

Search for Ancient River in Contemporary India: Heritage, History and Politics of Saraswati

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*A dissertation submitted for the partial fulfillment of
BS-MS Dual Degree in Science*



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April, 2021

Certificate of Examination

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “*Search for Ancient River in Contemporary India: Heritage, History and Politics of Saraswati*” submitted by **Ms. Amisha Yadav** (Reg. No. MS16052) for the partial fulfilment of BS-MS dual degree programme of the Institute, has been examined by the thesis committee duly appointed by the Institute. The committee finds the work done by the candidate satisfactory and recommends that the report be accepted.

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Declaration

The work presented in this dissertation, titled “*Search for Ancient River in Contemporary India: Heritage, History and Politics of Saraswati*”, has been carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. Rajesh Venkatasubramanian** at the **Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali**, for the partial fulfillment of BS-MS dual degree programme of the Institute.

This work has not been submitted in part or in full for a degree, a diploma, or a fellowship to any other university or institute. Whenever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions. This thesis is a bonafide record of original work done by me and all sources listed within have been detailed in the bibliography.

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In my capacity as the supervisor of the candidate’s project work, I certify that the above statements by the candidate are true to the best of my knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

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History plays an important role in defining nation and its appropriations. Contemporary India is facing ideological conflicts, especially for defining nation and its citizens (insiders). These ideologies are constantly trying to change the past either by recreating heritage structures or by changing history textbooks. The contemporary changes introduced are legitimized on the basis of imagined past. History has always played a role to bind the nation and create a sense of similarity among citizens. Political parties try to influence the names, history textbook writing and emotions of contemporary India. These political forces try to demonstrate their version of history so that they can inculcate a particular national identity among citizens, especially along the lines of religion and imagined majoritarian identities. This work is an attempt to understand the history and politics behind the recreation of Rigvedic river Saraswati in contemporary Indian state of Haryana and at the same time trying to relate other political stunts of renaming places, changing texts in history textbooks. This work will explore the meanings of varieties of imagined and at times invented pasts and its role in Indian politics.

Dedicated to
My late grandfather
&
my brother Dhruv

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Prejudice is the ink with which history is written.”

Mark Twain¹



Fig.1 Kalibangan's mounds near the dry bed of river Ghaggar²

¹ Saurav Basu, *NCERT History Texts: hopelessly degraded*, Vijayvaani Open Forum, 2009

² A photo taken in 1950s during A Ghosh's expedition (courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

1.1 Historical Background

The Vedas are considered to be the most ancient and sacred texts in classical Hinduism. There are four Vedas - the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The Rig Veda embodies the earliest literature of what is understood as classical Hinduism. The river 'Saraswati' is first mentioned in the Rigveda around 50 times (Danino, 2010). It was considered to be majestic and sacred. In fact, it is believed that some parts of Rig Veda are written on the banks of river Saraswati. Several Hymns are composed on it, to mark its glory. Later the river was personified as a goddess by Raja Ravi Verma. The *Nadistuti* Hymn of Rig Veda mentions that river Saraswati is in between Yamuna in the east and the Sutlej in the west. Drishadvati and Apaya were its two tributaries. However, later several texts like the Mahabharata, Tandya, Jaiminiya Brahmanas, etc mentions that the river dried up. The great battle in the epic Mahabharata is believed to have been fought on the banks of the river Saraswati.

This legendary river Saraswati, referred in Indian mythology, has been identified to the current seasonal Ghaggar-Hakra River. The geographical location of river Ghaggar-Hakra is quite similar to the glacier-fed mythical river Saraswati. Interestingly, the route of the Ghaggar River coincides with the locations of many of Harappan sites, which further prompts some scholars to assume that Ghaggar is the 'Rigvedic Saraswati'. Many scholars believe that Harappans depended solely on monsoon for their water requirement while others believe that Ghaggar river must have been perennial in the past and thus served as the main water source for the civilization.

1.2 Contemporary Conditions

The historiography around River Saraswati is a contentious issue among scholars. Many scholars believe that the river Saraswati was an imaginary one and never existed. Is Saraswati mythical? Was it there in pre-Vedic times? Did the Harappans live on the banks of river

Saraswati (paleo-Ghaggar)? Many such questions have become the most disputable and polarizing debate in India today. Such questions have pitted the two diametrically opposing theories face to face. The proponents of the theory often refer to evidence from early Indian literary sources such as the Puranas, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. However, mainstream scholars reject such evidences as mythology.

In 2014, the Union Water Resources Minister Uma Bharati explicitly stated that "finding the missing river" was one of the priorities of the Narendra Modi led NDA government (*India Today*, July 2016). Therefore, as soon as 'finding the Rigvedic River Saraswati' became a political question, the search for a river which is mightier, larger than life, has started. The geographical distribution of a large number of Harappan sites are majorly concentrated in Haryana, Panjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and UP, and not along the banks of river Indus. Fortunately, for the State, the flow of Ghaggar river matches with the geographical location of some of these Harappan sites. (Ghaggar is a seasonal river flowing in north-western India. It arises in the Shivalik hills). Some scholars believe that this indicates that the river Ghaggar might have served as the perennial water source in these areas in the past, to sustain the dry arid climate. This prompted the state to undertake extensive research about the Palaeography of the river Ghaggar. This quest to find the legendary river was finally concluded in 2015 when the river Ghaggar was proclaimed the best candidate for this glossology. In 2016, a board – Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board (HSHDB) was formed which deals with the issues related to this new river.

The 'Rigvedic river Saraswati' was put on life by the Manohar Lal Khattar government in Haryana in 2015. To regenerate the river by artificial means, the project is allocated a fund of 500 million rupees. Around 100 cusecs of water (1 cusec = 28.317 litres per second) were

pumped into it initially (*The Wire*, July 2019). The paleoclimatic studies of river Ghaggar suggests that it had two distinct perennial phases. The first phase is from 80,000 to 20,000 years ago and the second phase extends between 9000 to 4500 years ago. This later phase is often correlated with the Rigvedic Saraswati. It is further believed that the early Harappan settled along its banks.

1.3 Problems with the identification

No doubt, the Rigveda mentions a large, snow-fed Himalayan river Saraswati, which was present during the times of its composition and some part of the Rigveda is written along the banks of this holy river. But does the description of paleo-Ghaggar matches with that of mythological Saraswati? In 1995, V. N. Mishra, Director of Deccan College in Pune, an important centre of archaeological research in India, contributed an article for the magazine of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) *Manthan*, titled 'The Lost Saraswati, the Cradle of Harappan Civilization'. In his article, he focused on renaming the 'Indus Valley Civilization' to 'Indus-Saraswati Civilization' or 'Saraswati Civilization'. Later, the historian S. P. Gupta in his book *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization* further emphasized on this renaming. Today this battle for name capture had been half won. For long, we have assumed that Saraswati neither had any geography nor history. Why then there is a need to sketch the river Saraswati from Prayagraj to Runn of Kutch? I aim to answer this question in my thesis, which is far from both commonsense and logic.

1.4 Importance

The river Saraswati is not only important for Hindus, who considered it sacred and divine but it is far more important for Hindutva nationalist groups for whom its presence in contemporary times serves a dual purpose. Firstly, they may refute the generally accepted theory of the migration of the Aryans from outside and claim that the Harappans are the Rig Vedic Aryans indigenous to and descendants of the land 'Bharat'. Secondly, the framing of the Aryan

indignity will help establish and justify their compartmentalised and communal understanding of Indian history showcasing the minorities like Muslims as others who came from outside. This renaming also serves the political reason, that is, by renaming the civilization it can be claimed by India and not as shared tradition of subcontinent comprising more than one nationality of the modern times

1.5 Methodology

My research aims to understand the historiography, politics and ideology around the river Saraswati in contemporary India. Apart from studying the views of historians on the ancient river and its place in Indian history, the research aims to understand the contemporary Hindutva appropriations of history and the politics of reconstruction in the form of state government projects like Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board (HSHDB). The sources for the research range from published works of historians, press clippings, government records to interview of bureaucrats and elected representatives of Haryana government. A comprehensive literature survey was done including important articles by historians and archaeologists such as Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Suraj Bhan, V. N. Misra and others. Michael Daninio's *The Lost River: On the Trail of Saraswati* (2010) along with Akshaya Mukul's *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India* (2015) were critically reviewed. A critical survey of the media reportage of the project initiated by the Haryana government was also carried out.

The publications of HSHDB were analysed to examine the kind of history presented from the perspective of state institutions. The two pamphlets published by the Board are *Balram ji Ki Saraswati Yatra* and *Bhaswati Saraswati*. Both the pamphlets are authored by Leena Mehendale (retired IAS officer, Batch -1974). A detailed questionnaire was prepared and presented to select historians and archaeologists studying early Indian history to get the perspective of the academic community on the current state of scholarship on early Indian history especially related to River Saraswati, history writing and the project of the Haryana

government. The primary aim was to understand the intellectual perspective and to also study the state of current scholarship on Indus Civilization. In a similar way, a different set of questionnaires was also prepared to interact with the government officials associated with the HSHDB.

CHAPTER – 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“History to be above evasion must stand on documents not on opinion.”

Lord Acton³

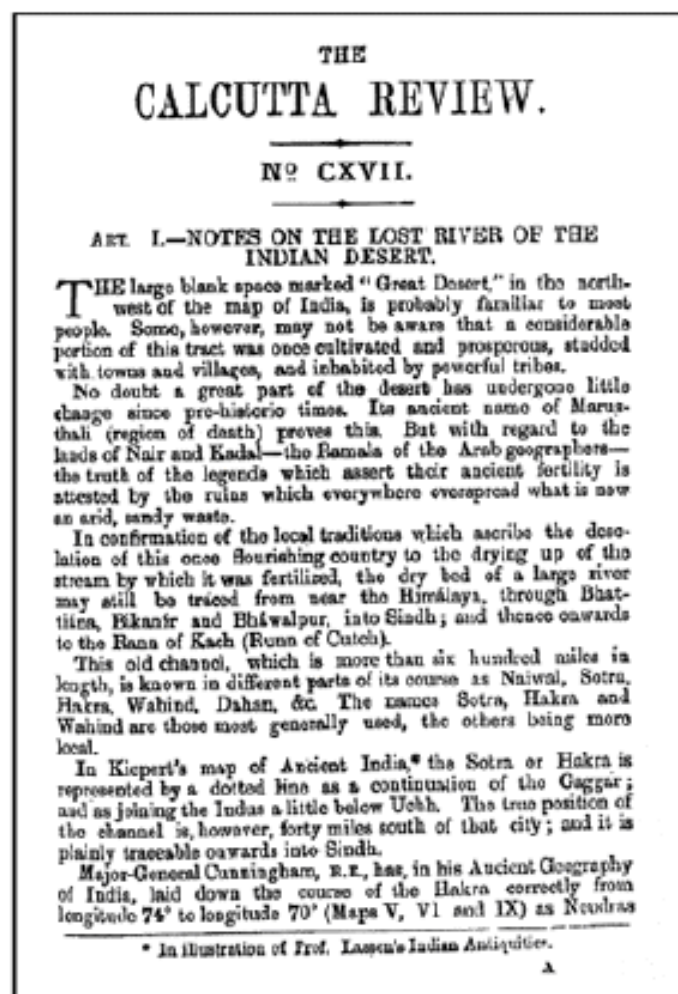


Fig.2 The first page of C. F. Oldham's anonymous paper of 1874⁴.

³ Source: Wikipedia (Lord Acton Quotes)

⁴ Picture Courtesy: Danino Michael, 'The Lost River: On the Trails of river Saraswati', 2010

2.1 Early myths and explorations

The Rig Vedic hymns had served as a source to historians interested in studying early Indian history. The text highlights certain features of Rig Vedic Saraswati like its flooding nature, length, mightiness and so on, followed by how the river vanishes somewhere in desert. A few ancient texts like Mahabharata, Purana, Abhinajanasakuntalam etc mention the river's importance in the past. However, when we talk about the politics and ideology around the holy and divine river Saraswati, extensive work has not been done. The majority of the work done regarding the river Saraswati deals with paleoclimatology, hydrography and its geology.

The early explorations of river Saraswati start from as early as 1812. Among the first to observe this lost, dried river was Lieutenant Colonel James Tod, who was deputed as East India Company political agent in Rajasthan in 1812. His work titled *Sketches of the Indian Desert* mentions that the main cause for sparse distribution and depopulation of northern desert was the drying up of Ghaggar river.

Ghaggar was first marked on Indian map in 1788. Today, Ghaggar is a seasonal river which rises in Shivalik hills near Dagshai and runs through plains crosses Chandigarh, Haryana (Ambala, Sirsa), Rajasthan (Hanumangarh, Suratgarh). It then enters Pakistan under the name of Hakra and finally drains in Arabian Sea. Subsequently, the river is observed by Major Colvin in 1833 during his project, *On the Restoration of Ancient Canals of the Delhi Territory*. He observed that the region was once populated long time ago (because of presence of ruins of towns, villages) and Ghaggar has somehow lost most of its water. Other British officials to notice Ghaggar includes Major F. Mackeson in 1844. He in his report claims that this was the same route used by Mohammad of Ghazni and his sons for expeditions of the subcontinent in the past.

In 1866, R. D. Oldham (a British geologist) was among the first to identify the river Saraswati with the river Ghaggar. He rejected all the theories that attributed the loss of Saraswati to diminished rainfall. According to him, if this would have been a cause it would have affected all other rivers equally. Oldham further stated that Yamuna's water also flowed in Saraswati during Rig Vedic times but later due to some landscape change (tectonic movement leading to plate shifts), hydrography of the region changed entirely. Oldham also reported that the Runn of Kutch was a huge delta for the lost river and the expanse of salt-silt in the area is because it was an estuary in the past.

Studies of Indologist Edward Thomas (1883) asserted that the Rig Vedic Saraswati is not present in the plains of Punjab. In fact, it is present in Afghanistan. He identified this Rig Vedic river with river Helmand of southern Afghanistan. The local name of this river 'Haraxvati' is linguistically akin with our mythical river. But he completely failed to explain other rivers such as Ganga, Sutlej etc in Afghanistan scenario. The theory was not accepted by intellectuals as the geographical topography mentioned in Rig Veda nowhere matches with this Afghanistan river. British officials during their administration have recorded majorly three things. Firstly, according to Indian culture (Rigveda, Mahabharata and other holy books) a holy river has existed in past. Secondly, that the dry river bed of Ghaggar is present and the flow of the river is seasonal in nature. Finally, near the foothills of Shivaliks a small stream Sarsuti exists.

2.2 Post-Independence Era Research

The overall research on the river Saraswati did not have any conclusive remarks; the scientific works done in the field are quite contradictory. Several prominent researchers have worked and almost all of them have come up with their own understanding of the river, their own theory about the potential sources of water for the river. The research done on the topographical and

paleontological aspects of the dry river bed hints towards the flow of some Himalayan river at the end of last ice age in Ghaggar's present basin (Courty Marie Agnes, 1986). Other research suggests that Tons (largest tributary of Yamuna) is the Vedic river Saraswati in its upper reaches (Puri V. M. K., 2004). Similarly, a research indicates that the Sutlej was the main tributary of Ghaggar and subsequent tectonic movements may have led to shifting of Sutlej and hence Ghaggar dried (ISRO, 2014). All such research concludes different types of results which show no correlation in them.

2.3 Mystery of Rig Vedic Saraswati

A new theory was put forward to solve the mystery of water sources for the river Saraswati. The geographical distribution of most of the Harappan sites is not along with the Indus river system but majorly concentrated in Haryana, Panjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, UP. This indicates that there must have been some water source for livelihood to sustain at these dry arid climatic places and this suggests the presence of some perennial source (and river Saraswati came into scene at this point) at this location in the past (Misra V. N., 2001). The presence of the dry river bed of Ghaggar-Hakra water channel further makes some scholars believe in the presence of Rig Vedic river Saraswati. Satellite imagery is also used to prove the point that a dry river bed existed in the past.

In regard to potential water sources for this river, the possibility of higher rainfall is completely ruled out because any amount of possible rainfall for such geographical region cannot suffice for a perennial flow in a mighty, lengthy river like Saraswati. It is instead believed that both Yamuna and Sutlej river must have flown in river Saraswati at some time in past. Various geographical, oral and paleoclimatic data is used to strengthen this point. Scholars like V. N. Misra emphasized on the fact that since the Indus valley has less distribution of Harappan sites

as compared to the Saraswati river (Ghaggar-Hakra channel) therefore, renaming the 'Indus Valley Civilization' to 'Indus-Saraswati Civilization' or 'Saraswati Civilization' is justified. However, he fails to answer that if the sources of Saraswati river were Yamuna and Sutlej then why there is less or nearly zero presence of Harappan sites around these rivers (since these rivers too have perennial flow and fertile land which were likely the main factors to select a site for settlement in those times).

2.4 Archaeological Studies

Many prominent Indian historians and archaeologists have tried to establish that since a greater number of sites are found in Ghaggar route as compared to Indus valley. Therefore, the civilization should be called Saraswati river civilization (Gupta S. P., 1989). But at the same time, this argument is not bought by many of the contemporary historians. This second group believes that many of the sites excavated along the Ghaggar route are sites of local culture. And only a few sites show connection to Harappa. Since river Indus is located at a very dynamic topography and changes its path frequently. So, there is a possibility that many of the Indus sites are washed away during floods in Indus in past (Ratnagar Shereen, 2000).

Another study based on archaeological evidences points that the Hakra flood plain may have been densely populated between 4th and 2nd millennia BC (Mughal M. Rafique, 1993 & 1997). Rafique identified 171 Cholistan sites of the Mature Harappan phase. He strongly disagrees with the common view of Saraswati being perennial in nature. He says that Saraswati was devoid of its water because the tributary of Hakra (that is, Chautang or Drishadvati) was captured by Yamuna, and around the same time the channel that connected Sutlej & Hakra, dried up. Both of these events eventually devoid Saraswati of its water & ultimately over a period of time, the river dried.

Studies by Indian archaeologist Vasant Shinde (2006) identifies Ghaggar-Hakra river as ancient Saraswati and Chautang as Drishadvati of the Rigvedic period. This view is highly endorsed as the present location of Ghaggar matches with that of Rigvedic Saraswati. Further it is also identified by locals.

2.5 Collapse of Harappan Civilization

Scholars from various fields have tried to give a possible conclusion to the collapse of such a brilliant civilization. Mainly there are three schools of thought on the issue. First being, that Indus cities ended due to destruction by invaders; Second is based on political & economic turmoil; Third stresses more on environmental upheavals of various kinds (Danino, 2010).

The first possibility is disregarded by many of the historians as none of the archaeological findings pointed in the direction of blood-and-thunder end of the Indus civilization. Also, almost all historians agree to the point that there is no evidence of introduction of new culture by central Asia. The theory that Aryan invasion led to collapse of this civilization is clearly rejected. Next comes the second possibility of political & economic turmoil. Many historians believe that Indus civilization was way too perfect that is, it could not tolerate or accept any change. It was unable to adapt to the changing conditions.

Another explanation for this came from work of Dilip Chakrabarti (2014). He in his studies elaborates that Harappans political fabric became almost inevitable. He also adds that there may be some human induced and other natural factors that impacted the civilization. Many studies establish that mature phase of Harappan civilization was followed by a sharp decline in rainfall. Harappan times had semiarid and arid environments. Scholars claim that the ending

phase of Harappan civilization was in parallel with arid phase and hence some severe draught may have led to decline of the civilization.

In fact, these 'prolonged draught' was a widespread phenomenon during 2200 BCE and affected large parts of China, Egypt, Mesopotamia. To give it a touch of Rigveda, many historians state that even Mahabharata has mentioned a phase of great draughts of 12 years in which many of the water sources disappeared.

The last possibility (out of all the proposed theories, it is the most considered one by the intellectuals) focuses on climatic & environmental issues. Geologists believe that land degradation & deforestation had made the civilization more vulnerable towards the violent floods. And in such a climatic condition even a small shift tips up the process of desertification. Historians believe that these floods occurred when the flow of Sutlej increased because the channel connecting it to Saraswati was no longer effective. Similarly, Beas (tributary of Indus) got swollen due to lost water of river Saraswati. All this led to high floods in Indus valley. So, pro-Saraswati historians substantiate that actually the drying of Saraswati river led to increased floods in Indus & ultimately to the end of this civilization.

On this basis, many warn that 21st century might mark the end of 3000-year-old Ganga civilization. But the point here is, that if rainfall was that excessive that it flooded these rivers too often. Then in such a scenario according to R.D. Oldham (1886), any place will become a marsh (which is completely in contrast with the paleontological research of the area) as river repeatedly overflowed & flooded. So, excessive rainfall cannot be a cause for the end of the civilization.

2.6 The Aryan Question

According to the 'Aryan Theory', it is believed that Aryans are the people who migrated from central & western Europe into the Indian subcontinent. They have written the Vedas. According to the generally accepted timeline, the Aryans entered the subcontinent around 2000 BCE and, the Indus civilization ended around 2000 to 1900 BCE (Thapar, 1996).

According to the standard chronology, the Vedic period extends from around 1500 to 500 BCE, also this is the same time frame in which the Rigveda and other Vedas were written. During the same period, other religious texts such as the Brahmanas and Shrauta-sutras. And the end phase of this period is marked by the composition of the Aranyakas and the Upanishads (Thapar, 2019). The Aryans first settled in Punjab and gradually moved south-eastwards. Here, they encountered a river 'Saraswati', which dried up. They have written and collected their hymns here (Thapar, 1987).

Since, a lot of Harappan sites are along the route of Ghaggar river compared to Indus river, therefore it is argued that the former should be seen as a nucleus of the civilization. According to Rig Veda, Saraswati lost a major part of its water source around 2000-1700BCE (Danino, 2010). The loophole here is that if the ancient Saraswati has dried up towards the end of Indus valley civilization (2000-1900 BCE), then how can Rig Vedic rishis (Rigveda is written around 1500 BCE) write about it? It is not possible to write about something which you have not encountered (I think even in those days same scenario must have been there). Now, if we assume that Rig Veda was written before the end of Harappans then Aryan question remains unsatisfied. We know, Rig Veda is written by Aryans who came from Central Asia to the subcontinent. But even if we assume that the above scenario is true then also how can they

write about Saraswati and not the civilization which was flourishing around it, that is, Harappans (there is no mention in any of the Vedas about them).

Archaeological excavations have made it clear that there are no signs of mass slaughter at any of the excavated sites of the Harappan civilization. It clears that Aryans were not responsible for the vanishing of these civilizations. And none of their records shows any mention of the Harappans which clearly means that they did not encounter them. If Vedic Aryans were present in the subcontinent before drying up of Saraswati then they must have been present somewhat between 2400 and 2200BCE but records show they were entered subcontinent only after 2000 BCE (Danino, 2010). In nutshell, Aryan theory collides head on with Saraswati drying up assumption. Pro-Saraswati scholars are unable to provide a clear and satisfactory answer to this confusion. The confusion popped up because of pre-accepted timelines. Scholars like Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Shereen Ratnagar, late R. S. Sharma, late Suraj Bhan, completely agreed that identification of Ghaggar is in controversy with the generally accepted Aryan theory.

2.7 Other Proposed Theories

Since, Rigveda mentions rivers such as Saraswati, Sutlej, Yamuna & others. Many scholars believe that Yamuna served as a potential source to river Saraswati, then why the Rigvedic people mentioned both of them as very important & scared river. Since, the former one is a tributary of the latter one. River Sirsa in Haryana has also been suggested as a candidate for this naming process (*Habib Irfan*, 2001). But the counter argument that comes here is that the Sirsa river was never lost and hence it will never fit into the Rigvedic landscape.

In modern times, canals have been dug to transfer water of Yamuna to Chautang (a river flowing west) but those attempts wasted because of slope differences then how could in the past Yamuna an east flowing river serves as tributary for a west flowing river Saraswati (Danino, 2010).

Many historians even say that Aryans must have named Ghaggar river as Saraswati in the memory of some previous grand river which they encountered while entering the subcontinent. But this theory can neither can be proven scientifically nor believed textually.

Scientists like Henri-Paul Francfort proposed that most of the Harappan settlements had vast irrigation systems, they used long canals for irrigation purpose. He has termed the dry beds wherever seen as '*ancient natural waterways*'. But this theory is unlikely to be accepted as it is very difficult especially in those times to maintain & create such long canals (as distance between Yamuna & Kalibangan is more than 1000 km).

The Ramapithecus's fossils found in Shivalik Hills indicates that the human life originated there (Wakankar V. S., 1985). Since these Shivalik Hills were quite close to the proposed route of the river Saraswati, hence it was proclaimed that the life originated on the banks of river Saraswati. But his theory was contradicted on the basis that Ramapithecus evolved to become Ape, Orangutan & not humans (Habib, 2001). Another theory, put forward suggests that Saraswati contributed its water to Ganga via Yamuna. Hence, Saraswati gave a major portion of water for Ganga's discharge. Here, a new possibility of tectonic activity advocates that the river Saraswati may have deflected from its older course & started flowing into Yamuna or as Yamuna (Valdiya K. S., 2013).

By analysing studies of Gurdip Singh (1971), it was concluded that if it is assumed that Saraswati had existed in the wet period of Holocene. Then due to excessive rainfall, catchment areas of not only Saraswati but that of Yamuna, Ganga & Indus system would also have been affected (Habib, 2001). And such meteorological conditions would have converted the land into an uninhabitable swamp.

Other historians also believes that the river Saraswati must have lied in the high rainfall areas of the Shivalik hills & supported his point by studies of Netajirao Phadtare. According to these studies, a warmer humid climate with high rainfall must have been present in the Garhwal Himalayas during 4000 – 2500 BCE (Danino, 2010). Danino further adds that a severe tectonic or seismic event must have occurred in the past due to which waters of Yamuna stopped entering Saraswati. Later even Sutlej changed its flow (presence of a sharp bent in its flow near Ropar) & a sharp drop in rainfall had happened which ultimately led to the drying of the river. Luckily, his assumption also matches with that of the Rigveda (as it is nowhere mentioned in the Rigveda that the Saraswati river is a glacier fed river) & some of the scientific studies published by different scholars. Therefore, out of the spirit, the Harappans must have been grateful to the river Saraswati & therefore evokes her presence in an invisible form at the confluence of river Ganga & Yamuna (the Triveni Sangam) (Danino, 2010).

The theory of ‘Afghan Saraswati’ is also given to solve this Rigvedic river puzzle. This theory has drawn river Saraswati & Rigvedic Aryans in Afghanistan (Kochhar, 2000). But this theory didn’t gain much acceptance in the intellectual world as it is difficult to explain the location of other rivers such as Indus, Ganga in the Afghan terrain. Further, it is also argued that it would be foolish of Aryans to rename a dry river bed as river ‘Saraswati’ in the memory of their Afghani-river encounter.

2.8 Aryans were Harappans

Urbanism to a certain extent has reborned in Ganga valley civilization. It is totally unrelated to its Harappan antecedent (Thapar, 1984). This also intensifies the debate on 'Theory of Aryan invasion'. The Harappans representing the pre-Aryan phase & Aryans fit into Gangetic eras. 'Discontinuity' has indeed become the key word for the invasionist perspective.

At some excavated places, some kind of continuity is observed like pottery manufacture in both eras, presence of same type of ornaments & so on. Many historians believe that cultural and religious traditions of the Harappans provide the substratum for the latter-day Indian Civilisation.

Historians have always tried to create a sense of parallelism between intangible heritage of Harappans and culture of India. They have used various tools such as symbols (swastika symbol found in Harappan sites & even used today), similar themes (lotus posture [recognised by French scholar Jean Varenne] are a kind of constants in Indian art), religious similarity (ritual bathing possessions, presence of lingas in both times), habit of fire worship and so on. Similarly, another group of historians have also pointed out a stark contrast between Harappan times and Vedic times. Many of them believe that Rigveda is misread and misunderstood during colonial times. They believe that it is impractical to compare a popular Harappan culture with a textual one, such as Vedic.

2.9 Recent Geological Studies

2.9.1 Double drought hypothesis

While comparing the paleoclimatic records of Indian subcontinent with modern climatology, it is seen that two consecutive droughts occurred in the past. The first occurred around 4.26 and 3.97 kyr BP (it was an abrupt 300-year long drought)⁵. It is associated with the 4.2 kyr

⁵ Here, Kyr represents 1000 years.

event. This led to abandoning of the Harappan civilization. And the second drought was gradual but longer lasting reduction in summer monsoon rainfall beginning 3.97 kyr BP leading to the further site abandonment (*Scropton Nick*, 2020). This led to more transition to a rural-kind of society and end of the Harappan civilization.

The 4.2 kyr event in tropical Indian Ocean hydroclimate played a significant role in deurbanization of the Harappan civilization. The Harappan civilization started nearly 5.2 kyr BP (*Possehl*, 2002), and it was at its peak between 4.8 and 3.8 kyr BP, and this phase marks the Mature Harappan phase (*Scropton Nick*, 2020).

According to the archaeological excavations, the late Mature Harappan is marked with poor pottery craftsmanship, cultural decline, abandoned water reservoirs (*Sengupta et al.*, 2020). It later lead to migration and site abandonment (*Possehl*, 2002; *Sengupta et al.*, 2020; *Vahia and Yadav*, 2011). During the Late Harappan period (3.9-3.0 kyr BP), abandonment continued as earlier, and no proper architectural managements (characteristic of Harappan civilizations) were seen, technological decline was observed, and the settlement size reduced significantly (*Possehl*, 1993, 1997, 2002; *Sengupta et al.*, 2020). Now, a different society emerged with few cultural similarities to Harappans. These settlements emerged around the Ganga-Yamuna interfluve and southern Gujarat, which have higher summer rainfall than the Indus Plain (*Gangal et al.*, 2010; *Petrie et al.*, 2017).

2.9.2 The Ghaggar during Harappans time

Next is the study by a team of international geologists, archaeologists and botanists. The study reveals some important palaeoclimatological factors of the Indus civilization. The first being that around 5000 years ago, the monsoon in the north-western subcontinent started to weaken,

which lead to less flooding of rivers (Giosan Liviu, 2010). And over a period of time, this lack in periodic flooding decreased the fertility of the soil.

The research also establishes that there is no connection of river Ghaggar with the Himalayan rivers Yamuna & Sutlej in the past 10,000 years. Also, there is no connection of Ghaggar with the Himalayas and it is not a glacier-fed river it instead depended on the rainfall to maintain its flow.

This research clarifies further that the due to good rainfall the Ghaggar-Hakra river was perennial, at least till 2900 years ago (Giosan Liviu, 2010). But later due to climatic changes, the floods reduced accompanied with reduction in flow of the Ghaggar-Hakra river. And this led to the whole crisis of Harappan site's abandonment. During this very same period, we observe a drastic shift in the settlement's sites along the upper courses of Ghaggar river. And over a period of time, the larger urban Harappan sites declined and emerged near the Ganga valley. The above explanation is also supported by the agricultural record of the Harappan settlements. The records indicate that the cultivation of winter crops decreased (as it depended on the river floods) and the cultivation of summer crops increased (as they depended on the monsoons) (Bal Hartosh Singh, 2012).

Giosan further elaborates that the Rigveda explicitly mentions that area west to the Ganga is 'a land of seven rivers' and these rivers are Indus and its tributaries. The Rig Veda further mentions that the river Saraswati is 'present between Sutlej and Yamuna'. So, today the seasonal river Ghaggar can be a "logical guess", as it somehow matches the geographic location of the mythic river Saraswati.

Historians like Steve Farmer considers the issue of river Saraswati as philological. He believes that the existence of some river cannot be proved on the basis of some ancient literary texts as there is a large possibility that these texts are mythological. And one cannot recreate history just on the basis of such fictitious sources.

2.10 The trend of renaming

A new trend has been observed with the historians supported officially by the government i.e., the trend of glorifying past that some historians follow in the majoritarian communal spirit. These historians have violated the craft of history in giving pseudo-scientific conclusions. The various attempts by communal oriented historians to touch emotional subjects of archaeology like Mahabharat sites, Ramayana sites etc. have always led to communal riots, delivered damage to the 'secular' side of the country (Bhan, 1997).

The misuse of archaeological evidence (by twisting and distorting them) in the name of archaeological proof is alarming. According to the historian Suraj Bhan, many scholars have acted emotionally towards Saraswati issue and tried to prove that Vedic culture is the foundation of Harappan civilization (Indian civilization) giving it its language, religion and social structure.

Another historian Irfan Habib articulates that not a single atlas or map discloses that Indus and Saraswati run parallel to each other (Habib, 2001). Habib urges historians to stop their quest of larger-than-life 'Saraswati' as according to oral tradition (and Mahabharata), the river probably dries up near Sirsa (a town in Haryana). The Saraswati school of historians in their search have gone beyond the imaginations connecting Saraswati river to Luni (stream in western Rajasthan), flowing river Saraswati right down to Kutch and whatnot. Habib also states that we

cannot entirely believe in Rig Vedic explanations as it is possible that it might refer to some unearthly rivers too.

Since 2014, the ruling government has insisted on renaming cities, towns and now an entire historical civilization. Citizens are not responding to such actions, because a feeling is inculcated in us that during Muslim rule India was under tyrannical rulers. The Muslim rulers did nothing except destroying what was already there as indeed the case with other so called Hindu kingdoms in various parts of India. The contemporary political leaders openly made baseless statements that the Taj Mahal was built on a Hindu temple and many other such statements. The majoritarian communalism is in the state of nostalgia and imagining India as the '*Sone Ki Chidiya*' and which came to an end as soon as the Muslim rulers emerged. This re-naming of ancient heritage sites indicates a form of cultural genocide.

The question arises that if Muslims can live under Hindu-sounding names in many places in India, then why cannot be a scope for pluralism and coexistence? Muslims are ready to assimilate into the 'Indian culture', and this 'Indian Culture' compromise of all the kind of culture, people that have lived in the past on this land and also present. We cannot ignore the contribution made by various communities in the past and by not acknowledging their existence in history we make a community feel insecure.

In *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru described India as an ancient palace, inscribed with layers upon layers of thought and reverence, and yet none of the layers was completely hidden or erased (*The Hindu*, November 2018). The present regime is more interested in attracting the attention of Hindus that they have got back their land from 'outsiders' (Muslims). The communal political forces, obsessed with the spirit of majoritarian religion based

nationalism, is making the minority religious communities invisible and not considering their sentiments. Names are indeed very powerful political expressions. This name change trend actually leads to alienation for many non-Hindu citizens, who are as much indigenous as Hindus. These names represent the essence of the nation.

The politics of naming has been closely associated with an attempt to organize public memory around a state-preferred version of the historical past. The naming of places in India enforces the same refutation of memory. Allahabad is now Prayagraj, Mughalsarai railway station is Deen Dayal Upadhyay, New Delhi's Aurangzeb Road is now APJ Abdul Kalam Marg to name a few (Economic & Political Weekly, July 2020).

CHAPTER – 3

HARYANA SARASWATI HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (HSHDB)



Fig.3 Logo of HSHDB- A Government of Haryana Undertaking⁶.

In 2015, the Manohar Lal Khattar government of Haryana, formed a board for the revival of the Rig Vedic River Saraswati. The Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board was constituted under the Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs for the rejuvenation of the Saraswati River Notification No.1/13/2015-IPP dated 12.10.2015, to highlight the Indian cultural heritage to the whole world.

⁶ Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board – Government of Haryana (hshdb.in), A Government of Haryana Undertaking

According to the Board, reviving the Saraswati river is a matter of national pride as the Rig Veda was composed on its banks, and its revival will re-establish India as the '*Vishwaguru*'. Further, it has been claimed that the glorious history of the '*Saraswati Sindu civilization*' marks the continuation of the great Indian value system. The Notification no. 2360/7-WC, dated 30.07.2018, issued by the Government of Haryana, notifies that all the intervening channels of river Saraswati from Adi Badri to its outfall in River Ghaggar are renamed as "*River Saraswati*". On a similar note, around 23 small channels/rivulets are renamed as "*Saraswati Tributaries*", which falls into river Saraswati during its flow.

3.1 Status of Projects under HSHDB

The path of river Saraswati and its tributaries in Haryana from Adi Badri to River Ghaggar (approx. 200 km main River and 150 km tributaries of Saraswati River) has been identified and demarcated. The Government of Haryana has finalized the alignment of river as per the old revenue records and old Maps of Survey of India. The whole renaming and settling of disputes on site have been done. For the first time in the state of Haryana, *Aksh-Sjzra* has been digitized about all the lands falling within the area of Saraswati river.

Government organisations like ISRO, HARSAC, CGWB, NIH etc have worked on the satellite maps and paleochannel maps⁷. The Revenue Officers from consolidation department of Government of Haryana, have completed the work of aligning the missing pieces of land of the river. The 16 villages of district Yamuna Nagar namely Machhrouli, Chanda Khedi, Chota Kheda /Kheda Khurd, Ambli, Judda Jattan, Kotar Khana, Nagla Jageer, Daiyara, Tala Kaur, Bhawani Pur, Juda formed the missing part of the land of alignment.

⁷ Here, ISRO refers to Indian Space Research Organisation; HARSAC refers to Haryana Space Applications Centre; CGWB refers to Central Ground Water Board; NIH refers to National Institute of Hydrology.

The Government of Haryana has approved vide 2/137/2016-1.IW dated 04.09.2019 to construct a Dam, Barrage & Reservoir on Somb River so that the perennial flow in the newly constructed river could be maintained. To achieve this, NIH Roorkee had studied the hydrological and quantum aspects of water. The construction of various structures throughout the alignment of the river has been projected. These structures include construction of River section in district Yamuna Nagar from Saraswati Reservoir to Uncha-Chandana and construction of intervening structures i.e., bridges, culverts, cross-drainage works, hydraulic fall, inlets etc. from Saraswati Reservoir to its outfall in River Ghaggar-Saraswati.

For diverting the surplus water (during floods), construction of a Barrage on River Somb is projected, it will be downstream of proposed Adi Badri Dam. There will be an underground pipeline connecting the proposed Saraswati reservoir (in village Rampur, Herian, Rampur Kambian and Chellaur in District Yamuna Nagar) to this barrage. This pipeline will help in diverting about 894 hectare-meters of flood water to Saraswati Reservoir. The Central Water Commission is designing this reservoir and barrage. Paperwork about No Objection Certificate has already been done. The Haryana government proposed that a budget provision be made for HSHDB in 2021.

Construction of a dam (the border of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh) at river Somb is projected. Various National Organisations are employed for on ground inspection. The completion of this project will lead to increase in storage capacity (from 1000 hectare-meters to 1475 hectare-meters) of the Saraswati Reservoir in villages Rampur, Herian, Rampur Kambian and Chillaur. An interlinking of Markanda and Saraswati River is proposed. They will be linked by the abandoned channel, Kainthla Supply Channel (KSC). This work is under progress. In the year 2017-2018, about 18 bridges have been constructed to increase the perennial flow in the Saraswati river. In addition, some new bridges are under construction near Pipli district of Haryana.

The Saraswati river is cleared every year before 30th June i.e., before arrival of Monsoon in districts such as Kaithal, Kurukshetra, Yamuna Nagar. The surplus water of river Yamuna was released in river Saraswati via Shahbad Feeder at Uncha Chandana (village in Haryana) and due to this Saraswati become functional in 2016, through its course at Pehowa, Kurukshetra, Pipli, Andli (Kaithal) to the Punjab border.

There are about 72 villages on the banks of the river Saraswati in Haryana. And as many of these villages drain their polluted water into the river, 25 sewage treatment plants (STPs) have been approved by the Government of Haryana to prevent the river from dying out.

3.2 Tourism in State

In many places an earthen dam has been built to separate the Saraswati river and the local water bodies of the villages as this will reduce pollution of the new river. In Saraswati Nagar, the RCC Divide Wall is projected, so that the Saraswati Tirath and Saraswati River can be separated for public ease⁸. To increase religious tourism in Haryana, bathing ghats are constructed at various places in Bhaini, Ishargarh and Bargat villages of District Kurukshetra.

To increase tourism, tenders were floated on 15.07.2019 under the chairmanship of honourable Minister of Arts and Cultural Affairs, Haryana for construction of River Section and River Front for Boating/Water Ways/ Heritage Development/ Pilgrimage Tourism and other activities from Pipli to Jyotisar and at Pehowa (Distt. Kurukshetra). The HSHDB also aims to build Saraswati Tirath (in Pehowa Distt.) and Parikrama Path, both of them will be funded by the Urban Local Bodies through Saraswati Heritage Circle, Kurukshetra. At Pehowa Tirath,

⁸ Here, RCC stands for reinforced cement concrete.

various construction work has been done for public ease including two separate bathing ghats for women.

Since, the river is created artificially therefore to maintain continuous perennial flow, a 18km pipeline was laid from Narwana Branch Jhansa Head to Pehowa Tirath, under the Irrigation and Water Resources Department, Haryana. A water body named, 'Saraswati Vatika' is created Seonsar Forest on the bank of Saraswati River with the help of Forest Department. This is done to increase tourism and provide water for wild animals of that area. A plantation drive was carried out under the Saraswati River Conservation Program in collaboration with the Forest Department and the Irrigation Department. Around 37000 trees were planted in 2019.

During the year 2019-2020, necessary financial assistance is provided to 196 identified places. These places will be upgraded, developed or restored to promote Saraswati heritage. Work is still on at these 196 places. The board has proposed to take Uday Singh Haweli at Pehowa, mainly for the purpose of exhibition and interpretation.

Every year “Basant Panchmi” is celebrated as ‘*Saraswati Mahotsav*’ to create awareness about the river, the Board and its heritage. The festival provides a platform to artisans from across the country to showcase handicrafts, and other artistic breath-taking crafts. In addition, rural craft traditions are also displayed to represent the typical rural environment. Also, cultural performances (folk dances, dramas, folk songs, local music, nagara, bean, bagpiper party, stage performances etc.) are given by artists from all over India.

The first Saraswati Mahotsav was organized from 10 to 12 February 2016. The second National Saraswati Festival was held from January 28 to February 1, 2017. The third International Saraswati Festival was held from January 18 to January 22, 2018. The fourth International Saraswati Festival was held from 6 February to 10 February 2019 and the 5th International Saraswati Festival was held from 27 January to 29 January 2020.

The HSHDB organized International Saraswati Mahotsav from 14 February to 16 February, 2021 at Adi Badri and Pehowa to showcase the rich heritage and history of the sacred river Saraswati (*Press Release CMO Haryana*, 14 February 2021).

This year due to COVID-19 an online seminar was also organized for the delegates from 10 am to 5 pm in the auditorium of Vidya Bharati Educational Institute, with the theme, 'The New Perspective and Heritage Development of Saraswati River'. Also, a 21-Kund Havan Yagya was organized at the Saraswati Tirth, Pehowa in the morning followed by the Bhajan Sandhya and finally the event was concluded with the Maha Aarti. Every year, various exhibitions are held at various places in Haryana to mark this occasion. Events like Kavi Sangam, Saraswati Heitage Yatra, International Gita Jayanti Mahotsav, exhibition organized by Granth Akedmi, Haryana International Trade Expo, India International Trade Fair, Parvasi Bharatiya Divas and many other such events to promote religious tourism in the state.

In 2016, Australian representatives were invited by the board on the International Gita Jayanti-2016. The delegation was headed by Sh. David Ridgway (Shadow Minister for Tourism) with Ms. Loretta Joseph (Director / Advisor Sydney Stock Exchange). It was agreed between the two sides that a village would be adopted under a pilot project. The village will be established as a model by the Australian Government in the fields of solar technology, information technology, wastewater management, transport and more. The project will be funded by Australia. In addition, possibility can be explored to the student exchange program for higher research on the Saraswati river and heritage and other fields related to this river, such as Geology, Archaeology, Indology, Hydrology, etc.

3.3 Activities by the Board

The board has signed various MoUs with various government organizations including ONGC Delhi, ISRO, NIH Roorkee, GSI Lucknow.⁹ Under ONGC's CSR initiative (20.07.2017), it has drilled around 10 borewells along the paleochannel of the Saraswati river. ONGC also collected samples, prepared drill time logs and performed electrical / gamma ray logging of all borewells under HSHDB. ISRO will provide technical support in consolidating all satellite data of the Saraswati Paleochannel (23.05.2018). It will also carry out geospatial analysis of the region and will also analyse Paleochannel's GIS database with data derived from archaeological and heritage sites, hydro-geological data, drilling data, and assist in hosting the website 'Vedic Saraswati River' on Bhuvan platform. This GIS database will be used to develop another web portal 'Saraswati Paleochannel' for Decision Support System (DSS). This will further aid capacity building for HSHDB officials.

The NIH Roorkee report entitled, *'Artificial recharging by linking Somb, Saraswati and Ghaggar Rivers for rejuvenation of the Saraswati River'* (08.03.2018) recommends the finalization of L-section designed by Water Resource Department & Haryana Irrigation Department from Adi Badri to Uncha Chandna. The report further also states that there is a need to develop Hydro-meteorological network for Saraswati River basin up to Sirsa. The report also shares hydrological data analyses of balancing Reservoir at Adi Badri.

The objective of the MoU with GSI was to study the geological and geotechnical investigation of the dam at Adi Badri Dam, Spillway and Reservoir, Haryana (first MoU 8.03.2018 and second MoU on 20.08.2018). The report also published a comprehensive study to reconstruct the Saraswati river rebound in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and parts of

⁹ Here, MoU stands for Memorandum of Understanding; ONGC stands for Oil and Natural Gas Corporation; GSI stands for Geological survey of India.

Gujarat. It also studied litho-cum-Chrono stratigraphy of the Paleo channel deposits of the ancient Saraswati river system (Ghaggar) and also try to identify glacier sources of the river.

To promote the Saraswati heritage internationally, seminars and conferences are held every year. In 2017, the theme of the conference was ‘Scientific and Historical Aspects of Saraswati River Heritage’. In 2018, the conference was held on January 18–19 and its theme was ‘Vedic Saraswati - New Approach and Heritage Development’. In 2019, the third international conference was held on 8-9 February with the theme, ‘Agricultural Practices and Archaeological Evidence and Exploration of the Saraswati River Paleochannel’. On 28 January 2020, the 4th International Symposium was organized with the theme ‘Saraswati River Heritage Rejuvenation and Water Conservation’.

The Board also claims that their project has some other economic benefits as well, despite the fact that its main purpose was to unravel the mystery of the Rigvedic river Saraswati. Certainly, this will increase tourism in the state especially in Kurukshetra, Pehowa, Hisar, Rakhigarhi, Fatehabad and Sirsa. This will generate new employment and business opportunities. Riverfront development of the Saraswati river will increase access to basic amenities and will lead to socio-economic upliftment. A major plantation drive is being carried out on the river banks by the board, which will promote deforestation and improve ecological balance. The board also asserts that the Saraswati river will not only develop Haryana but also the entire north-western India, channelizing the river water will improve the drainage system of the entire area. The STPs installed by the board will recycle water and therefore promote sustainable life.¹⁰

Despite the fact that Haryana is hardly affected by floods due to river water, the project will still provide protection from flood waters due to interlinking of both the Somb and Ghaggar

¹⁰ Here, STPs refers to Sewage Treatment Plant.

rivers with the Saraswati river. In addition, two large reservoirs are constructed mainly to supply water to the river, but they will also help in rainwater harvesting. These are Dam in Adi Badri area and Saraswati Sarovar in Saraswati forest area Seonsar near Pehowa. This river along with these reservoirs will also recharge ground water table. As a part of the development of heritage, various Hindu temples of the deities are constructed or repaired under the project that come in the tourist circuit from Adi Badri to Sirsa, it will promote the antiquity of the oldest civilization in the world. And indirectly will support the supremacy of Hindus who claim to be descendants of this civilization. The HSHDB refers Saraswati river as a goddess of knowledge, learning and wisdom. And therefore, its rejuvenation will lead to prosperity of not only Haryana but the entire nation.

3.4 Saraswati Committee

In 2017, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) constituted a committee to study the Saraswati River for a period of two years. Now, the committee is reconstituted in March 2021. Its main purpose is to draw the path of the mythical river. The committee is chaired by the Culture Minister and other members include officials from The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Water Resources, Environment and Forest, Housing and Urban Affairs; Representatives of ISRO; Governments officials of Gujarat, Haryana, and Rajasthan and an ASI official.

CHAPTER- 4

Response and Perception of the Project

"History can be well written only in a free country."
Voltaire¹¹



Fig. 4 Painting of Goddess Saraswati by Raja Ravi Varma¹²

¹¹ Source: *Goodreads* (Voltaire Quotes)

¹² Image Source- Wikipedia

The historiography of river Saraswati is a very contentious issue. Various scholars have their own perception and understanding about the river. Therefore, to get a holistic view, interview of many historians and archaeologists who are studying early Indian history was done.

4.1 Questionnaire

- 1) What is the current state of academic scholarship on ancient Indian river systems especially Indus and its tributaries?
- 2) There has been a consensus among historians working on ancient India that Indus Civilization and the Vedic culture are different. However, there are also views to the contrary that they represent one and the same culture. Where does River Saraswati stand in this debate?
- 3) Some scholars have identified Ghaggar-Hakra system with Saraswati. What is your opinion on it?
- 4) There has been an attempt to rename Indus Civilization as Saraswati Civilization or Indus-Saraswati Civilization. When does this tendency start in historical writing and what is the objective and underlying principle?
- 5) The BJP led Haryana Government had started a project Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board to revive the river and build a heritage around the site. Is there any relevance for the project in the present context and for understanding the early Indian history?
- 6) What is the implication of renaming of Indus civilization as Saraswati or Indus Saraswati civilization in contemporary India especially when situated in the context of other renaming efforts around public places and cities?
- 7) Contrary to consensus among scholarly community that Aryans migrated to India there is a view that Aryans are indigenous to India. What is the place of River Saraswati in such understanding?

8) How much of history around River Saraswati has been institutionalised in school history textbooks both at national and regional levels?

9) Around 100 crore rupees was allocated to the project on reviving River Saraswati. Do you think such an investment is relevant in current context?

Among the historians interviewed, Historian1 feels that not enough scholarship has been attributed to ancient Indian river systems and therefore, whatever there is, it is seldom discussed in detail with archaeologists and historians.¹³ When we look at the historicity of the Saraswati river, we see such conflicting views with a never-ending debate. A newcomer in this field is completely stunned because each major research tells a different story. And there is as such, not a well-accepted conclusion among scholars about the mystery of the Rig Vedic Saraswati. Historian 1 believes that much research is needed in this field, devoid of patriotism, so that a substantial conclusion can be reached.

Historian 1 totally agrees that the Indus civilization and Vedic culture are quite different. The activities of the Indus should be seen as being connected to the regions of West Asia from its core region in the Panjab and the Indus region, while the Vedic should be seen from the same core region, but later in time and going east into the Gangetic plain. Historian 1 further states that if the date of disappearance of Saraswati can be ascertained with certainty then it will be an important time marker. However, many believers of the Saraswati civilization also contend that there was no migration. Aryans were indigenous and not outsiders.

Historian 1 further believes that the identity of the Saraswati still remains uncertain although the Ghaggar-Hakra system seems plausible. But, at the same time we also have to remember that the river Haraxvati in Afghanistan was a major river. In the Vedic language this would also be called the Saraswati. Some scholars prefer this identification. But contrary to this,

¹³ Here, phrases such as Historian 1 are used to maintain the anonymity of the scholar.

Historian 2 believes that there is nothing “mythical” about the existence of the river Saraswati and its identification with the Ghaggar-Hakra, which was first made in 1855 by a French geographer and later endorsed by generations of Sanskritists, geologists, archaeologists and geographers.¹⁴ This scholar further argues that this issue has now turned into an ideological and acrimonious battle. Furthermore, this scholar argues that Harappans existed during the Vedic period and a cultural continuity is seen between the Harappans and the Ganges Valley civilization. Evidences like the Shiva-linga-cum-yoni, Lord Shiva's trident, the use of vermilion (sindura) in married women's hair partition, Harappan swastika, yogic postures, figurines in namaste and more, points to a kind of continuity.

Discussing the issue of renaming civilizations, Historian 1 boldly states that the renaming of the Indus civilisation as the Saraswati civilisation is for political reasons - so that it can be claimed by India and not by Pakistan. It is a strange that a civilisation should be renamed after a river that can neither be identified nor did it survive for long. The Saraswati was acclaimed in the Rig Veda but then so was the Sindhu. Historian 2 tactfully tried to keep quiet on this question. He said, “As regards the political aspects, I have to confess that I do not have much interest in them. But I may point out that your use of the word “mythical” in the title of your thesis is itself political.”

For the very same political reason, scholars like Suraj Bhan had repeatedly urged for non-political explorations in history that can lead to our actual past. He believes that too much of religiosity is dangerous for archaeology. History writing is a fast-growing scientific discipline and demands academic rigour, expertise and professional ethics. Non-professional zeal distorts the evidence and sometimes even leads to forgeries.

¹⁴ Here, phrases such as Historian 2 are used to maintain the anonymity of the scholar

Historian 1 further comments on the HSHDB (Haryana Government) that the hypothesis with which the project has been started is doubtful. If it was a study of the hydrology of all the river systems of Haryana it would have made more sense. There is no point in allocating such a large budget to a dry river and the worst part is reviving the river by digging wells. Given the current global crisis, the government would have received more appreciation if it had taken significant steps to recharge the groundwater table and focus on rainwater harvesting. Moreover, this new trend of re-naming the historical monuments, places and now civilization is not just to claim before Pakistan, but it also indicates a deeper ideology of the ruling government.

The Historian 1 stands firmly on the grounds that the Aryans were not indigenous and instead migrated from Central Asia to the subcontinent. According to him, the research on trying to find the Saraswati has so far produced no effective results in proving that the Aryans were indigenous. The Rig Veda indicates that they knew the area from the Indus to the Saraswati but little beyond, that is the upper Indus region and Panjab. What needs more attention of a detailed kind are the connections with the Iranian Aryans. This connection is seldom mentioned by those that argue that the Indo-Aryans are indigenous because it implies that the Aryans were not indigenous to India.

Contrary to this, Historian 2 says that Indus civilization was not pre-Vedic. 'The Aryan Invasion theory' in past has been rejected by many Indian scholars like Swami Dayananda Saraswati, B.R. Ambedkar, Swami Vivekananda, A.D. Pusalker, Sri Aurobindo, P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar. If Saraswati river dried in late-Harappan period, then how is it possible that Aryans who entered the subcontinent four or five centuries later named and praised a dry river bed?

Historian 1 further states that since the label of Saraswati civilization is now being used in government publications, it will soon be extensive in school history textbooks at both the national and regional levels. Many Marxist scholars believe that what is presented today is not

history, it is a mere fiction. When the Congress government was in power, it tried to de-saffronize history. And today since the communal political forces are in power, it wants to push its version of history, however, it faces restraint as its ideology is not backed by credible historians. But the problem with both of these major political powers is that they often change school curriculum without having an open debate with the concerned professionals.

Answering a question related to the budget of Rs 100 crore for such projects in contemporary times, Historian 1 states that digging bore wells into the dry bed of a river is self-defeating. Geological change cannot be countered in this fashion. That sum of money could be spent far more usefully on other life-saving projects that are needed in Haryana. The most disappointing is that India's performance on the Human Development Index is much lower than the global average, so how can the use of such a large amount of money for this project seem appropriate?

Overall, since there is no straight forward path to this entire research, the Haryana government should have waited for the open debate to settle and then have move forward scientifically. Clearly, it can be seen that more scientific work needs to be done and there is an urgent need to distance the evidences obtained from politics. To carry out any research expedition, the most important requirement is not to predict the conclusion. Even if the conclusions based on the findings are unpalatable, they should be presented in their true form rather than moulding them for some non-academic benefit.

For many Indians, the question of river Saraswati is related to the nature of organization of Indian society. This question is somehow related to the origin of the caste system because the Vedas first divided society into 'varnas'; Further, it is also related to Indo-European relations, their migration etc. This is a sensitive issue and is deeply related to our present.

For a long time, Hindus have worshiped the Saraswati River in Prayagraj in an invisible form and never felt the need to present the river in physical form. The Saraswati river has always

flowed in the hearts of its devotees and the government can easily find it there, instead of the dry Ghaggar river bed. There is a twofold side of the story, the discovery of this divine river can reinforce the faith, but at the same time we cannot rule out the possibility that devotees may not agree with the government's version of history and disregard the entire project.

The political conditions of contemporary India are not only influenced by religious polarization. But this growing trend of changing the names of places further adds more oil to the fire. The majoritarian communal forces has erased the name of the iconic Mughal Sarai railway station (now the new 'so-called attractive name' Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction), they renamed Allahabad to Prayagraj, and Faizabad district to Ayodhya. Other names that are in the list to get new 'more indigenous' names are Muzaffarnagar, Agra, Sultanpur, Hyderabad, and Gujarat's largest city, Ahmedabad (*The Scroll*, November 2018). And now efforts to rename an entire civilization, 'The Indus Civilization', which existed even before the very existence of 'Hinduism'.

Even if we assume that the Indus valley civilization flourished due to two rivers, the Indus and the Rigvedic river Saraswati, then also renaming a UNESCO World Heritage Site (the ruins of Mohonjodaro are designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1980), is not justified at any cost. The greatness of Indian society (Hindutva) cannot be achieved by creating a glorious past. The growing Hindutva ideology has turned historiography into a battleground, in which historians fight wars over culture and identity in the spirit of nationalism.

In the words of the honorable Prime Minister, the nation had to suffer '1200 years of slavery' (*The Wire*, August 2019). Supporters of such ideology consider these 1200 years as a blot, which according to them, still have a deep scar on the nation. And to get rid of these scars that outsiders have given to the heirs of this land, it is necessary to retrieve, reclaim and rename all the symbols of the medieval past. The irony of the whole story is that they consider the

‘Mughals’ (or Muslims) to be outsiders as well as argue that the Aryans are the original descendants of the subcontinent, not outsiders. Since they consider the Aryans to be insiders and therefore, they claim that all Hindus are descendants of these Aryans and therefore they are “the original and sole heirs” of this *Bharat Varsha*.

It is dangerous to see that identity-inspired history writing is gaining official support. Such histories can only be used to meet the ideological ends. Hindutva historiography is guided by the contemporary political agenda as it has nothing to do with the understanding of the past. If the 21st century wants to engage more critically with its past, then it must highlight its hypocrisy.

CHAPTER – 5

A visit to the Office

I have lived in the political, social and educational changes brought by the majoritarian communal political forces after coming to power. I believe that citizens have never been the central figure in most of their educational and institutional reforms. The major force behind all such reforms has been more due to the need to satisfy ideological ends.

As a part of my research, I once visited the state government office of the Saraswati River, namely the Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board, Panchkula. Being a Hindu and a resident of the state of Haryana, my identity and sense of self is strongly associated with the office and the location of the river, not only geographically but also politically.

The title of my thesis has led to growth in my sympathy for social justice with minorities of the country. The way countries minorities are side-lined, on the basis of history is awful. I am well aware of the axiological positioning of this research and am also very cautious about how my ‘desire for truth’ can make a person like me ‘outsider’ too.

But the story of my visit to this HSHDB office will form a kind of subtext in this research.

I visited this office located at SCO-217, Sector-14, Panchkula (134113), Haryana. As most of the government offices located in the tricity¹⁵, it was also in a posh area. It appeared to me that the office was rented as there were cheerful shops, restaurant etc. on the ground floor and an office on the first floor.

¹⁵ Here, Tricity is a notation commonly used for Mohali-Chandigarh-Panchkula.

After the staircase, the office comes with fairly good interiors and large hoardings, posters and representatives from the government, who visited it at many of its events. There were about 5-6 offices and support staff outside these offices. The discomfort and uneasiness caused by my sudden arrival could be felt quite easily in the office environment. When I was looking at those posters, without any further delay, I was directed directly to an office (might be the office of manager).

Firstly, I introduced myself and then I informed them about my purpose of visit. Since my visit was for research, they asked me for a certificate or some other letter. Luckily, I was prepared for such a situation, I handed them a certificate issued by my supervisor. They further asked me questions about my research and other questions like where am I from?

As this work involved 'study of the Saraswati river in contemporary times', so I was asked to wait for some time. Meanwhile, the person called some number from the landline.

After waiting for a while, the Research Officer came to the office. The officer asked me, 'What is the context of your research? Is it related to history, geology or politics?' By this time, I was quite sure that my answer, 'I aim to study the history and politics of the Saraswati river in contemporary times', would lead me to problems and there was a lot of possibility that I could return empty-handed, without any knowledge and information. So, I changed my answer and convinced her that my research is completely based on the history of the Saraswati river. This made the officer a little comfortable and she directed me to her personal office.

The officer told me about the whole issue of the Saraswati river based on Rig Vedic studies and further explained how the British authorities also tried to solve this mystery before independence. She further said that, 'Not only Indian scholars, in fact even the foreign scholars believe that Ghaggar is Saraswati'. She also elaborated on some of the works mentioned in Michael Danino's, *The Lost River: On The Trail Of The Saraswati*.

I further inquired about any publication that the board is currently doing, so she introduced me to two pamphlets based on ancient texts like the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. The pamphlets were namely, '*Balram Ji ki Saraswati Yatra*' and '*Bhaswati Saraswati*'. When asked about any scientific publication, she looked at me with suspicion and advised me to do some literature review. All the literature she suggested included works that were compatible with the ideology that Ghaggar is Saraswati, and not the name or principle of any one person to the contrary was mentioned. However, the name of the pro-Sangh scholars was clearly mentioned by her and some of them are also mentioned on the official website of the Board. In addition, I was denied access to the Board's Annual Report, despite the fact that every government institution had to make its annual report public.

The visit made me realize the kind of securitized atmosphere created in the office, the discomfort while sharing the facts and findings with the public. As a citizen, going to a government office should empower us, but nowadays we often feel alienated at such places. Whenever I talked about the scientific and political aspects of the project a sense of unease could be felt in the official.

It is strange that the official website of the Board (hshdb.in) claims that they promote science, education and other things but my experience was completely opposite. The office in reality tried to create a barrier between the public and the knowledge on the basis of which the project has been started. I am pretty sure that if I was unable to produce a certificate, I could not even get access to the office and therefore their vision is only on the papers, otherwise there should be no problem with the sharing of their data and publications. The way bureaucracy had hold over knowledge in a democratic country raises serious questions on this 'so-called scientific project'.

I could not understand that if this project is just about recreating an ancient river, then what is the bureaucracy doing between knowledge and citizens for whom the whole project has been undertaken?

I also prepared a list of questionnaires, which I wanted to ask all those who are connected to the Board in one way or the other, but my request were turned down. However, later I had to send it to them by mail which initially was not entertained. But after some follow-up and sending them some other scanned certificates, I managed to get a response from them, which is discussed later in the chapters of this text.

On analysing the publication of the Board, it seems that our ancient stories are considered by them to be factual. This single version of the state-aired story is quite dangerous. The government is completely ignoring the fact that the historiography of the Saraswati river is a controversial issue and ignoring these debates undermines confidence in government institutions. The official believes that there are no anomalies in the project, but at the same time creating a protected environment in the office premises does not go hand in hand.

It is important to maintain transparency, especially in democratic countries, so that citizens maintain confidence in democratic principles. Official hesitation in sharing the annual report of the government office also points to a lack of trust of the officers themselves in the institution. It is morally wrong of the government to suppress and withhold the data that may not be favourable for them.

The research officer also spontaneously stated that she was unaware of the Saraswati river herself (despite the fact that she is also a Hindu and hails from North India) before being part of this organization. ‘With the help of seminars and ‘selected’ literature reviews, I came to know about this holy river’, she added. The irony of the majoritarian communal political forces

is that not all educated youth relates to their newly formed past and the myths associated with it, despite the fact that they try hard to support some of their stories with ‘modern science’.

5.1 Growing Emotions in Political Arena

Currently, there is not much difference left between ‘emotions in politics’ and ‘angry populism’. These days, a lot of emotions is created in politics not only under contemporary condition in India, but also in other democracies around the world, including Bolsonaro's Brazil and just ended Trump's USA.

In recent years, right-wing populism has exposed a deep connection between political mobilization and feelings for dramatic upsurge for support in elections. The sentiments of the majority population play an important role in the vote politics, whether it is the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya or Saraswati in Haryana, the deadly combination of the glorious Hindu past claimed by the Hindu nationalist party has now become the key to Parliament. Both emotions and logic have their own legitimacy in the political arena.

Emotions have a huge place in Indian democracy and the dominant political parties in contemporary India have mastered this art in its favour. These dominant political formations mix politics with a variety of emotions. It often incites its staunch voters on a largely socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-structural basis.

The Supreme Court of India judgment on November 9, 2019 regarding the Ram Mandir is also an example of growing emotions in politics. The verdict states that the Ram Mandir will be built at the site of the dispute not because it has enough evidence in its favour, but due to the sentiments of the majority population. Therefore, this power of emotion makes supreme justice biased towards a particular group, these powerful emotions have effectively clung to the modern politics of India. Therefore, the sentiments, emotions and beliefs of the majority Hindus in contemporary times are above those of other groups (read ‘Muslims’). This jaw-dropping

fact is reality of the modern 'secular' India and these religious sentiments are also responsible for boasting histories of India.

The communal political formations have given rise to strong Hindu sentiments that only lead to hatred and fear. This 'feeling of historic unjust' and the consequent communal polarisation and policies stand in stark contrast to underfunded education and healthcare system, issues of women safety but still the government prioritizes the construction of large statues (Statue of Unity, Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj Memorial- a proposed huge equestrian statue), and heritage programs such as these can cause chaos in the public.

Being a developing country and given the current condition of economy, logically we cannot afford such 'luxuries' by suspending the economy. Such huge funding does not seem appropriate for projects like these. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable that it is a waste of entire funds in the Saraswati project as it is almost impossible to return this money to the State government by this heritage program. The basic income source for this heritage program will be religious tourism, but given its location and connectivity it is difficult for this heritage program to take off.

CHAPTER – 6

Appropriations of History by HSHDB in Contemporary times

“Each age writes the history of the past with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time.”

Frederick Turner¹⁶

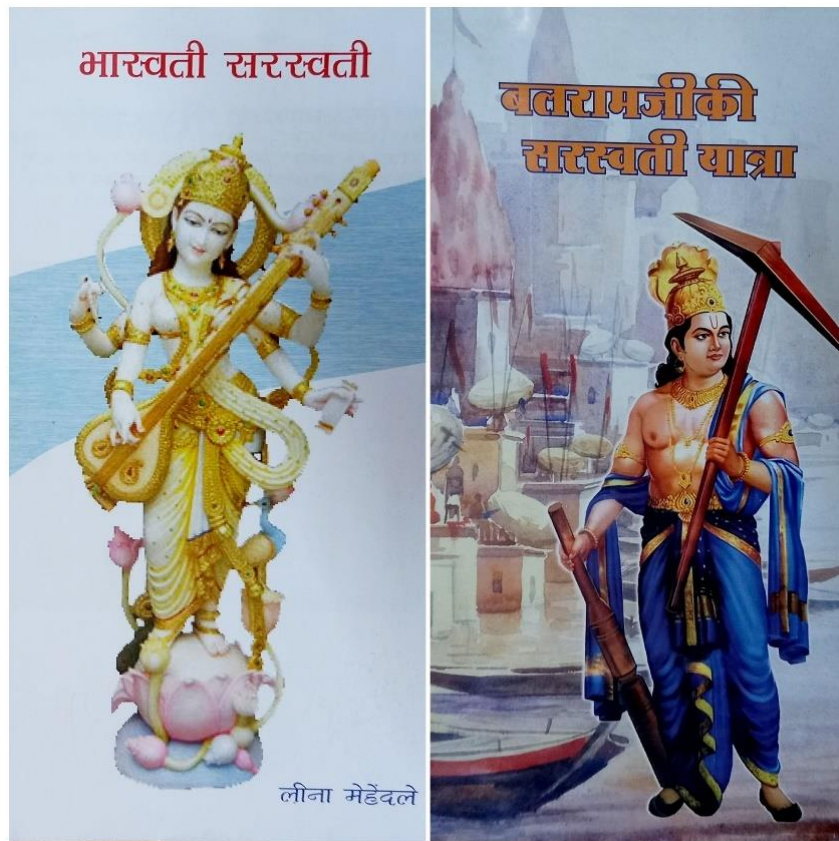


Fig.5 presents the publications of the HSHDB¹⁷.

¹⁶ Source: *Goodreads* (Frederick Jackson Turner quotes).

¹⁷ These images are cover pages of the HSHDB's publications.

6.1 Publications of the Board

The board had published 3 pamphlets to bring out the bureaucratic view on the Saraswati river. These three publications are namely - '*Balram Ji ki Saraswati Yatra*', '*Bhaswati Saraswati*', and '*Saraswati ki kahani*'. All three of them is written by Leena Mehendale (retired IAS officer of 1974 batch).

'*Balram Ji ki Saraswati Yatra*' tells us about the religious journey that Balram (a character in Hindu epic literature 'Mahabharata', who is elder brother of Lord Krishna) undertook. This holy expedition was made by him when the war of Mahabharata was approaching its end. There were a large number of pilgrimage sites that Balram visited located on the banks of the Saraswati river and each has its own religious significance. According to this text, a few of the names prevalent or used in those times, matches with the names of places of contemporary times (present in the state of Haryana). However, it is quite tough to relate a majority names to the current places.

Both Bhima and Duryodhana (character from the Hindu epic literature 'Mahabharata') were Balaram's students and Balaram wanted both of his students to attain salvation and so they were taken to fight on the banks of the Saraswati river. Leena Mehendale has emphasized that the Saraswati river had a very deep place in the lives of Hindus. Taking a bath in the Saraswati river relieves people of all their sins. She appreciates the initiative of Haryana government of reviving the River Saraswati which in turn will help in reviving the 'Sanathan Dharama' and Vedic teachings. At the same time, she completely failed to provide any scientific evidence on the basis of which she identified a few places in Haryana to that of Mahabharata times (as the names do not sound similar). Further, the whole pamphlet is based on the shlokas of Mahabharat and Gita so one cannot consider it as a 'good scientific source' to refer.

The second pamphlet - '*Bhaswati Saraswati*', has drawn attention to the importance of Sanskrit, Vedic culture in Indian context. This text claims that before the Battle of Plassey, Sanskrit was well spoken throughout India and thus indicating that the country was united by a common language and culture despite the presence of regional variations.

During their stay in India, many British officials deduced that the Aryans were people who came from the Middle-East and were the authors of the Vedas. It is believed that the Aryans were considerably more advanced than the original inhabitants of the land. The British also believed that ancient Hindu texts such as 'Mahabharata' and 'Ramayana' were nothing more than fictional literature. And since the Saraswati river is mentioned in these texts, it is also imaginary. Further, it was claimed by them that there is no physical evidence that can prove that any river can be called Saraswati. Leena Mehendale throw light on the data obtained from the American satellite 'Langsten' which indicates the presence of a dry river bed in Haryana as well as excavation of several civilization sites of the Indus Valley along this dry river bed. The excavations from these sites suggest that their main flourishing source was the Rig Vedic river Saraswati. She further stated that the Aryans were not outsiders but were people who lived at Harappan sites. But later due to some tectonic movements, the path of Saraswati river changed and it eventually dried up. Then these Harappan people shifted to the banks of river Ganges, but still their devotion to river Saraswati was not diminished and they provoke its presence in an invisible form at Prayagraj.

According to Leena Mehendale many sites have been excavated like Lothal, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi etc. Therefore, it would be morally wrong to consider that the Harappan Valley civilization flourished due to the Indus River. It was the Saraswati river which flowed through Rajasthan and Kutch due to which these sites flourished. She further contend that is not wrong that many scholars have now started referring to it as the '*Saraswati Civilization*'. Formerly, Haryana; Punjab; Rajasthan were prosperous due to this river and now HSHDB is doing a great

job to revive this river. The author specifically mentions the works of Natwar Jha who deciphered the Harappan seals and established that the writing on these seals is similar to the Vedic Sanskrit and hence the Aryans were not outsiders and indigenous to the land. Saraswati river is important because it is the river that gave birth to Indian culture and civilization and hence the 'Saraswati Project' is important too. Of all the rivers originating in the Himalayas, the Saraswati river flow was the highest. The Saraswati river existed very well during the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata', but towards the end of the Mahabharata (the beginning of 'Kalyug') the river began to dry up. Leena Mehendale also claims that by using DNA fingerprinting we can prove that there is no difference between Aryans and Dravidians, tribal and non-tribal people, lower and upper caste people and hence there is no outsiders and insiders.

Leena further went on to say that Indians were people who moved and settled in different regions like Japan, Lanka, Eurasia, Russia etc., which is completely contrary to the common belief among scholars. She thanks the Government of Haryana and other organizations (like ASI, ONGC, GSI) that are involved in the Saraswati project. She concludes by saying that Indians should be proud of such a golden past and appreciates the works of HSHDB which is working to create a glorious future.

Leena Mehendale invokes Hindus that it is now their moral duty to worship this new but sacred river Saraswati, which was present in the memories of our ancestors since the Vedic period. We must work together to bring back our Vedic culture. In her second pamphlet, author tried to sound a bit more scientific. She talked about a few of the research done in order to prove that the dried bed of Ghaggar is the Vedic Saraswati. But at the same time, she completely ignored the timeline controversy if we considered Aryans as 'insiders'. There was neither any scientific evidence nor any reasoning of many of the things she said (like Indians went to foreign land and settled contrary to accepted view) due to which she seemed baseless.

However, knowingly or unknowingly, she forced the readers to accept the Saraswati river, worship it and accept 'Sanatan Dharma' based on the Vedas.

We cannot ignore that there is a huge gap in the history presented by the Government of Haryana, which can be seen in its publications and history presented by scholars on the basis of archaeological and geological evidence. In these pamphlets, the Government of Haryana completely ignored various important scientific studies published by scholars from different domains, but rather focused entirely on ancient Hindu literature such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata.

On the other hand, when we look at the scholarly point of view, almost every study is supported by some scientific studies. Every theory has some supporters and some opponents but it is necessary for a healthy scientific environment in the country. The government should promote such debate and only after reaching some relevant scientific conclusion should it undertake such a large project, funded from the taxpayer's pocket. These publications released by the government office HSHDB present the idea of the state on the project, its perspective, its ideology. While launching such a large project that is of international importance (relating to the origins of the Indus Valley Civilization), the government-specified sources in its publications, question the genuineness of the project. Discussing topics such as 'The Insider - Outsider Debate', 'Aryan Invasion Theory' and linking them to ancient Hindu literature is a derision of all the work done in the relevant field.

In the 21st century, through its projects and publications officially focusing on 'Sanatana Dharma', the government directly challenges one of the pillars of the Indian Constitution – 'Secularism'. The country's minorities just could not relate to this project as they feel alienated. In contemporary times, there is a greater need for 'state-sponsored rationalist thinking' rather than holding religion and backing it with science.

Nowadays, religion is trying to sound 'scientific'. When any research becomes incompatible with religion, orthodox clings to the latter, but at the same time they maintain that science itself originated from religion.

In the present day, we see the Saraswati river at a miserable confluence of politics, religion and some little science. The government has apparently not excavated the river, which is usually done for archaeological findings. Instead, it has built (or in official terms, rebuilt) the seasonal Ghaggar river by connecting it to other streams through drains, pipes and by digging tube wells to increase its flow.

It is the perfect match anyone could ever think of that majoritarian communal political forces takes credit for the revival of the sacred 'Rigvedic' river. The Hindutva forces are adept at mixing religion with politics. But the question that arises is, can we mix religion and science? This mixture will not be that easy as the mixing of the rivers at Prayagraj. Among other growing trends, one that we see is that in order to prove some religious beliefs to be factual or scientific, the entire ancient texts are claimed to be scientific. Today, in the market, we can find a plethora of books claiming that the old religious texts of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Quran are scientific.

There is no answer to the question why science should be considered on the subject of faith. If because of our faith, we believe that Saraswati river exists, then why need to prove it scientifically? Why the need to physically recreate it? By simple logic, if we feel need of building something (here, a river), then it implies that it did not existed in past!

6.2 Hindutva Appropriations of History-

Hindutva is a fascist ideology. Currently, it fosters the supremacy of Hindus, and especially in comparison to Muslims. Its prime vision revolves around the 'glorious Hindu past'. And

because of this so-called 'glorious past', they imagine how scientific modernity flourished in India in the past. Furthermore, it is the basis of their larger agenda to rewrite the Indian past, which would accordingly suit their current political interests. At the same time, the goal of such an ideology is to transform India from its current secular position to an ethno-nationalist state (Truschke, October 2020). This ethno-nationalist state would actually be a 'Hindu Rashtra'.

There is a meta-narrative of the rise and fall of Hindu civilization that there used to be a prosperous golden age, followed by an obstacle created by outsider Muslim rulers, who tried to destroy Indian/ Vedic culture, heritage and religion. Obviously, in context of India, such miscreant claims make no sense historically, but at the same time they make perfect sense politically. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) vision of Hindutva Rashtra has reached new heights since 2014 under the newly elected government. They had always promoted the creation and advancement of a 'fanciful past', their mythology is neither supported by a scientific basis, nor by any scholarly investigation. But all these glories of the past now constitute an ideal platform for contemporary political goals and concerns.

The main task of a historian is to strive for accuracy while discovering the past. But these political forces want to build their past on the basis of their own terms and understanding. Followers of 'Hindutva', looking at their modern identity, try to invent a past that justifies it completely. History is not just a study of the past, but also of various changes of the past, but the forces of Hindutva completely deny any such change. They propagate that there has been no change in Hindu culture over time, that it is in its purest form and there is a need to make it safer and stronger by reviving the ancient Hindu heritage and culture.

The irrefutable commitment to never-changing cultural history grants some extreme Hindu forces a license to act in particular ways, which are usually inexplicable. This commitment is

dangerous for both history and society. To satisfy their ideological dogma, they can also refute all sciences and reconstruct the past on their own terms.

Hindutva scholars propagate the 'Out of India Theory', which means that the Aryans originated in India and later spread throughout the world (Das Joyjeet, 2019). These scholars have given evidence by the interpretation of 'Horse Seal' and many other examples, to show that the Indus civilization was a Vedic civilization (Witzel and Farmer, 2000). This 'Out of India Theory' is not supported by any substantial scientific evidence. These extreme Hindutva ideological forces want to prove that only Hindus are indigenous, so that they can define who and what Indians are in contemporary India. Among all minorities living in India, Muslims are specifically targeted and excluded because it is believed by Hindutva ideological forces that there were only two major phases in Hindu history- the first being the glorious Hindu era and second an era of persecution of Hindus by Muslims. India was a British colony for nearly 200 years (1757 - 1947). But there is no mention of them in Hindutva history. British rule is neglected because it does not serve the political purpose today.

Hindutva forces cannot change what happened in the past, the artificial construction of the Saraswati river did not prove that it ever existed in Indian history. Since they are in power, they can certainly control how people should know their past. And hence, publishing their ideologies or extensively using the label of Saraswati civilization in their publication will help them in expanding their own version of history. The government has at times removed certain chapters or sections from history textbooks, which does not go easy with their ideology. They have added their own versions of the past (Thapar, October 2020). This rewriting of history is of utmost importance to them as it helps them to legitimize their works of the present and the future. This rewriting will provide the ground for Hindutva in contemporary times.

If this Hindutva history continued to gain the patronage of the government, professional history would soon be extinct from the subcontinent. Scholars who do not agree with the Hindutva version of history are often labelled ‘anti-nationalists’. Hindutva forces are attacking the secularism of the country in no uncertain terms. Currently, the rigour of doing the historical work (based on scientific facts and excavations) that contradicts with the Hindutva ideology, comes with a huge price for academicians. In short, Hindutva nationalists are succeeding in creating majestic and unrealistic Indian past. Scholars are facing serious challenges in the current Indian political environment, where Hindutva forces dominate. Professor Pranab Bhanu Mehta's recent resignation from Ashoka University, Sonapat is a small example of how scholars are prevented from presenting their views (*The Quint*, March 2021).

Assuming the Vedas and everything written in them as the ultimate science contradict the very definition and understanding of science based on reasoning, logic and induction. The Saraswati river is not only for boosting some religious tourism, it is just actually a small part of the bigger picture. Such ideologies receiving patronage of government in every domain are more worrisome for Hindus as well as non-Hindus. The government is more interested in supporting religious utterances rather than science, and whenever there is too much religiosity in the academic field, the country pays a heavy price by lacking in progress (Das, 2019).

CHAPTER – 7

Response of Research Officer of HSHDB

To understand the difference between the ideology of the state and academics, on the subject of river Saraswati, Research Officer of the HSHDB were interviewed.

7.1 The following is a list of questionnaires prepared to understand State's perspective.

1. What is your understanding of the project? What is your view on this project?
2. Does this project help in understanding & appreciating Indian History & tradition?
3. What are the uses & disadvantages of this project?
4. What has been your experience working in this project?
5. Were you aware of the history of the river before joining the board & how has your historical understanding changed with joining the project?
6. Do you think funding for the project is justified & sufficient?
7. What has been the response of the public to the project?
8. What is the kind of activities the Board organised?
9. What is the organisational structure of Board?
10. What do you anticipate in future from this project?

The bureaucratic understanding about the project is that the board has played an imperative role in Saraswati River rejuvenation, Research and development on Saraswati River, Restoration of Saraswati Heritage and Showcasing, promotion of Cultural Heritage. This project will play an important role in reviving Saraswati and development of related heritage.

The *Official* believes that this Saraswati river project helped in understanding Indian history and tradition¹⁸.

The *Officer* further elaborates that the early Harappan or pre-Harappan culture represents the formative stages of Harappan civilization and just preceding the urban phase. The discovery of the Harappan civilization was discovered on the banks of Saraswati and also indicates that the river was mighty more than 8000 years ago.

The evidence of Human habitation all along and peripheral region of Sindhu-Ghaggar-Saraswati-Drishadvati is available since the Palaeolithic period onwards as witnessed from several sites in Rajasthan, Sindhu, and the Siwalik region. Even though the plains of Sindhu and its tributaries are devoid of the Mesolithic/Microlithic remains, the peripheral regions in Rajasthan, Gujarat yield enough evidence of human Sindhu-Saraswati basin is from pre-urban/proto-urban/mature urban and late/decadent urban phases of the Sindhu Valley civilization of Copper-Bronze Age, Culture of early Iron Age, early Historical through different historical phases down to late medieval times.

The Vedic Saraswati, a mighty and holy river of northwest India during 6000 B.C., was stretched through Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan and finally discharged into the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat Coast and disappeared around 3000 B.C. It was a lifeline of the people of ancient India, mostly in the Vedic and Puranic ages.

According to geological and glaciological studies, the Saraswati originated in the Banderpuch Massif from the Saraswati-Rupin Glacier confluence at Naintwar in western Garhwal. Vedic River Saraswati leaves the Shivalik Mountains and enters the plains at Adi Badri. The old

¹⁸ Name of the official is not disclosed to maintain anonymity.

course of river Yamuna, Markanda (tributaries of Saraswati) diverted east wards due to tectonic events of 3rd millennium BCE or Earlier which caused a break in Shivalik ranges.

More than 70 organizations like ISRO, GSI, SOI, ASI, ONGC, NIH, BARC, CGWB, CWC, HARSAC, HIWRD, Saraswati Nadi Sodh Sansthan etc. are working with in the research work of Saraswati River Heritage. The Saraswati rejuvenation and its Heritage restoration will definitely place the India in new heights.

An attempt is made to justify the project on the basis of its benefits. The benefits enumerated by the *Officer* are as follows –

- 1) Rejuvenation of Saraswati River will revitalise the ancient Saraswati heritage and underscore the antiquity of the world's oldest Saraswati River Civilization, and its heritage to the world.
- 2) It will be beneficial to develop the places pertaining to pilgrimage importance as Saraswati Tiraths. The project will be also beneficial Development all such places where the evidence of Saraswati River and its Heritage exists.
- 3) Perennial flow of water in Saraswati River will recharge the ground water level; as most of the blocks in Haryana turning into the Dark zone.
- 4) To rejuvenate Saraswati River, Constructing Saraswati reservoir, Dam and Barrage in Adi Badri area and Saraswati Sarovar in Saraswati forest area Seonsar near Pehowa.
- 5) Interlinking of Somb and Ghaggar with Saraswati river will be helpful for flood control, improvement in minor irrigation, palaeochannel recharging.
- 6) We will be able to maintain clean and unpolluted water in Saraswati River and treated recycled water irrigation purpose by constructing 25 STP on Seechewal Model in 72 villages along the course of Saraswati River.

7) Channelization of Saraswati River shall improve the drainage system of North-western region of India.

8) Development of a National level tourism circuit from Adibadri to Sirsa (Kurukshetra, Pehowa, Hisar, Rakhi-Garhi, Fatehabad and Sirsa) will create new tourism opportunities in these areas results; generation of new employment and business opportunities as well.

9) River Front Development alongwith River Saraswati shall lead to improvement in basic facilities or amenities and upliftment of socio-economic condition of the region.

10) Afforestation on the bank of Saraswati River will help us maintaining the ecological balance, nurturing the environment and beauty of nature.

Furthermore, the *Officer* boldly claims that, “*This project doesn’t have any disadvantages*”. After signing more than five MoUs with various agencies; With GSI, ONGC, ISRO etc. and many more in the pipeline; the *Officer* feels fortunate to be part of the organization as new experiences and opportunities are always there in this field.

Questioning about the change in experience and understanding about the river and history, the *Officer* said that earlier she had no background knowledge and awareness about Saraswati River, especially in academic terms, “I always knew Saraswati as Sharada, the goddess of knowledge, music, art, speech, wisdom, and learning. But after joining at Haryana Saraswati Board then I realized there is a huge research already being carried out more than 100 years on Saraswati River and its related culture, tradition etc. Saraswati rejuvenation and its Heritage development project itself is a very ideal and interesting project and it will definitely give major role in spreading awareness on Saraswati among people”.

The *Officer* fully agrees that project funding is appropriate but also adds that the variation in funds is observed due to different developmental tasks at different stages of the project. The board is fully satisfied with the response received from the public regarding the project. People

consider the river an incarnation of Goddess Saraswati. Saraswati is also known as one of the sacred rivers of India, along with the Ganges and Yamuna and the rejuvenation of the Saraswati river is a sacred project, people are eagerly waiting to see the water of Saraswati flowing on the earth again. For this they do their best cooperation with the Board.

7.2 The *Officer* lists the objectives of the board as follows-

- 1) To intimate, promote and support research in the field of Saraswati Heritage.
- 2) To assist in the preservation and restoration of Saraswati Heritage.
- 3) To establish Museums, Libraries and Research institutions for Saraswati Heritage studies.
- 4) To support research documents, compile research papers, publication of books, journals, monographs and reports etc. pertaining to Saraswati Heritage.
- 5) To pursue with educational institutions for inclusion of Knowledge of Saraswati heritage in curricula.
- 6) To develop and publish books and booklet in different languages for student readership pertaining to Saraswati Heritage.
- 7) To offer research scholarships and stipends pertaining to Saraswati heritage.
- 8) To establish Research institutes for classical ancient disciplines like Ayurveda, yoga, etc.
- 9) To provide academics assistance to persons/institutions working in the study of Saraswati River, language, scripted and Saraswati Heritage.
- 10) To network and build partnership with various institutions and organizations working in and outside the state in line with the objectives of the Saraswati Heritage Board.

11) For dissemination and exchanging knowledge organize seminars, conference, workshops, and special lectures etc. on relevant themes pertaining to Saraswati heritage at the National and International level.

12) To maintain effective liaison with the Archaeological Survey of India and other related National/International Institutions.

13) To invite cultural leaders, scholars, scientists and activists.

14) To undertake any research/programme/project/scheme as may be required in furtherance of the Board's aims and objectives.

Future anticipation from the project includes the successful revival of the Saraswati River with additional benefits such as groundwater recharge, flood control and recreation / tourism.

7.3 Organisational Structure of the Board

- 1) Chairman
- 2) Deputy Chairman
- 3) Advisor
- 4) Chief Executive structure
- 5) General Body: Ex. official members and Non-Official/Nominated members
- 6) Governing Body: Ex. official members and Non-Official/Nominated members

From the responses of board officials and historians, a clear distinction can be seen between ideology. The state did not address the popular debate among scholars. The historiography of the Saraswati river is a controversial issue, and either they did not understand that their theory had faults or they did not want to understand other versions of the theory.

The officer himself states that '*there is no disadvantage of the project*', this raises questions on the ideology of the government. Such a version of story, presented by the state and now widely used in school textbooks and its publications, is a sign of danger in society and implicit violence.

The state needs to think about the impact it can have on society or popular culture if they populate such versions of history. India is a secular country but at the same time it also provides space for non-violent forms of dissent and protest. Majority-minority division has become an integral part of communal politics in India (Nalunnalakkal George Mathew, 2004). India's largest Hindu organization, the RSS, worked relentlessly to promote its agendas of violent Hinduism.

The ideology of the RSS is the main force behind this Saraswati project. In 1980, the historical wing of RSS '*Itihas Sankalan Samiti*', formed a committee namely, the '*Apte Memorial Committee*' primarily to publicize their ideology in masses. As part of its objective, this committee also emphasized the need to rename the Indus Valley Civilization to the Saraswati civilization. RSS believes that India is witnessing a kind of democracy where the minorities are given more rights and privileges than the majority Hindus (*John T.K*, September 2002). Official sponsoring of such projects indicates pro-Hindu agendas and they are not suitable for India, the world's largest democracy.

The government claims that among other reasons, one being promotion of tourism, but it is well known that how much such pro-Hindutva projects had remained dear to the RSS and hence to the majoritarian communal political forces. The credit for the religious violence that India is facing today, to a large extent, goes to the religious fundamentalism under the garb of Hindutva (Kalliath Anthony, 2013). Hindu fundamentalism is becoming a challenge for the country's minorities.

At the same time, they are also facing crisis related to '*identity*'. Nowadays, being Indian is often referred to as being Hindu. The irony in this case is that the word 'Hindu' itself does not have an Indian origin, it is a word of Persian origin. The term 'Hindu' is used for people living beyond the eastern bank of the Sindhu River. And 'Hinduism' refers to the religion practiced by these people. The word 'India' also came after the river Indus, that is, 'the land of Indus river' (*Tirkey*, 1998). The term 'Hindustan' came from 'land of Hindus' (*Noss John B.*, 1980), and which was further interpreted as the Hindus being the true sons of the land, the ultimate heir of this country. And hence, it is often misunderstood that the 'interests of India' refers to interests of Hindus.

7.4 Changing Textbooks and the Single story peddled in them

As the government is widely using its own version of stories that are based on myths in school textbooks, it is going to have an irreversible effect on school children. In the future it will not be easy to find history books based on facts and evidence with these mythological histories will leave an irreversible mark on the minds of children. Therefore, changing the school's syllabus according to Hindutva ideology will actually create a new generation which will fully agree with every move of RSS and majoritarian communal political forces. In the future, the government will no longer need to answer questions while favouring of a particular religion, it does not have to explain itself for reconstructing the past.

According to a Nigerian scholar Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, if we show people the same thing, as the only thing, over and over again, then over time they become what we want them to be (or what we showed them). And this is the ideology of the government. It wants to convince citizens (especially the next generation) that we had a glorious past; we are 'insiders' and all other communities 'outsiders'; we had a river called Saraswati; whatever written in the

Rig Veda, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana is true and it existed. And hence it is our moral duty to preserve the past, and first step for achieving this is to create a 'Hindu Rashtra'.

It is impossible to talk 'single story' without talking about power. Like the economic and political world, stories are also governed by a principle called '*nkali*', meaning 'to be greater than another'. What stories we are told, how many stories we are told, and when they are told, all this is really dependent on power. The same is with the story of the Saraswati river. By mixing these memories of the river with the flame of religious hatred, the government will find exactly the kind of puppets it wants, and then the government can propagate its ideology without questions.

It should be noted that "power" not only has the ability to tell a story about something, but it makes it a definite story. The Saraswati story based on the Rig Veda will soon be the only story that the upcoming generations will have. They may never know that historiography of river Saraswati is a controversial issue and that different scholars have different versions, which need to be introduced at least.

The Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti, says that if you want to deprive people of their perception, then tell them a story which starts with 'secondly'. For example, start the story with the failure of the Mughals and other Indian rulers, rather than the British arrival or colonization of India, we have a completely different story; similarly start the story by discussing the sources of the Rig Veda instead of who created it where, then we have a completely different story.

When we allow different scholars to present their views and if those views are considered, then we have different stories and with each story we can see our past with different angles and hence the past is "not stereotyped" (Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi, 2009). The problem with these stereotypes is that it is not that they are untrue or something else, but they are incomplete. And because of that, the 'story presented' becomes the 'only story'. It is impossible to connect

with the past (even with the pre and post Vedic past) without being engaged with the different perceptions of the different people. And this engaging also means to associate with those ideas that are not compatible with or contrary to our ideology.

The result of the single story is that it robs the current generation of their humanity and dignity, focusing on how different we are rather than appreciating our similarity and equality. And hence, a balance of stories, ideas, ideologies in every sphere are important. In Indian context, nowadays, the stories especially created from our past are used for malfeasance and to create differences but the other side is that these same stories can be used to humanize and empower us.

When Atal Bihari Vajpayee came to power in 1998, one of the things he did was the formation of NCF (National Curriculum Framework). In schools run by the RSS, such as Vidya Bharti and Saraswati Shishu Mandir, students are often taught Hindu-centric versions of Indian history. Such teachings result in modifications in the overall character of student. The students become intolerant to other religion while they formulate the Indian nationalism in the form of militancy and on the basis of mythic themes.

These newly revised textbooks featured the ideology of the Sangh Parivar. Recently, R.S. Sharma's book on ancient India and Irfan Habib's book on medieval India have been removed from the school curriculum (*The Wire*, March 2021). And books by scholars, who are pro-Sangh, have been included.

There has been a common notion that 'Hindus have been wronged' and their histories (read 'Indian History') have been distorted by Nehru and Marxist historians (Hasan, 2002). The language used for these scholars transcends all limits of disrespect, often the term used to describe them is 'intellectual terrorist' (Hasan, 2002). The attack is not limited to verbal abuse only, but often comes with a social and educational cost, with many scholars resigning. It is

beyond doubt that the country's institutions play a major role in formulating the RSS agenda of saffronisation. Saffronisation impedes students' ability to strike a balance between things, it leads to cultivation of communal consciousness as well as pseudoscience as the ultimate knowledge.

There is no such thing as 'Scientific Hinduism'. And so, the claim on various things (solving Rig Vedic river mystery, Pythagoras theorem, surgeries done in ancient India and many more) demands a complete stop. The concept of 'national exceptionalism' and 'supremacy' is not only dangerous for the internal stability of the country, but also for a coherent international relationship. This madness that takes us to find 'advanced modern science' in ancient texts will never lead us to real scientific development and modernity. Modern science and ancient myths cannot be accommodated in the Hindu belief system at the same time.

Since the early 20th century, the credit of all the great scientific discoveries to the ancient Hindu sage-munis (inspired poets) has been an integral part of the indoctrination of *swayamsevaks* (Hindu nationalists) (Nanda, 2015). And hence from Vajpayee to Modi, each Right-Wing Nationalists¹⁹ focuses on revising history and moulding it as per their political needs.

The new mantra of current regime, 'India First' (*The Hindu*, March 2013), not only stand for the political and bureaucratic purposes but also in the academic and historic contexts. This indirectly implies that every region should have the first claim by India (and that too come from some sacred Hindu text written 1000s of years ago), whether it be nuclear weapons, plastic surgery or airplanes, everything should come from India. Can India not be a taker?

¹⁹ Right-wing party: Bharatiya Janata Party

The inauguration of events like ‘Cultural continuity from Rigveda to Robotics’²⁰ itself indicates state’s appropriation of modern science which marks the glory of ancient texts as well as Hindu sages. The majoritarian communal political forces have smartly erased the lines that demarcate myths and science (read ‘History’). They cautiously tried to make sense between the common man’s faith and saffronised science, due to which it appears quite appealing among the majority population of Hindus.

The misuse of Rig Vedic texts is part of the growing Hindutva agenda. The government mixes the faith with the investigation of evidence and logic, and produces a story about every folk tale written in ancient texts. There is no doubt that the “so-called scientific Vedas” belonged to “incredible India!” (Nanda, 2015) But a mythological heritage (Saraswati river heritage created around river Saraswati in Haryana) built around them will make Indians feel foreign in their own country. The members of the political Right seem justified with this ‘revision of past’. They often say that it is well known that the Indus was a great civilization but now with the promotion of scientific temper by the State, the modern science has rediscovered that the civilization was great not because of Indus, but because of Saraswati. Therefore, there is nothing like ‘saffronisation of history’ as claimed by Marxist historians. Furthermore, it is a must that every Hindu should know that they belong to such a scientific and powerful past. But the question arises that if the ‘element of science’ was always present in the Vedas, then why is our glorious past revealed now in the state of contemporary affairs? Why only the 21st century citizens are so fortunate to witness this coincidence?

Many of the Right-wing nationalist believe that by claiming the scientific past and great culture, we can incorporate faith in present and future generations. But is it possible that by reviving a

²⁰ An exhibition event inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi held at Lalit Kala Academy in September, 2015.

river and further renaming an entire civilization can make us feel great in the 21st century? Trying to discover the continuity between ancient and modern science is completely unproductive. The notion that 'we knew everything', even for things that are worth knowing, prevents development. If everything is necessarily to be guided by the Vedas, the progress of science is held back and will continue in the future as well.

A practice of 'self-censorship', which has been applied to Indian scholars has jeopardized the idea of inquiry and true knowledge. According to Bertrand Russell, history is "ever devouring in the transient offspring of the present". History is never about any single person, no matter, how much great he was. History has always been a medium that connects us to our past and hence interconnects the present to the future. Therefore, histories can have both effects- it might unite the people and at the same time might increase hate among them (which is currently seen between two communities- Hindus and Muslims).

The kind of history presented by the state is a dangerous version. This is a dangerous because it does not allow one to think rationally, think of other versions, it is rather a single story. It is a bad history because it fails to see how the various cultures and communities that migrated to the subcontinent have enriched the heritage and culture of the country. This Hindu-centric historiography alienates the country's own citizens.

A cultural heritage from the past cannot be recreated by wiring other cultures and groups from the scene. There is a lack of honest and sincere allegiance among Hindu nationalists in the context of historiography. A heritage is created from the past to establish a connection and meaning with the present. The government's 'Presentist history' is not only bad, but also dangerous because the main basis behind it is to serve the fundamentalist and ethnic ideology.

CHAPTER – 8

CONCLUSION

“There is no real ending. It’s just the place where you stop the story.”
Frank Herbert²¹



Fig. 6 presents the river Saraswati in Yamunanagar and Kurukshetra.

8.1 Summary of Chapters

The 1st chapter provided us a glimpse of the historical background about the Saraswati river. It provided us a detailed account of the contemporary situation of the Ghaggar River (now recognized as the Saraswati River) by the Government of Haryana. This further explains why

²¹ Source: *Goodreads* (Frank Herbert Quotes)

the Saraswati river is important for Hindus and the majoritarian communal political forces. It also discusses the research methodology employed for the thesis, followed by scope and limitations of the research.

The 2nd chapter is about literature review. Early myths, exploration, and theory about the mystery of the Saraswati River are discussed here along with the works of several prominent scholars. Initially, the dry river of Ghaggar was first noted by the British authorities in 1833 and later in 1844. Later in 1866, R. D. Oldham first identified the Ghaggar River with the Saraswati River. He rejected all theories that the river diminished due to low rainfall, instead he envisaged a new theory that the hydrography of the area changed and the sources of the river stopped their flow in the Saraswati river. Some other similar and dissimilar researches were also presented by different scholars at different times in history. Later, after 2014, several government institutions also carried forward their research and concluded that the Sutlej was the main source of water of the Ghaggar river and the Ghaggar river was identified as the Saraswati river. Further, archaeological studies from different scholars point in different directions and this contentious issue could not reach a conclusion. The decline of the Harappan civilization is related to the drying up of the Saraswati river. In fact, it is believed that the Aryans were not outsiders and a group of scholars often misapprehend them as Harappans. The puzzle regarding the timeline of Harappan, drying up of river Saraswati and Aryan invasion is yet not solved. The recent trend of changing the name of places in Indian politics is also discussed in this chapter.

The 3rd chapter discussed the organisational structure formed by the government of Haryana to revive the Rigvedic river Saraswati. The Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board (HSHDB) was established in 2015 under the Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs, Government of Haryana. The board's vision is to re-establish India as a 'Vishwaguru'! The organisation believes that India had a glorious history and hosted the most advanced

civilization in past, 'The Saraswati Sindhu Civilization' and reviving it again will mark the continuation of great Indian value system. This chapter also throws light on various projects undertaken by the board in Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. It also discusses the government's goal to increase religious tourism in the state by reviving this mythical river by organizing various seminars and events. And along with this, the recent activities of the board are also discussed.

The 4th chapter discussed the historiography of the Saraswati river, and how it had always been a contentious issue, and therefore, various scholars have their own perception and understanding of the Saraswati river. So, an attempt was made to interview some archaeologists and historians (especially those working on ancient Indian history) and their responses to a selected list of questionnaires are discussed and analysed in this chapter. After this, the political ideology behind this whole project is discussed.

The 5th chapter narrated my experience of going to HSHDB office, Panchkula. My encounter with various officials and members of the office and how they responded to my research objective are discussed in detail. The publication of board and ideology behind these publications is discussed in detail. This is followed by an overview of how emotions play an important role in growing politics, especially in the context of contemporary Indian politics.

The 6th chapter discussed the ideology behind the publication of the Board. The publications are namely - '*Balram Ji ki Saraswati Yatra*', '*Bhaswati Saraswati*', and '*Saraswati ki kahani*'. They are authored by Leena Mehendale (retired IAS officer of 1974 batch). They are based entirely on ancient religious texts such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and others. The publication focuses on the moral duty of Hindus to worship this new but sacred river Saraswati, which is present in our memories from time immemorial. There has been a huge gap between the history presented by the State through its publication and history presented by experts based

on facts and findings. The linking of important theories such as, ‘The Insider - Outsider Debate’ and ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’ with the ancient Hindu religious text presents the governmental approach and ideology in a broader perspective. The majoritarian communal political impulse and its various efforts to convert a secular nation into an ethno-nationalist state by officially endorsing the myths of Hinduism will soon be paid as a heavy price by the nation, lacking in science and development.

The 7th chapter dealt with the bureaucratic understanding of the project. This includes interviewing the Research Officer associated with the Board. The Officer claimed that the project has only advantages and no disadvantages. The officer justifies the project and its financing due to the many benefits of the project, which are discussed in detail. In addition, chapter analyses the potential impact the project can have in the long run on the popular culture of the country. The politics of changing textbooks and presenting a single story of mythological history can be an irreplaceable mark on the minds of children. The RSS's conviction that ‘Hindus are misrepresented’ and therefore saffronisation of history is justified will soon transform India into a ‘*radical Hindu-rashtra*’.

8.2 Limitations of the study

Like most research work, the present study is also subject to limitations. First, due to the current pandemic situation, it was not possible to carry out ethnographic work in relation to the project. Interviewing the common people who live in the vicinity of Ghaggar river was not possible. Furthermore, it was not easy to establish any contact with the school children in Haryana and therefore, it was difficult to get their perspective about changed textbook history, especially in context of river Saraswati, Aryans and Rigveda. Also, I was unable to get access to the people who were specifically involved in the project at the time of its initiation.

The sample size of the interviews conducted was highly limited. The response received from the interview of the officers of the board members is also restricted as it presents the standpoint of the single officer (though it is on behalf of the institution). Similarly, contact with only two historians regarding the questionnaire was established, although some of them provided their valuable feedback regarding the research. An attempt was made to remove this limitation caused by COVID, but it was not very successful to contact all the proposed person for interview through email.

Review of literature is an important part for any research, it tries to sketch the framework of all the work done so far. However, there was very little work done in context of heritage and politics of the mythical river Saraswati, especially in regard to the contemporary times. This research gap has its advantages and disadvantages. It provides more self-expression scope, along with the difficulty of forming one's own ideas.

Since the chapter 'A visit to Office' is based solely on self-reported data and therefore may contain many information that seems biased and may be noted as a limitation.

8.3 Importance of Study

Despite the fact that such ideological projects are supported by the mainstream politicians, we cannot ignore that they are based on the pseudoscience. If the growing extreme Hindutva forces are not checked, then soon they will tear the country apart. The country may become something which even its literate citizens will fail to recognise. The sacred religion, 'Hinduism' which binds people through popular culture in the country, has nothing to do with 'Hindutva', which tends to transform the country into anarchist form. The division of the nation on the basis of the invented past would be extremely dangerous for the unity of the country. This study will help to target fake history that is either being taught or has been recreated in the country. The

innumerable rise in the communal hate crimes, malign not only Hinduism but the nation as a whole.

8.4 History writing in Contemporary Politics

Identification of river Ghaggar with river Saraswati by the government is highly controversial. Just because some of the Harappan sites are located at the banks of the river Ghaggar does not prove that the mystery of the river Saraswati is solved. While proposing such a hypothesis we neglect most of the sites which are not located on the banks of the Ghaggar River. The second most prevalent hypothesis that considers the Indus River and the Sutlej River as a tributary of the Rigvedic River Saraswati raises another question. If both these rivers are considered to be the tributaries of Saraswati, then why are there almost zero sites along their routes compared to the Ghaggar river. Also, the second question is that if the river with this identity was Saraswati since the time immemorial, then from where did the name 'Ghaggar' come from in the scene?

The major controversy over the timeline is unresolved. According to the accepted timeline, the Aryans entered the subcontinent around 2000 BCE and Saraswati lost a major part of its water source around 2000–1700 BCE. Clearly, the Saraswati river was in its drying phase and this is in complete contrast to the circumstances described about the Saraswati river in the Rigveda. Such indications suggest that it is highly likely that the Rigveda refers to some unearthly or heavenly river. Further, there is no clue that if it was the Saraswati river in the Rigvedic period, why did it come to be known as Ghaggar?

Different studies point in different directions about the fall of Harappa but none point towards the drying up of Saraswati. Not only today but also in the past, Ghaggar was seasonal and never as mighty as the Rigvedic Saraswati.

The historian of medieval India, Harbans Mukhia, remarked that 'history is everyone's discipline'. Every community in some form or other, knowingly or unknowingly, contributes to the history. Also, everyone takes care of their personal history (used in the context of 'family history'). History is a discipline of the humanities and is based on logic and reasoning, but the history now becoming popular is completely unfounded.

The majoritarian communal political force's fierce hunger for history has led to an irrational controversy, especially after 2014. Maintaining a kind of silence, especially by scholars is a kind of callous display and support of 'Hindutva History'. Professionals should come forward to disseminate about these false perceptions of fake history. Unpopular stories are the most important because they tell us who we are and, broadly about our roots, they open up new possibilities for identity and can bring about some changes in popular history and discourse of unjust violent nationalism. A saffron wave is encapsulating India and at a very alarming rate plunging everyone in its tides. But still, we have at least time to discuss, analyse and to some extent express dissent to the authority until we can.

The Government of India is actually losing some of its World Heritage Sites, under the purview of reconstructing some mythological heritage. The Taj Mahal has always been a white elephant for Indian tourism, but its removal from the UP Tourism Handbook in 2017 and calling it a blot on Indian culture is a dangerous trend. The government ideology to reconstruct Saraswati Heritage to promote Indian heritage and tourism, stands in complete contrast with opinion on the 'Seven Wonders of the World- The Taj'. The main difference between these two heritages is that the 'Saraswati heritage' is associated with the faith of Hindus, while the 'Taj Mahal' is built by a Muslim ruler and is considered by the state to be associated with Muslims only. Another major difference is that the former has been reconstructed and is an attempt to make a myth into reality and the latter a reality since 1631 in India. In fact, it is not the Taj but it is anti-Muslim spirit and bigotry growing under the majoritarian communal political forces

government, which is a blot on secular India. This Islamophobia that Hindu nationalists have developed only leads to extremism and leads to unpalatable Hindutva.

History is neither related to the present circumstances (and the same applies for India too) nor they are supposed to be glorious at all times. The truth is, we all lose a piece of the heritage when the past is rebuilt for some contemporary political gain or for the fulfillment of some ideology. Contemporary politics and Hindutva agents cannot change the real past, although they may create an illusion of their past. Hindutva nationalists often think that Hindus are enfeebled because of their Muslim past and hence there is a need to overcome this flimsiness by focusing more on ancient Hindu texts and assure everyone that Ramayana existed, Mahabharata existed and hence Saraswati too existed and that too on the same identified path.

History is neither based on beliefs nor do historians sanctify the past. Also, the past cannot be judged on the basis of the present. Time demands the exclusion of pernicious myths about India's past, otherwise this poisonous notion can engulf not only Hindu-Islam extremists but the entire subcontinent. There is nothing like '*our history*' and '*their history*'. History is universal and everyone has equal or no claim over it. No matter how much anyone tries, the heterogeneity, diversity and syncretism of Indian history cannot be washed away. The vibrant past we had should be a matter of pride and inspiration.

The way Hindu nationalists think and present the past is far from actual history. Like every field, Hindutva ideology suffers from internal emotional contradictions that pose a serious threat to its existence. Clearly, the current time can be regarded as one of the best times for Hindutva. It is flourishing far better than expected and the main reason behind this is the harsh attitude of the government towards those who express dissent. The autonomous nature of higher institutions is very well disposed and therefore gives the Hindu nationalist the precise environment needed to displace professional history and knowledge. Furthermore, secular

features and Muslim figures from history textbooks are replaced by the staunch Hindu leader Savarkar, Shivaji. In fact, many of these new textbooks also praised Hitler and Mussolini because their ideology is similar to the ideas of Hindutva (Traub, 2018).

The ideology of Hindutva has successfully increased the feeling of hatred and zeal against Muslims. Hindutva leaders have directly attacked Muslims for erasing or distorting memories of the Muslim past. The current Hindu-Muslim divide is not a 'colonial hangover' at all. This growing nexus of intolerance towards other religious groups needs to be tackled with patience and true historical knowledge. The narrow-minded 'Hindutva' promoted by the RSS and majoritarian communal political forces should not be misconstrued as 'Hinduism' which refers to a broader religious tradition. This trap of overlapping these two needs to be falsified. In fact, the former poses a threat to the latter. The promoters of extreme-Hindutva have tried to turn the nation into a "religious anarchist".

The lens of Hindutva is both forward as well as backward looking. While considering the future, the main aim is to create a '*Hindu-rashtra*' that would be a land of selected people (only Hindus) and at the same time restrict the space and freedom of non-Hindus (especially Muslims). Steps to achieve this goal are already in place to create an environment of intolerance and violent acts such as mob-lynching, especially targeting Muslims. And when we look backwards through this lens, there is an attempt to encapsulate the Indian past and name it '*glorious Hindu history*'. Also, at the same time, the new identity crisis that have been created by referring 'Indian' as 'Hindu' is one of the multiple tactics of the Modi government to exclude Muslims. This persistent attempt to eradicate Muslims not only from history but also from the future has a dangerous effect on the unity and internal stability of the country.

Modern day politics has given a new definition to 'Hindutva'. Hindutva is now ethno-nationalism which shows the dominance of Hindus only in the present times, it is often

represented by saffron. This ideology is narrow and openly prejudiced. It is intolerant towards religious minorities and tends to incite violence. History is altered to a startling degree. Their fiction state that Hindutva has always been in India in one way or another, Hindu identities constantly tend to overlap with being Indian and they are redefining India and Indian. Hindutva advocates invests heavily in claiming indigeneity and specifically claims that Hindus are indigenous to India. Therefore, they have a claim to the longevity of the subcontinent that no other group can rival. Hindus must be from India and Hindutva culture never changes to its core, the soul of Hinduism is similar to the soul of India and both are eternally constant over time.

In today's modern world, why do Hindutva ideologue are viscerally threatened by the events of 1000s of years ago? The Hindutva vision of past is obsessed with the equality with the modern world, specifically in terms of science. They claim to discover every aspect of modern science in ancient India. These outlandish ideas supplant academic ones. Such claims indicate that Hindu nationalists feel ashamed of their own heritage and therefore seek to rebuild it.

While dividing the Indian history into Hindus and Muslims, we reduce our vast long diverse range of South Asian history to modern religious identities. This division comes to the fore by idolizing some fictitious era of the 'Golden Hindu era', followed by 100s of years of suppression and depression in the Muslim-led regime. But the problem with this is that the Indian subcontinent has a lot of physical and cultural remains of Indo-Persian or Indo-Muslim rule. Hindu nationalists have gone a long way in suppressing the Muslim past of Indian history, while doing so they either efface Muslim past or reconstruct their own kind of histories, to remain superior.

When the State censors history to a huge audience, certainly the history is not changed as it cannot be changed. But, definitely one can change what, when and by how much the people

should know about it and this way they can be primed for future misinformation. Hindutva ideologue espouses such ignorance about their own heritage. This is our heritage, whether we like it or not! Those who read the past through the lens of politics, cherry-pick evidence but academically it is completely unethical.

There is a need for the non-political explorations in history that can lead to our actual past. We need to clarify that there is no similarity between Harappan civilization & Rigvedic civilization. Too much of religiosity is dangerous for archaeology! History writing is a fast-growing scientific discipline and demands academic rigour, expertise and professional ethics. Non-professional zeal distorts the evidence and sometimes even leads to forgeries.

APPENDIX

9.1 Pictures associated with river Saraswati²²-



Fig. 7 presents the before and after picture of construction of river Saraswati.



Fig. 8 presents the various developmental works done by ONGC for constructing Saraswati.

²² All these pictures associated with the Saraswati river are taken from HSHDB ([Haryana Saraswati Heritage Development Board – Government of Haryana \(hshdb.in\)](http://hshdb.in))



Fig. 9 presents the site of religious tourism on the banks of river Saraswati.

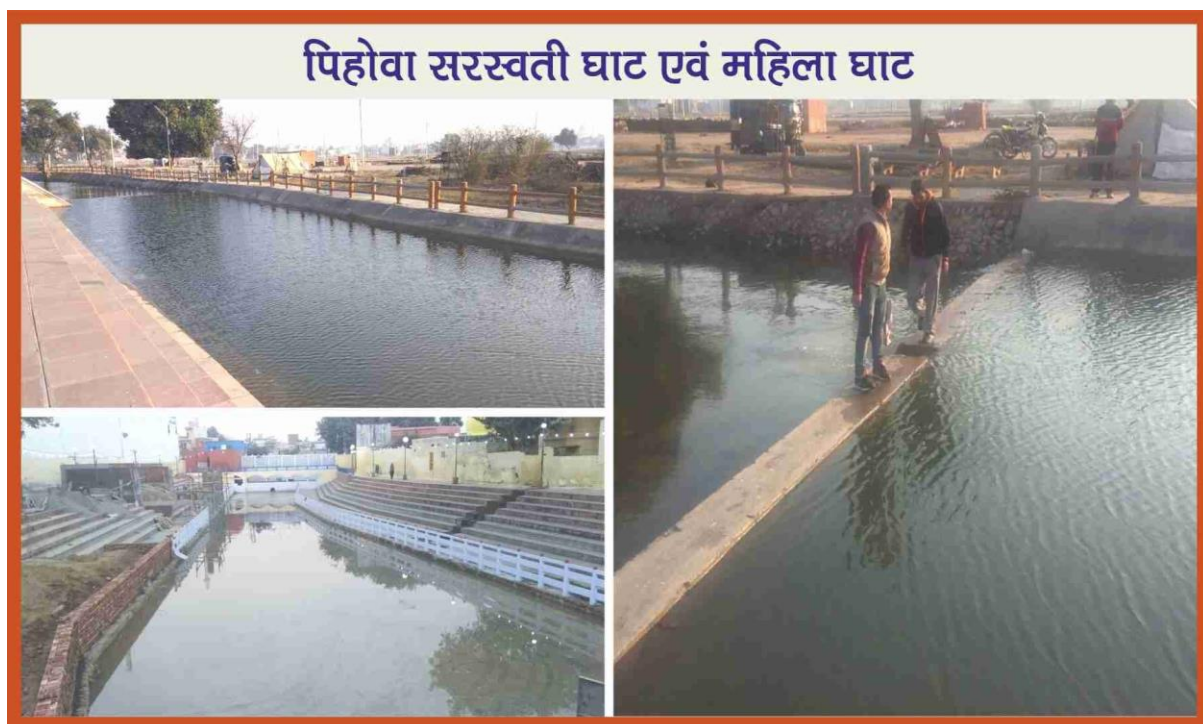


Fig. 10 presents the different Ghats developed on the banks of river Saraswati for devotees.



Fig. 11 presents archaeological excavations done at Rakhigarhi under HSHDB.



Fig. 12 presents the human skeleton excavated from Rakhigarhi (Hisar) under HSHDB.



Fig. 13 presents the view of Saraswati river at Ottu and Sirsa (Haryana).



Fig. 14 presents view of Saraswati Kund at Adi Badri (Haryana).

सतयुगी सरस्वती तीर्थ, सरस्वती नगर, यमुनानगर

'सरस्वति व्रतेषु ते दिव्येषु देवि धामसु ।
जपुस्व हृण्यमाहुतं प्रजां देवि ररास्व नः ॥ '

— ऋग्वेद, 7.70.1

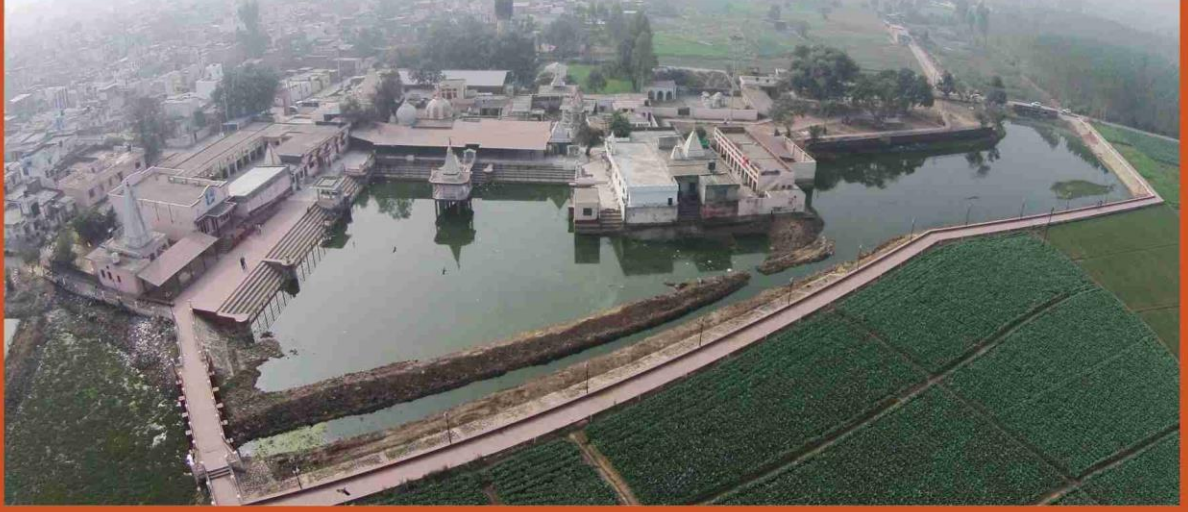


Fig. 15 presents the heritage site constructed in Yamunanagar (Haryana).

आदिबद्री का विहंगम दृश्य



Fig. 16 presents view of Saraswati Kund at Adi Badri (Haryana).

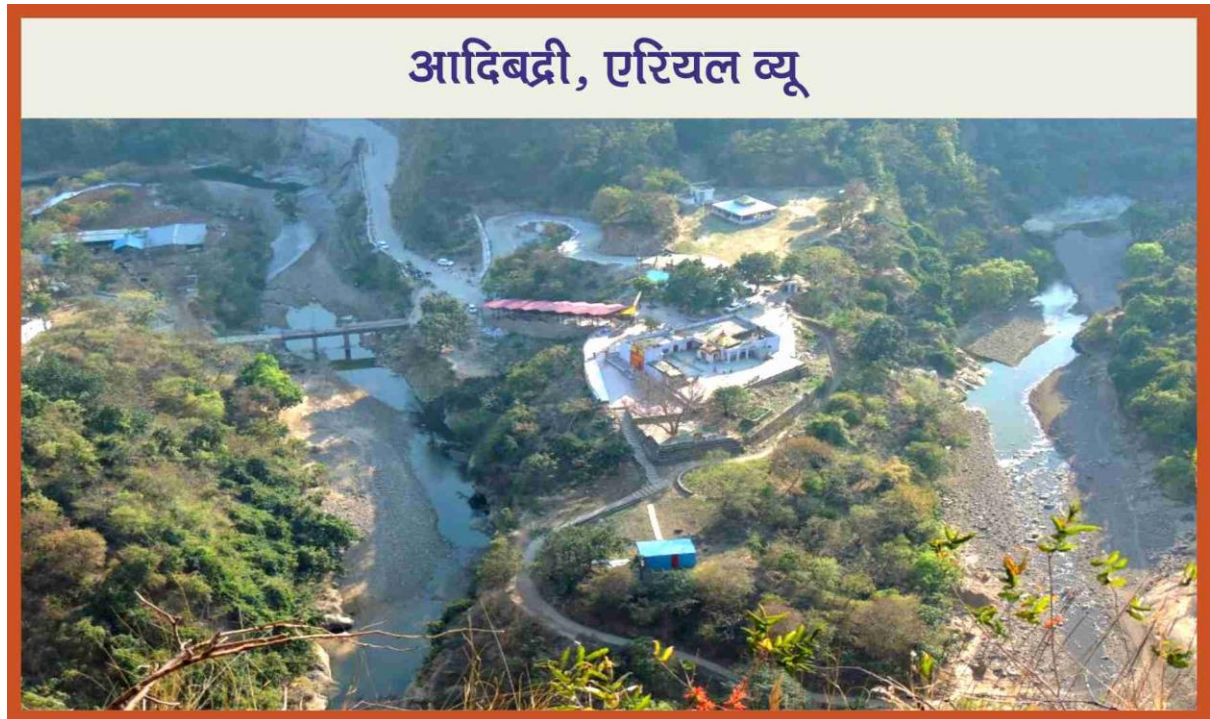


Fig. 17 presents aerial view of the Saraswati river construction site at Adi Badri (Haryana).



Fig.18 presents picture of Narayan Temple located along the course of river Saraswati at Adi Badri (Haryana)



Fig. 19 presents the various temples constructed or repaired to promote religious tourism by HSHDB.



Fig. 20 presents the photos from 1st International Saraswati Mahotsav held from 10-12th February, 2016.



Fig. 21 presents photos from 2nd International Saraswati Mahotsav held from 28th January to 1st February, 2017.



Fig. 22 presents photos from 3rd International Saraswati Mahotsav held from 18th - 22th January, 2018.



Fig. 23 presents the photos from 4th International Saraswati Mahotsav held from 6th - 10th February, 2019.



Fig. 24 presents photos from 5th International Saraswati Mahotsav held from 27th – 29th January, 2020.



Fig. 25 presents the photos from Gita Mahotsav, 2017.



Fig. 26 presents heritage site at Yamunanagar



Fig. 27 presents STPs constructed by HSHDB



Fig. 28 presents the various MoU signed by HSHDB with other organisations.



Fig. 29 presents the bore well construction by ONGC so that flow of water can be maintained in the river.



Fig. 30 presents the photos from International conference on ‘Saraswati River’ held in 2017.

9.2 Tables

Haryana Panchayati Raj Public Works Department 20 Nos. funded by HRDF Board		
Yamuna Nagar	i. Chhalour ii. Pabni Kalan iii. Daulatpur Malayan iv. Uncha Chandna, v. Mohri vi. Khera Brahmana vii. Tehi Jattan viii. Kher Khurd ix. Kheri Darshan x. Fatehpur	Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Not Started Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress
Kurukshetra	i. Bodla ii. Kolapur iii. Amargarh Majra iv. Jyotisar v. Narkatari vi. Garhi Rodan vii. Ramgarh viii. Kasithal xi. Untsal	Completed Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Completed Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress Work in progress
Kaithal	Sotha	
Urban Local Bodies 2 Nos.		Status
Yamuna Nagar	i. Bilaspur: (Villages -Bheel Chapper, Chanda Kheri, Kakroni) ii. Sarasvati Nagar: (Villages-Sabalpur, Chhappar & Maggarpur	
Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP)		
Kurukshetra	Kheri Markanda	

Table 1. indicates the status of various STPs constructed by HSHDB in various villages across the river.

Sarasvati Basin (east to west)	Early Harappan	Mature Harappan	Late Harappan	Total
Haryana	558	114	1168	1840
Indian Punjab	24	41	160	225
Rajasthan	18	31	0	49
Cholistan (Pakistan)	40	174	50	264
Total	640	360	1378	2378

Table 2. Distribution of different Harappan sites across different states²³.

²³ Danino Michel, 'The Lost River: On the Trails of Saraswati', 2010

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