
Reflection of the Acquisition of the Land for Creating Haweswater Reservoir in Sarah Hall's *Haweswater*: A Critical Study

Mr.Bilyansidha Kallappa Payagonde¹,Assistant Professor, Department of English,Arignar Anna Government Arts and Science College, Karaikal, Puducherry, India.

Dr.H.K.Awatade²,Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Department of English and Linguistics, Shankarrao Mohite Mahavidyala, Akluj, Solapur, Maharashtra, India.

Paper Received on 21-07-2024, Accepted on 19-08-2024
Published on 21-08-24; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.3.297

Abstract

The complete oeuvre of literary writings draws critical attention to multiple social, political, and economic predicaments, yet there are some avenues that demand subtle observations. The phenomenon called 'land,' concrete and abstract, has yielded enough literary discussions in literature. The land as a concrete entity connotes physical or geographical land for which people fight in the name of a nation or state and developmental projects to uplift their livelihood. The abstract land connotes 'space,' which normally functions at a conscious level for which to people struggle. The present paper highlights the former sort of 'land' acquisition issue, which creates several severe problems of 'place and displacement.' Acquisition of the land is a crucial step after the geologists and engineers have finalized the site to build a dam on a flowing river. The government or its designated agency, with the help of existing laws or by creating new ones, starts the procedure of acquiring the land for the project. This includes passing on the information to the inhabitants of the select area till the complete evacuations of the villages where they have been residing for generations. Sarah Hall's *Haweswater* deals with the theme of the dam affected lives. The novelist has described the process of land acquisition for the construction of the dam. The tenant farmers from the Mardale Valley had to vacate their houses to pave the way for creating the Haweswater reservoir. Sarah Hall, an English novelist, has captured the struggles of the people affected by the dam in her novel *Haweswater*.

Keywords: Place and Displacement, Water Reservoir, Land Acquisition; Persuasion of the affected people, Manchester City Waterworks

Introduction:

The discourse of so-called progressive colonialism from the West and the Afro-Asian world from the East is based on political, social, and cultural aspects first and literary aspects second. The long-time exploitative experiences have intensified the striving consciousness of the 'third world' demography while progressive projects in the West are looked at by some Western writers as veiled practices of exploitation. As a result of this narrative tone, literary adventures of either West or East attempt to address problems like dam building and its consequences faced by common strata of the respective society. Developmental projects like dams built on rivers have been serving intended purposes, such as the generation of electricity, the supply of drinking water to the growing population, irrigation in agriculture, and other uses. However, the beneficiaries of such projects do not consciously ponder upon the sacrifices the affected people have made. The struggles the affected people undergo in paving the way for the construction of the dams have been captured by sensitive novelists in good numbers across the world. Reflections of such dammed lives in the novels can be studied in order to bring awareness among the readers about the issues and challenges the project affected people have faced. Sarah Hall's *Haweswater* has been selected for the analysis. Her portrayal of the dam affecting people's lives is the center of the present study. The novelist has delineated the dammed lives, such as the acquisition of land, evacuating the village, witnessing the demolition of the properties, and moving of the burials. Land acquisition is considered for the critical analysis of all of these various aspects of the dam construction since the important step in coming up with any water reservoir is to acquire the land required for the project.

Meaning of Acquisition

The term 'acquisition' refers to the ownership of something that one buys or obtains. The transfer of legal rights over ownership from one person to another can be part of the acquisition. The Cambridge Dictionary (Online) defines acquisition as "something such as a building, another company, or a piece of land that is bought by a company, or the act of buying it."

Land is acquired by the government or its agency for developmental projects like the building of dams. It is comprehensively defined in the research article titled "Land Acquisition and Eminent Domain" as "Land Acquisition' literally means the acquisition of land for some public purpose by a government agency from individual land owners as authorized by the law, after paying a government fixed compensation to cover losses incurred by the landowners from surrendering their land to the concerned government agency" (Ratheesh Kumar V.V. 2018).

Brief History of the Acquisition of Land in England

Acquiring land is not a recent phenomenon, but it can be seen in the past, too. "Compulsory Powers," "Compulsory Purchase," and the "Lands Clauses Acts" are

the terms used in the legal documents in England for the power of taking private properties for public causes. The brief history of the acquisition of land is stated in a research article, "The Power of "Compulsory Purchase" under the Law of England." The researcher writes, William of Normandy declared that all land was held of the sovereign and all allegiance was due to him as lord paramount, and not to the immediate lord as had been the custom under the Saxon rulers... The law of the royal court rapidly absorbed the local customs and became the supreme and universal law of the land. Most of the large holders were dispossessed, but it was not till near the close of the reign of William I that this enforcement of the Conquest was effected. He gave no compensation for the lands that he annexed to the crown and, in one instance, laid waste a large tract of land in Hampshire, demolishing villages, churches, and convents and expelling the inhabitants for thirty miles around merely to form that royal hunting ground known as the New Forest. (William D. McNulty 1912)

England has its legislation for the acquisition of land for various developmental projects for the benefit of the larger group of people in society. It is mentioned by *Government Digital Service*, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in "Compulsory Purchase and Compensation: Guide 1 – Procedure" in the website as the following:

Compulsory purchase is a legal mechanism by which certain bodies (known as 'acquiring authorities') can acquire land without the consent of the owner. Compulsory purchase powers can support the delivery of a range of development, regeneration, and infrastructure projects in the public interest. In doing so, they can help to bring about improvements to social, economic, and environmental well-being. (*Government Digital Service 2021*)

Reflection of the Land Acquisition in *Haweswater*

The reservoir named 'Haweswater' was created in England, and the Mardale village was affected. Sarah Hall, after her research on the project, wrote a novel entitled *Haweswater*. The novel deals with the theme of dam construction and its effect on the people living in the area. The government gives responsibility to Manchester City Waterworks (MCW) for creating a water reservoir. As a result, MCW engages itself in the execution of the project, i.e., from the selection of the site to the construction of the dam. Mardale Valley was found to be suitable for the dam by geologists and surveyors. This is described by the novelist as,

It began as a simple proposal. Manchester City Waterworks had been hunting in Lakeland and the border for a site suitable for special development. This Valley had been considered among others. For the past fifteen years, geologists and engineers have served the area, boring holes in the rocks of the Valley and testing the water. Their results, when they reported back to MCW, had been favorable. (Hall 48)

The next step in building the dam is to acquire the land required for

construction. The MCW starts the procedure to acquire the land with the support of the Parliament. Haweswater Act was created to acquire land. "The original proposal had outlined a scheme to trap and transport water south from the lakes. It had been met with the perfect location. And it had already been authorized by an Act of Parliament some years before, in the spring of 1921. The Haweswater Act" (Hall 50).

A representative from the MCW arrives in the village in order to pass the information to the local people about the reservoir going to be created. The description of his arrival in the novel is as follows:

One bright day in the winter of 1936, a man came into the Mardale Valley with the intention of changing it forever. He came as the spokesperson for a project so strange and vast that, at first, the village did not take it seriously. It was as if the man spoke to them in another tongue or in abstracts far removed from the life of these men and women. His purpose was inconceivable. (42)

The representative of the MCW "needed to conduct a meeting" to discuss the purpose for which he had come to the village. The residents of the village gathered even with short notice for the meeting. The novelist writes, "Slowly, within half an hour, the village assembled, in the hard mud road next to the bridge over the river, in the waning light" (Hall 46, 47).

Samuel Lightburn's daughter, Janet Lightburn telephones the Lowther Estate and learns that the information shared by the spokesperson to the villagers is correct. She announces it to the people "He confirmed that the Mardale tenancies were under review. Relating to a private business endeavor with a Manchester Corporation. She was assured by him that they would all be informed, by letter and within a month, of the estate's decision" (Hall 70-71).

The land Acquisition plan is made by the MCW with no information to the inhabitants of the place or any kind of discussion with them in this regard. This may be perceived as a civilized invasion of the people of our own society. Sarah Hall writes, "...the village would know that it was to be a civilized invasion, the Valley annexed with great sympathy, dignity. Let them show their anger, and that anger will use itself up instead of breeding within itself" (53).

Manchester City Waterworks, with the help of the law passed by the Parliament, issued the compulsory purchase orders to acquire the required land for the reservoir. It left no scope for the people to appeal or question its move in this regard. The novelist describes it in the novel, "The lake and the surrounding land had been acquired by Manchester City Waterworks under Parliament's backing, and the owned properties had had compulsory purchase orders placed upon them. There was no question of appeal. There was no higher authority. It was signed and sealed; a done deal, so to speak" (Hall 50).

The MCW has diligently selected the site for the dam building. Experts sought to finalize the site where there is a scope to utilize more natural structures. It

is also observed that while selecting the land, the possible impact on the people living in the area is also considered. It seems the prime focus remained on the number of people who must be affected by the reservoir project. It is described in the novel as "Here was the village. Not insignificant, but it was a small place, with no more than thirty habitations, only four or five of which were owned outright. The land suitable for cultivation within its catchment area was almost negligible. And here was a scheme to benefit the whole nation" (Hall 49-50).

In conclusion, it can be said that the land acquisition process for the Haweswater reservoir has been studied minutely by the novelist Sarah Hall and described effectively in the novel *Haweswater*. The description includes the announcement of the compulsory purchase of the properties and the execution of the same through the representative from the Manchester City Waterworks (MCW). It is found in the novel that there was no provision for appeal from the people from the Mardale Valley when the purchase orders were issued. The novelist considers this practice of the MSW as a 'Civilised Invasion.' From the history of the laws prevalent in England at different times as far as the acquisition of the land is concerned, there has been little scope for the protest. The same is evident in the supremacy of the royals as well as the laws created by the Parliament. However, it is worth taking note that the site has been selected carefully so that fewer people are affected. Literary reflection on the legal provisions for land acquisition in England has been effectively delineated by Sarah Hall through her lens as a novelist.

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How to cite this article?

Mr. Bilyansidha Kallappa Payagonde, "Reflection of the Acquisition of the Land for Creating Haweswater Reservoir in Sarah Hall's *Haweswater: A Critical Study*" *Research Journal Of English (RJOE)*9(3),PP:293-297,2024, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.3.297

www.rjoe.org.in Oray's Publications ISSN: 2456-2696

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-3,2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.
