivals, our gatherings, will all come to an end. Will there be any point in continuing to live after that?” (p. 52).

Buribai is another real figure who protests against the “bazarias” who disturbed the local people. In an interview with Paul Gravett, Sen states that due to his father’s transferrable job he has developed in himself “an empathy for ‘outsiders’ and people who didn’t fit in.” Sen has also said happily that his text has done a lot in changing people’s behaviour towards nature. He avers, “I still meet people who tell me they read *River of Stories* years ago and it helped change the way they look at development, ecology and the rights of indigenous people in India.” Moreover Sen asserts that this graphic text is at least able to spread the message among the people, students and activists who were ignorant of the environmental movement regarding this and the massive impact of this project on environment, people and nature as well. Sen has also taken the step to publish it in Hindi and distribute among the activists.

Conclusion:

River of Stories focuses more on the mental processes of the characters and their relationships. Though their minds are portrayed in a way, readers are engaged in the study of the characters’ mind, and are compelled to comprehend their wish and desire, impulse and mental state. Thus the book is able to teach moral values and social behaviour. The text exhibits a collective experience of the tribal community in a certain critical juncture of time and their momentous struggle; it is not a saga of an individual, though both the cases need serious concern and feeling of the masses. Surely millions of people will get privileges after the completion of the dam, but the situation will also put the nearby villagers into great difficulty which the government is overlooking. As Sen was directly in touch of the local tribal communities, he was plagued by the adverse impact of the construction of a dam on nature and the resultant plight of its habitants. As a consequence Sen took the initiative to lodge a literary protest, and *River of Stories* is the consequence of it which is “intimate, complex and rich with observed detail” (Interview). The construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh led to the dislodging of the local tribe and their consequent undergoing of hardship, pain and distress. Sen’s attempt to humanize their situation portraying their terrible struggle through this sixty two pages graphic text is a good step in this regard. Though the construction of the dam began in 1987 in spite of all these protests, the text is a literary protest which is a part of those attempts which stirred the prevailing government. As it is now proved that there is a positive correlation between reading literature and empathy, *River of Stories*, a qualitative fiction, may certainly have affective

benefits on its readers which beautifully depicts a crisis of humanity. Sen cogently remarks, "The relationship between art and social change isn't a direct cause-and-effect one. It isn't a short-term thing. Art speaks to the heart as well as the mind, and the way it impacts us as individuals and societies can be very powerful and lasting, but is not necessarily measureable" (Interview with Rukminee Guha Thakurta and Nityan Unnikrishnan).

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