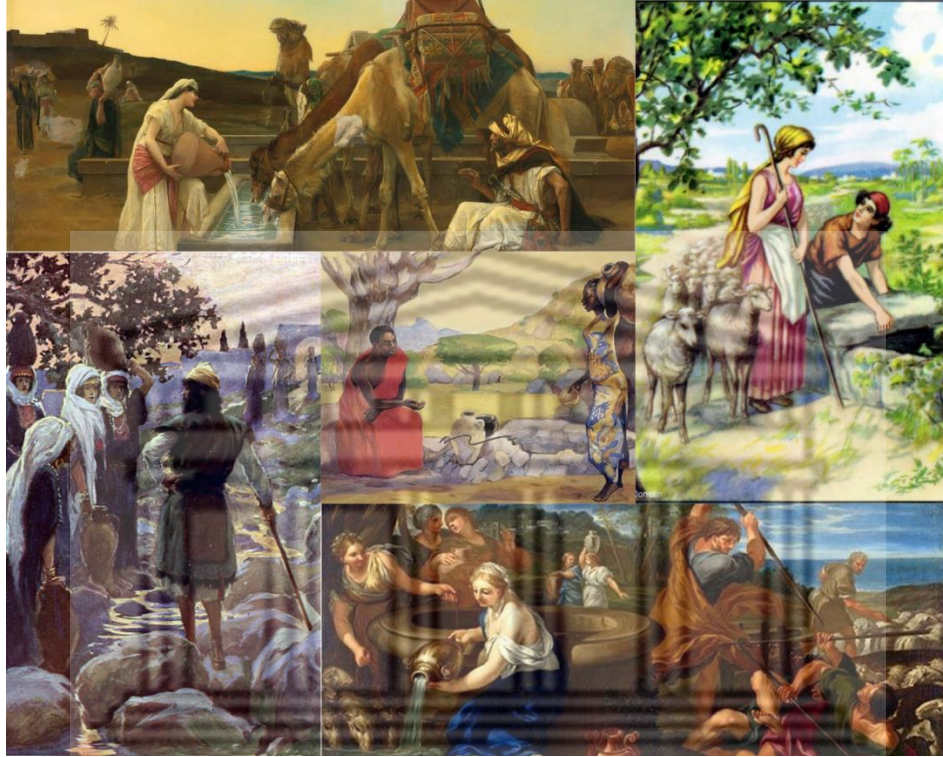


Daughters as Water-Fetchers:

'Streamlining' Water-Gender Dialectics in Biblical Narrative



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

David Augustine Dorapalli
Student Number: 3779305

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Supervisor: Prof. Sarojini Nadar

Co-supervisor: Dr. Johnathan Jodamus

ABSTRACT

Biblical interpreters have often been unwittingly anthropocentric in their reading of biblical narratives, ignoring the living and nonliving presence of physical world characteristics that underpin the narrative's overall framework. Moreover, with a focus on men, women's role as water fetchers has been overlooked, resulting in the text's dual undermining of ecological and gender issues. This thesis attempts to move away from such interpretations and reread selected biblical texts about water and women using a dual-mode of inquiry, namely gender-ecocriticism. A central question within ecocritical inquiry is—how is nature represented in the narrative? Furthermore, on the subject of gender criticism—how are daughters narrativized in the text? These are the two critical questions that this thesis intends to explore.

There are only five explicit narratives of 'daughters fetching water at the well' in the Bible. Nevertheless, these scenic activities are significant because of their historical link to the water-fetching daughters in the contemporary world. This study draws attention to the gendering of the water-fetching task by a gender analysis of the five texts. To understand why only daughters are assigned the task of water-fetching, the study draws on theories of the sexual division of labour. The first theme I discuss in this dissertation is water symbolism as found in Judeo-Christian and contemporary stories of water and its interplay with current issues of water scarcity. The focus of the second part is the water-gender intersections found in those five narratives. These themes are explored in this thesis through an exegetical analysis of the five biblical water-drawing narratives. The interpretation is based on socio-historical analysis as well as literary analysis employing narratology and biblical hermeneutical methods.

This dissertation concludes that water stories demonstrate that water is more than a symbol. The current water shortage crisis in some parts of the world directs our attention to the urgency of reconfiguring water in our religious and theological imaginations. Water becomes an intrinsic feature in the reader's mind when read from a gender-ecocritical angle. Being appreciative of each physical element in the vast expanse of the ecosystem, allows a reader's imagination to reflect on the global negative impact and the distortion of those valuable connections we as humans have with the rest of the physical world.

Keywords: Biblical Narrative, Water, Gender, Daughter, Water-Fetching, Drought, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Migration

DECLARATION

I declare that *Daughters as Water-Fetchers – Streamlining Water-Gender Dialectics in Biblical Narrative* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

David Augustine Dorapalli

16th November, 2021

Signed:



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The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this PhD are mine alone, and the NRF and LMS, and no other person or entity accepts any liability whatsoever for my views.

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO

My Parents

Kshema Dorapalli

&

Reverend John Augustine Dorapalli



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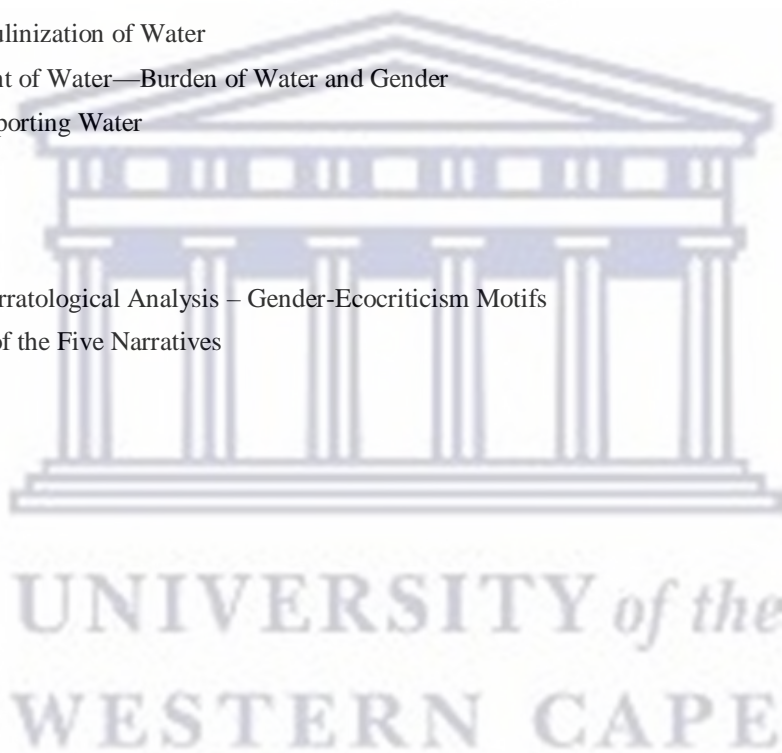
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

The Bible is an anthology of ‘sacred documents’¹ written at intervals over ‘seven to eight centuries.’² Shimeon Bar-Efrat observes that “more than one-third of the Hebrew Bible comprises narratives.”³ This dissertation is a narrative analysis of five accounts of daughters⁴ stepping out in the open to draw water. Canadian scholar Robert C. Culley names the structure of these narratives ‘at the well’ scenes. Early established interpretations of these stories reveal that it was the custom for “oriental women, particularly those who are unmarried, to fetch water from the wells”⁵ in the ‘mornings and evenings’⁶—at which time ‘they go adorned with their trinkets.’⁷ Fetching water from a water-spring or river ‘in a vessel carried on the head or shoulder has been women’s errands from time immemorial.’⁸ Although these accounts constitute a minor literary genre, we find many parallels in world folklore.⁹ The motivation for rereading these stories is the remarkable historical links they share with the contemporary realities of water-fetching daughters in several water-scant regions of the world.

The water-women narratives have been selected primarily based on the presence of ‘daughters of the townsfolk’ who walk to fetch water from a distant water source—a well. The water-drawing task was usually assigned to daughters and women of the household. However, sadly, the politics of this tedious task’s gender-specific nature has neither been recognized nor

¹ John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York, *The Bible As Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 389.

² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, new and rev. ed. (New York, NY/USA: Basic Books, 2011), xiii.

³ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 2004), 9.

⁴ Rebekah, Rachel, Zipporah and her sisters, the water drawing daughters of the townspeople of Zuph, and the Samaritan daughter — these are excerpts from Genesis 24 and 29, Exodus 2, 1 Samuel 9, and John 4, respectively

⁵ Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis: With Introduction and Notes*, 4th ed., Westminster Commentaries (London, England: Methuen & Co., 1905), 233-234.

⁶ Thomas Hartwell Horne, John Ayre, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 13th ed. (London, UK: Longmans, Green, 1872), 3:45.

⁷ John Fleetwood, *History of the Holy Bible: From the Creation of the World to the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ (With Numerous Notes)* (New York, NY/USA: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 43.

⁸ Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA/USA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013), 9.

⁹ The image of women fetching water is a powerful metaphor reflected in Indian mythological figures of Krishna playing with the milkmaids (*gopis*) at the water spaces (with Krishna often breaking those water-pots). See Archana Yadav, “Songs of Fetching Water,” *Down To Earth*, March 23, 2017; Magoulick narrates some interesting facts about water fetching in the villages of West Africa. See Mary Magoulick, “Women and Water in Senegal,” in *The Folklore Muse*, ed. Frank De Caro (Utah, UT/USA: Utah State University, University Libraries, 2008), 32-38., Emily Urquhart shares the water fetching stories in Amherst Cove (a Canadian community in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador). See Emily Urquhart, “Looking at the Water versus Fetching It,” Newfoundland and Labrador: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Features, last modified June 26, 2015.

discussed in biblical interpretations. The Hebrew verb *שָׁאֵב* transliterated *sahw-ab'* for 'to draw' — 'to bale up water,'¹⁰ and the equivalent Greek word *ἀντλέω*— *antleó* — 'to draw out water,' 'to bale or pump out,'¹¹ are terms that are attached to women who perform the activity of baling out water from the well. The use of this verb is common in all five narratives. This is another distinguishing element that lends itself to the grouping of the five water-fetching stories. These passages have multiple configurations of meanings unique to each context and multiple motifs within each narrative that unfolds.

1.2. Gender-Ecocritical References in the Five Narratives

With the help of tables below, I outline the parallel references to ecological elements and gender characteristics in the five narratives to illustrate how such parallel references in the narratives lend itself to the deployment of the lenses of gender analysis and ecocriticism.

Genesis 24	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 13	I am standing here by the spring of water , and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water .
Verses 15, 16	There was Rebekah , who was born to Bethuel, son of Milkah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder . The girl was fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had known

The blue highlights indicate the text's reference to water and the red highlights indicate the text's reference to daughters. Such an interweaving of the gender and ecological elements in the narrative illustrates how the theoretical approaches of gender and ecocriticism can be deployed as cognate disciplines to investigate the dialectical relationship between water and daughters in the biblical narrative.

Genesis 29	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 6, 9	He said to them, 'Is it well with him?' 'Yes.' They replied, 'and here is his daughter, Rachel, coming with the sheep .'

The red highlights indicate the text's reference to Laban's daughter and the green highlights indicate the text's reference to sheep – parallel references pointing to a relationship between the daughters and characters in the other physical world in the narrative.

¹⁰ Francis Brown et al., "Sha'ab," in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA/USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), n.a.

¹¹ Francis Brown et al., "antleó," in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA/USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), n.a.

Exodus 2	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 9	The priest of Midian had seven daughters . They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

The red highlights indicate the text's reference to the seven daughters of the priest of Midian, while the blue highlights indicate the text's reference to the water, and their father's flocks – a feature of the physical world.

1 Samuel 2	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 11	As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water , and they said to them, 'Is the seer here?'

The red highlights indicate the text's reference to some girls, while the blue highlights indicate the text's reference to water.

John 4	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 7	A Samaritan woman came to draw water , and Jesus said to her , 'Give me a drink.'

The red highlights indicate the text's reference to the woman, while the blue highlights indicate the text's reference to water.

In the title of this dissertation, the phrase 'daughters as water-fetchers' is purposefully deployed as a polemical-rhetorical device to draw attention to the household's systemic sexual division of labor. The question of women's historical association with this strenuous task of drawing, fetching, storing, and managing water, is the primary focus of this study. The study is informed by multidisciplinary discourses when analyzing these narratives against the background of the current global freshwater crisis.

Gender and ecocritical hermeneutical strategies are employed as primary dual modes of inquiry. This study centralizes the dialectical interaction between water and women as characterized within these narratives. The ongoing geopolitical water problem sets the scene for revisiting these stories with a plea to elicit newer gender-eco-central meanings. The need to streamline the water-gender dialectics, therefore, becomes a crucial activity of an observant reader.

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The introduction outlines the central problematic associated with global water scarcity and women's task of water fetching. Here, I also discuss my positionality and provide the rationale for studying sacred texts and their importance for the reader. And, I articulate the purpose and the central research questions that frame this dissertation.

The second chapter is a detailed synopsis of the available literature on the texts' literary structure, water symbolism, and daughters in the biblical narrative. The second section of chapter two discusses the methodology, theories, and hermeneutical strategies deployed in this study.

The third chapter elucidates the dialectical human-water relationship and water symbolism found in Judeo-Christian water stories. Indigenous water stories from Canada, India and South Africa and the meanings of water in these contexts are discussed, concluding with an observation on global water scarcity and its connection to daughters as water-fetchers.

The fourth chapter is a discussion of the narrativization of daughters in biblical narratives through a gender-ecocritical narrative analysis of Genesis 24:1-21 and Genesis 29:1-12. The methodology that is applied explains how the methods of gender and ecocriticism augment the understanding of the text.

The fifth chapter is a discussion of the dangers near water sources. It continues the narrative analysis of the next two texts, Exodus 2: 15b- 24 and 1 Samuel 9: 1-14. The sixth chapter deepens the discussion on water symbolism, focusing on water innuendo, thirst, and the current realities of water scarcity while engaging in the narrative analysis of John 4: 4- 26. Chapter seven is the epilogue, where I summarize the findings and suggest some possibilities of further research beyond the present study's scope.

1.3. Central Problematic of the Study

The earth is a water planet. Almost ninety-seven percent of the water is in the oceans and the water is salty. A large part of the over 2.5 percent of the water is secured in the form of solid ice caps in the North and South Poles. Just around “one percent of accessible water is found in lakes and rivers as freshwater.”¹² As a relative concept, “water-scarcity is a phenomenon that results from unequal distribution and mismanagement of water.”¹³ Several studies indicate that ‘population growth, increasing climatic and hydrological variability, and changing food preferences are likely to aggravate water scarcity, with potential implications for food security for millions of people, especially in developing countries.’¹⁴ Boretti Roas states that by 2050, more than 40 percent of the

¹² Msangi Josephine Phillip, ed., *Combating Water Scarcity in Southern Africa: Case Studies from Namibia* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 3.

¹³ Phillip, *Combating Water*, 2.

¹⁴ Edward B. Barbier, *Water Paradox: Overcoming the Global Crisis in Water Management* (New Haven, CT/USA: Yale University Press, 2019), 75.

world's population will live in water-stressed regions – in which around one billion people live in such areas today.”¹⁵

The ways in which people obtain fresh water from its sources differ, especially in some regions of developing countries. In Anita Roddick's evaluation, “physics dictates that water takes the path of least resistance, but for most people on this planet, the path to the water is a bloody hard road— one billion people worldwide do not have any water within a fifteen-minute walk of their homes.”¹⁶ Within this context, the very idea of fetching water from a nearby water source daily for domestic use is to be understood as a gender-specific burden of underprivileged women, who lack piped freshwater. Studies have shown that “women and young girls primarily have the task of fetching water in developing countries.”¹⁷ Women frequently are the caretakers, healthcare providers, food provisioners, and small-scale farmers and are responsible for domestic water provision and management.¹⁸ These roles are often ‘naturalized, unpaid and under-recognized— but also brings women into daily and direct contact with environmental pollution and resource scarcity and gives access to issues linked to political and climate shifts.’¹⁹ Often children, mainly daughters, accompany their mothers in this daily work. Women thus pass on knowledge about political and ecological conditions related to water resources to future generations.²⁰ Anthropologists, archaeologists, and artists have historically documented this daily chore of the water fetchers. Susan Sorenson points out that, a brief review of non-scientific literature, poetry, and art reveals that fetching water has traditionally been a female activity. Images of a tranquil and beautiful woman balancing a water pot on her head, for example, were glorified.²¹

¹⁵ Boretti, A., Rosa, L., Reassessing the projections of the World Water Development Report. *Nature Partner Journals/ Clean Water* 2, 15 (2019).

¹⁶ Anita Roddick, in Robert F. Kennedy, Anita Roddick, and Brooke Shelby Biggs, *Troubled Water: Saints, Sinners, Truth, and Lies about the Global Water Crisis* (Chichester, West Sussex/UK: Anita Roddick Books, 2004), 8-10.

¹⁷ Ellen Webbink, Jeroen Smits, and Eelke de Jong, "Household and Context Determinants of Child Labor in 221 Districts of 18 Developing Countries," *Social Indicators Research* 110, no. 2 (January 2013): 819-856.

¹⁸ Bennet, et al, 2005, Burchler 2009; Radel 2009.

¹⁹ Ariel Salleh, *Eco-sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology* (London, England: Pluto Press, 2009) in Stephanie Buechler and Anne-Marie S. Hanson, *A Political Ecology of Women, Water and Global Environmental Change* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 5.

²⁰ Stephanie Buechler and Anne-Marie S. Hanson, *A Political Ecology of Women, Water and Global Environmental Change* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 5.

²¹ Susan B. Sorenson, Christiaan B. Morssink, and Abril P. Campos, "Safe access to safe water in low-income countries: Water fetching in current times," *Social Science & Medicine* 72, no. 9 (2011): 1522.

On the African continent, “40 billion working hours are lost each year because people, mainly women, have to spend them fetching and carrying water.”²² Procuring water involves a significant amount of time and energy for those with no water sources in or near the home. Yashoda Zole, a young woman who lives in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, says that her vote will be determined by one thing only—and that is the accessibility of water.²³ In the video interview,²⁴ Zole sternly states that “men do not care because it is the women who fetch water.”²⁵

Richard and Jacqueline Agesa argue that “the absence of piped tap water in most Sub-Saharan African homes has led household members, typically women, to seek water from a source outside the home: rivers, ponds, community water source points, or boreholes.”²⁶ Barbara Schreiner reports that current UN statistics indicate that water and water management are gendered; there is an apparent disparity in how water-related labour/tasks are distributed and who makes water decisions.²⁷ It is estimated that “girls aged 6-14 spend an average of one hour a day collecting and fetching water compared with 25 minutes for their brothers in most rural areas of the developing countries.”²⁸ Women in rural areas walk about 5 to 20 kilometers a day to fetch water. Rita Chandran says that the physical strain of collecting water affects their emotional equilibrium and their menstrual hygiene,²⁹ which are serious gendered issues that draw the attention of this study. Considering the facts underlined, the gender-specific nature of this task of water-fetching is the central problem that this study undertakes to investigate.

²² Sorenson, Morssink, and Campos, "Safe access," 1522. This article reflects the findings of forty four countries making calculations about the amount of time women and children spend at water sources from a health point of view.

²³ Yashoda Zole, narr, 'Men don't care about drought as women fetch the water', BBC, May 2019.

²⁴ Zole, 'Men don't care'

²⁵ Zole, 'Men don't care'

²⁶ Richard U. Agesa and Jacqueline Agesa, "Time Spent On Household Chores (Fetching Water) And The Alternatives Forgone For Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from Kenya," *Journal of Developing Areas* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 29.

²⁷ Barbara Schreiner, "A Place for Women in the World of Water," *Research Program on Land, Water and Ecosystems* (blog), the entry posted November 7, 2014.

²⁸ C. Mark Blackden and Quentin Wodon, *Gender, Time Use, and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC, USA: World Bank, 2012), 55.

²⁹ Rina Chandran, "Forced to walk miles, India water crisis hits rural women hardest," *Reuters* (Albuquerque, NM), July 12, 2018, United States edition, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-water-women/forced-to-walk-miles-india-water-crisis-hits-rural-women-hardest-idUSKBN1K318B>. Ranjana Kumari, director of advocacy Centre for Social Research makes a statement on the issue. Forced to walk miles, India water crisis hits rural women, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-water-crisis-hits-rural-women-5258162/>

1.4. Global Water Scarcity Statistics

It is somewhat disquieting that the ‘biggest threat to the planet earth will be a global water crisis over the next decade.’³⁰ Over the years, “water has been identified as a top global risk on economies, environments, and people.”³¹ Concerning drinking water, “it is predicted that declines in streamflow will exacerbate aquifers' pollution and that by the 2050s, more than 650 million people in 500 cities are projected to face declines in freshwater availability by at least ten percent”³². As rivers and streams contain some groundwater, salination could also affect surface-level freshwater.³³ It can be noted that “a range of compounding factors risks pushing more megacities towards a ‘water day zero’ that see the taps run dry.”³⁴ These include population growth, migration, industrialization, climate change, drought, groundwater depletion, weak infrastructure, and poor urban planning.³⁵

Insufficient access to water services is the “primary cause of early mortality,” especially in the world's megacities, and this human and environmental cost "surpasses" the expected negative human implications of global climate change.³⁶ In this situation, “it is invariably the poor and powerless that die of inadequate sanitation.”³⁷ Eric Swyngedouw points out that, in most situations, genuine scarcity is caused by a lack of financial resources, political and economic clout, poverty, and poor governance, not by a lack of water.³⁸ He reminds us that water is intrinsically political, and so contested, and is susceptible to a variety of tensions, conflicts, and social struggles over its acquisition, transformation, and distribution, with socio-ecologically unequally partitioned impacts.³⁹

³⁰ The Global Risks Report 2016 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum within the framework of The Global Competitiveness and Risks Team, 2016), 6.

³¹ Edward B. Barbier, *Water Paradox: Overcoming the Global Crisis in Water Management* (New Haven, CT/USA: Yale University Press, 2019), 3. This study observes the human exclusivity in most researches that thereby ignores the rest of the non-human lives—animals, plants, and the entire ecosystem that also need water to survive.

³² The Future We Don't Want – How Climate Change Could Impact the World's Greatest Cities (New York, NY/USA: Urban Climate Change Research Network (UCCRN), 2018), 24.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Global Risks 2019: Insight Report*, 14th ed. (Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2019), 71.

³⁵ Global Risks, 71.

³⁶ Eric Swyngedouw, "The Political Economy and Political Ecology of the Hydro-Social Cycle," *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education* 142 (August 2009): 58. (Gleick 2004, Gleick and Cooley 2006).

³⁷ Peter H. Gleick and Heather Cooley, *The World's Water 2006-2007: The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources* (Washington, DC/USA: Island Press, 2006. Cited by Swyngedouw, "The Political," 58.

³⁸ Swyngedouw, "The Political," 58.

³⁹ E. Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power: Water and Contested Modernities in Spain, 1898-2010* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), in Simon P. Meisch, "I Want to Tell You a Story: How Narrative Water Ethics Contributes to Re-theorizing Water Politics," *Water* 11, no. 631 (2019): 4.

1.5. Positionality

I grew up in Chennai (Madras), a city in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in the household of parents who were emigrants from the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh and spoke the Telugu language. In this study, the gender and ecocritical perspectives of readings have enormous significance for the current incidences of drought and the subsequent migrations of peoples. A blatant truth that is historically evident centers on how water scarcity, drought, and the subsequent famine force peoples to migrate in large numbers to countries that have more water. This is a geopolitical phenomenon because millions of people are constantly on the move. It is estimated that ‘approximately three percent of the world’s 6.5 billion people are displaced.’⁴⁰ Growing inequalities of wealth cause these migrations by globalization, political and ethnic conflicts and environmental disasters. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller have already called this era “the age of migration.”⁴¹ They argue that the possible climate change-related migration is often closely related to other aspects of environmental change. Migration scholars now recognize that environmental factors have been significant in driving migration throughout history.⁴²

The ideological, theological, religious, and cultural framework was provided by a conservative stream of the Baptist Church denomination. Although I assumed that framework, I also questioned it in many ways. When I started studying, I chose to study theology. One area of study that I cultivated an interest in as a theology student was feminist, gender-critical and ecological analysis of biblical texts. I was drawn towards structuralism⁴³—sociological - anthropological sciences—to understand theological questions. That set off a dual trajectory where I could engage both in religion and theology and specialize in gender-ecocritical analysis of biblical texts.⁴⁴ I define this theological framework as one that articulates questions of the human

⁴⁰ VanThanh Nguyen, SVD, "Asia in Motion: A Biblical Reflection on Migration," *Asian Christian Review* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 18.

⁴¹ Stephen Castles, Hein Gysbert de Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 5th ed. (New York, NY/USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

⁴² Castles, Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 212.

⁴³ Claude Lévi-Strauss’ structural anthropology, especially his theory of kinship. He argued that human kinship was fundamentally cultural.

⁴⁴ As a student, my master’s thesis focused on the topic of virginity — textual analysis of Deuteronomy 22:13-19, using gender and anthropology perspective as tools of interpretation. I have also published a book chapter on topics of Queer Theology, Gendering of Water, and articles on 1 Samuel 9: 11-13 using gender and spatiality methods of analysis. David A. Dorapalli, "The Water-Drawing Girls in 1 Samuel 9: 11-14a: Exploring Spatiality and Gender toward a World for All," *In God's Image* 35, no. 2 (December 2016): 12-20; Dorapalli David Augustine, "Engendering Water Resource Management: Eco-feministic Overtures of Rural Women’s Epistemologies of Water and Water Resource Management", *Waters of Life and Death*, ed. Sam P. Mathew and Chandran Paul Martin (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 130 – 161.

condition and the natural environment, including anthropology and ecology. As a man, I consider that men must participate in feminist agency and struggle because patriarchal men have historically been the main perpetrators of women's oppression. Men bear a greater proportion of the blame for ending women's subjugation.

This dissertation's geographical positionalities are in the form of stories and statistics from India, Canada, and South Africa. My first travel overseas was to Holland, the water land. The coastline waters surrounding Holland and the flows of tiny canals, lakes, rivers, and boats are etched in my memory, positioning the weather's synonymity with the rains that bring water and the cool breeze. I was amazed that water was everywhere in Holland and learnt that it was a human-made water land and that the construction of dykes literally earned the land from the rising seas. Growing up, living beside, and spending time near water bodies in these countries for a fair degree of time has shaped my paradigm of water and water issues.

Therefore, throughout the study, an attempt has been made to balance my readings on the issue from these diverse regions—which constitute both an abundance and absence/scarcity of water. Mainstream photo-journalists articulate the seamless link between the ancient biblical stories and their counterparts in the present-day geographical regions mentioned above. So I also use random select visual representations of the five biblical water-fetching scenes by popular artists.

This study is guided by a deep sense of environmental concern and ecological urgency, considering how 'water is distressed and has become scarce and vulnerable.'⁴⁵ "We are all bodies of water in the constitutional, genealogical, and geographical sense."⁴⁶ For the survival of life or for any biological process, water is an essential requirement and "a robust ability to regulate total body water is paramount for any living thing to survive."⁴⁷ In essence—I am water, and therefore I exist. Thus, I think, along with my co-waters. In reality—as soon as we recognize that our bodies are mostly water, "continuously transformed through water, continuously giving back to other

⁴⁵ Government of Canada Global Affairs Canada, *Global Water Crisis: The Facts*, by Lisa Gippy and Kelsey Anderson (Hamilton, ON/Canada: United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, 2017), 3-6.

⁴⁶ Astrida Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, by Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Soderback (New York, NY/USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 96-99.

⁴⁷ Perrier ET, Armstrong LE, Daudon M, et al. From State to Process: Defining Hydration. *Obes Facts*. 2014;7 Suppl 2:6-12

bodies of water for better or worse— it becomes clear that human bodies are hardly separate from the other myriad water-bodies— with which we co-exist now and across times.”⁴⁸ Alongside this theoretical positioning and formulation, water is conceptualized as an inseparable part of ourselves and therefore, the need to understand the gravity of water issues becomes increasingly crucial. Rupert Glasgow reasons that “at present, over two-thirds of the world’s cities with more than a million inhabitants are located on the coast, and many more are beside rivers, and hence our bodies are simply too dependent on water for us to let it out of our sight for long.”⁴⁹

1.6. Geopolitical Significance of Water and Gender

The flowability of water transgresses any geographical boundaries. In her studies, Karen Becker points out that “water, flowing through the hydrological cycle, links individual bodies to one another through the cycling of waters and water-borne effluents between water bodies and organisms — both human and non-human.”⁵⁰ As it flows, “water transgresses geopolitical boundaries, defies jurisdictions, pits upstream against downstream users, and creates competition between economic sectors, both for its use and disposal— invoking intertwined water quantity issues and quality.”⁵¹ Thus, “water is intensely political in a conventional sense: implicated in contested relationships of power and authority.”⁵² It is perceptible that the shortage of freshwater is becoming geopolitically problematic. When nations dispute with each other for their fair share of water and lead to a crisis, inadvertently, they are caught in a vortex of geopolitical forces. Writing about the geopolitics of shared water resources, Peter Gleick highlights the “long history of water-related disputes,” ranging from disagreements over appropriate water supply to deliberate attacks on water systems during wars.⁵³

John Beddington⁵⁴ argues that “the world will be amidst a “perfect storm” of food shortages, water scarcity, and costly oil by 2030.”⁵⁵ He also mentions that ‘these developments, plus

⁴⁸ Astrida Neimanis, "Water and Knowledge," in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, ed. Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong (Waterloo, Ontario/Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017), 51.

⁴⁹ Rupert D. V. Glasgow, *The Concept of Water* (Zaragoza, Spain: R. Glasgow Books, 2009), 56.

⁵⁰ Karen Bakker, "Water: Political, Biopolitical, Material," *Social Studies of Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 616.

⁵¹ Bakker, "Water: Political, Biopolitical," 616.

⁵² Bakker, "Water: Political, Biopolitical," 616.

⁵³ Peter H. Gleick, "Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security," *International Security* 18, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 83.

⁵⁴ The chief Science advisor to the United Kingdom government

⁵⁵ John Beddington, Speech to the GovNet Sustainable Development UK Conference, at www.govnet.co.uk/news/govnet/professor-sir-john-beddingtons-speech-at-sduk-09, 19 March 2009. Cited by Ian

accelerating climate change and mass migration across national borders, would lead to significant upheavals,⁵⁶ resulting in a severe problem where ‘water’s access becomes a contentious site.’⁵⁷ Be it the raucous quarrel between women at the well,⁵⁸ water-tap or the conflicts between townships at the water source, or the wars between nations⁵⁹ to obtain a share in the seas and rivers—the truth of water's ambiguous nature as a divider is implicit. These struggles around water will continue as long as politics and market forces determine the allocation of water. The day-to-day media flooded by pictographic drought stories point to the collapse of infrastructure obligated to ensure access to this basic necessity.

1.7. Evidence of the Issues at Stake

Throughout this dissertation, a conscious emphasis is laid on how women, from, and despite their marginalized positions, are very active in their communities and are primary motivators for storing and managing water and addressing the adverse effects of environmental change on water resources.⁶⁰ Malcolm Farley states that globally, women and girls spend about two hundred million hours daily collecting water, which, he claims, is a colossal waste of their valuable time, (when compared to men and boys who do not have this responsibility thrust upon them, and are able to use that time for education or leisure). He gives the example of Aysha, a 13-year-old girl from Afar, Ethiopia, ‘who hauls eight hours round trip every day to collect water for herself and her family.’ He invokes Sanjay Wijesekera’s claim that “those 200 million hours add up to 8.3 million

Sample, “World Faces ‘Perfect Storm’ of Problems by 2030, Chief Scientist to Warn,” *Guardian*(London), 18 March 2009;

⁵⁶ Beddington, Speech to the GovNet

⁵⁷ Beddington, Speech to the GovNet

⁵⁸ Fights over well-water are quite common in India. With the upper caste monopoly of the rural village wells, that space is restricted to Dalit women, who endure a lot of discrimination due to this exclusion. Elyse Wanshel, "After His Wife Was Denied Water, Man Spent 40 Days Digging A Well During Drought: We can dig it.," *HuffPost* (New York, USA), May 11, 2016, Good News, accessed October 13, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dalit-man-bapurao-tajne-digs-well-40-days-wife-denied-water-drought_n_573223bce4b096e9f092e1d8.

⁵⁹ Wendy Barnaby, "Do Nations go to War over Water?" *Nature* 458, no. 19 (March 2009): 282.

⁶⁰ In line with other approaches to understanding how women have been marginalized in water decisions, this research agrees with the findings by Ariel Salleh, *Eco-sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology* (London, England: Pluto Press, 2009) Cited in Stephanie Buechler and Anne-Marie S. Hanson, *A Political Ecology of Women, Water and Global Environmental Change* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 5.

days or more than 22,800 years,⁶¹ it is as if a woman started with her empty bucket in the Stone Age and did not arrive home with water until 2018.”⁶²

In 8 out of 10 houses with water off-premises,⁶³ women and girls are in charge of water collection, hence lowering the population with restricted access to drinking water services will have a significant gender impact. It is observed that ‘of the ten countries where at least 20 percent of the national population uses limited services, eight are in sub-Saharan Africa, and two are in Oceania.’⁶⁴It can be reasoned that women contribute significantly to their households due to their role in society as caregivers. When there is water scarcity, it affects this role in a significant way. Studies in different countries in Africa have shown that ‘women do ninety percent of the wood gathering and water collection.’⁶⁵ It was evidenced by another research conducted in Ethiopia’s Wuchale and Jidda Woreda regions by Getachew Demie and team. They estimated in their studies on women’s relation to development activities that about “six hours are spent fetching water by girls and women every day.”⁶⁶ These are not isolated stories—as the politics of framing might presuppose and minimize—but when multiplied by the millions, they become a geopolitical phenomenon which necessitates the need for the politics of water-gender dialectic to be vocalized.

1.8. Why Religion or Sacred Texts are Important to the Debate?

As a reader of sacred texts my proclivity towards gender and ecological themes within and outside the biblical text has been the primary factor driving this study. My particular interest in water rhetoric grew as I resided in different cities⁶⁷ near watersheds. The persistent problem of water

⁶¹ Malcolm G. Farley, "How Long Does It Take to Get Water? For Aysha, Eight Hours a Day," <https://www.unicefusa.org>.

⁶² Farley, "How Long Does It Take?"

⁶³ Anik Bhaduri interview — "Water Future": a global platform <https://waterpartnership.org.au/anik-bhaduri-interview-water-future-a-global-platform-facilitating-international-scientific-collaboration/>

⁶⁴ *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017), 11.

⁶⁵ UN-Water. *UN-Water Factsheet on Water and Gender, World Water Day 2013*; UN-Water: Geneva, Switzerland, 2013. Cited in Gomez, Perdiguero, and Sanz, "Socioeconomic Factors," 7.

⁶⁶ Demie, G.; Bekele, M.; Seyoum, B. "Water accessibility impact on girl and women’s participation in education and other development activities: The case of Wuchale and Jidda Woreda," Ethiopia. *Environ. Syst. Res. (Environmental Systems Research)* 2016, 5, 1–12. Cited in Gomez, Perdiguero, and Sanz, "Socioeconomic Factors," 8.

⁶⁷ The geographical positionality this dissertation reflects are the stories and statistics that are from India, Canada, and South Africa. Growing up and living beside watersheds in these countries for a fair degree of time has shaped my paradigm of water and water issues. Therefore, throughout the study—an attempt has been made to bring about a balance of my readings on the issue from these diverse regions.

shortages has always troubled my mental and intellectual standpoint on the question of water. Some basic questions like what is water, how do we humans socially relate to water, and the sacrality of water, initiated my curiosities on water issues from a gender and ecocritical angle. I began to understand that we cannot know water except in relation to our own circumstances and modes of knowing. In every case, it is the 'relation' that defines the essence of "what water is."⁶⁸ The primacy of relationships is evident in the literal and material sense that 'every cell of our body contains water and functions by virtue of water.'⁶⁹ Jamie Linton argues, "the very process that we call 'life' is so conditioned by water that it becomes impossible to separate the two processes except by fixing them in abstractions such as 'people' and 'H₂O.'⁷⁰ He further states that 'knowing and identifying water is necessarily a product of engagement, with engagement itself being the real—relational—a substance of both the knower and the known.'⁷¹ I began to understand that defining the water crisis in terms of diminishing quantities of available water obscures the bigger picture—namely, that 'every issue involving water is realized in a specific social and cultural context.'⁷²

Margaret Somerville argues that "our physical ecosystem is not indestructible, and we have obligations to hold it in trust for future generations. The same is true of our metaphysical ecosystem—the values, principles, attitudes, beliefs, and shared stories on which we have founded our society."⁷³ This dissertation cautiously treads on the understandings of religion, especially as the research is aware of religions' role as a contributor to the ecological water crises. The Indigenous, Jewish, Christian and Hindu environmentalisms are critically discussed in the process. An attempt is made to understand how we can use the religious text as a rhetorical tool to advance the ecological agenda.

Biblical interpretation involves a fusion of horizons. We read using the prism of context—a particular water issue that is infuriating becomes the rationale for this research. I draw my inspiration from Ivone Gebara, who discusses poverty and women, especially pregnant women, and the strain on natural resources and population pressures, which is dependent on the availability

⁶⁸ Jamie Linton, *What Is Water?: The History of a Modern Abstraction* (Vancouver, BC/Canada: UBC Press, 2010), 223.

⁶⁹ Linton, *What Is Water?* 223

⁷⁰ Linton, *What Is Water?* 223

⁷¹ Linton, *What Is Water?* 223.

⁷² Linton, *What Is Water?* 227.

⁷³ Margaret Somerville, *Bird on an Ethics Wire: Battles about Values in the Culture Wars* (Montreal, Québec/Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), vii.

of potable water.⁷⁴ She was instrumental in positioning the poor and marginalized as her hermeneutical locus and focused on “socially engaged readings of the Bible by applying the social sciences methods to the study of social realities.”⁷⁵

The realities of the sight of water-fetching girls who transport water from the well to their homes with the heavy burden of water on their hips/shoulders, heads, and backs compel this research to ask pertinent questions. This dissertation problematizes the connection between water, the seemingly marginal-gender assignment of water-fetching, and the current geopolitics that cause water scarcity.

1.9. Purpose of this Research

This research seeks to identify the water-women themes in the five narratives mentioned earlier in this chapter in order to analyze the texts' ideological structure and the gendering of water fetching tasks. The purpose of this research is to explicate the intersections between the concepts and realities of water, symbolisms related to water, water stress, water and women, and their relevance to the global water crisis and its unequal gendered impact on women.

1.10. Central Research Questions

- a. What are the symbolisms of water in selected biblical narratives and contemporary narratives?
- b. How do these symbolisms intersect with the gendering of water fetching?
- c. What significance does a gendered ecocritical reading of the narratives hold for the geopolitical phenomenon of water scarcity?
- d. How is the interplay between water scarcity, gendered role responsibilities of water fetching, and migration expressed in the five selected biblical narratives?

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the dissertation topic by offering a general backdrop and rationale for this study. I have brought attention to the arguments around the issue of water scarcity and the attendant controversies in order to locate the biblical texts' significance to the contemporary global water crisis. This chapter also highlighted my positionality and the

⁷⁴ Ivone Gebara's interview with *Veja Magazine*. Cited in Nanne, K. and Bergano, M. “Aborto Não É Pecado.” (Abortion is not a Sin) *Veja* 26 no.40 (1993): 7-10.

⁷⁵ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN/USA: Fortress Pr., 2001), 38.

rationale for why religion is essential in the debate about water and gender, before concluding with a statement about the study's purpose and defining the four research questions that would be addressed. The following chapter continues on to a discussion and review of the diverse literature on the subject.



CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2. 1. Synopsis of Scholarship

The narratives chosen for study from Genesis, Exodus, 1 Samuel, and John are stories of ‘Rebekah and Isaac,’ ‘Rachel and Jacob,’ ‘Zipporah and Moses,’ ‘the ‘water-drawing girls and Saul,’ and the ‘Woman of Samaria and Jesus.’ These ‘daughters at the well’ stories have attracted some attention by biblical scholars such as Robert C. Culley, Robert Alter, Esther Fuchs, and Amy-Jill Levine. These stories are crafted following a similar narrative pattern. Biblical scholars employ several literary devices to interpret these stories. Adele Berlin calls to attention that ‘biblical narratives are vibrant and vivid and have an enduring power to affect those who hear or read it.’⁷⁶ She further affirms that “its power comes not only from the authority of the scripture but from the inner dynamics of the stories themselves—these dynamics make biblical narratives comparable to works of art.”⁷⁷

Based on the key components relevant to this research, this chapter aims to present a literature survey that can be broadly divided into three parts:

- a) Literature on selected texts for analysis i.e., Genesis 24: 1-21; Genesis 29: 1-14; Exodus 2: 11b-21; 1 Samuel 9: 1-14, and John 2: 4-15.
- b) Literature on biblical scholarship on water and water symbolism; daughters, and water-gender dialectics.
- c) Literature on methodology used in narrative analysis.

Samuel Rolles Driver, in his 1907 Commentary on the Book of Genesis, commenting on chapter 29: 1-14, remarks that the practice of water drawing by daughters “is still the duty of women in the East.”⁷⁸ Driver lists four references to this practice in his footnotes: Genesis 29: 1-14; Exodus 2: 11b-21; 1 Samuel 9: 1-14, and John 2: 4-15. It can be observed that biblical scholars after Driver uncritically followed suit without showing any interest in the observation that the role of water fetching was exclusive to daughters. Typically, the recurrent focus of these scholars relates to the structural similarity between these five narratives. They refer to the similarities of

⁷⁶ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1983), 11.

⁷⁷ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 135.

⁷⁸ Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis: With Introduction and Notes*, 4th ed., Westminster Commentaries (London, England: Methuen & Co., 1905), 233-234.

the ‘at the well’⁷⁹ scene, the ‘betrothal type-scene,’⁸⁰ the ‘betrothal journey narratives,’⁸¹ or they argue about it being ‘hospitality rather than betrothal’⁸² narratives.

In the present research, the daughter characters, and ecological themes i.e., each narrative’s physical world, are considered essential to these stories. Although scholars minimize daughters’ significance with their focus on wives and mothers, this research centralizes their role in the narrative space. In this dissertation, a daughter is defined as a female member of the family, and as a character who resides under the family household and is identified with a parent or a male relative. This research examines the narrativization of daughters—Rebekah, Rachel, Zipporah and her sisters, water-drawing girls, and the Samaritan woman. This dissertation relies upon socio-historical and gender-ecocritical approaches to intersect the stories of daughters’ lives as water-fetchers in the ancient world as represented in the biblical narrative and as observed in the contemporary world.

Feminist biblical scholars have an important place in this literature review because their work presents newer ways of understanding daughters in ancient societies. Their writings challenge traditional interpretations that have endorsed oppressive patriarchy in the text by raising several critical questions about daughters and women’s treatment in the Hebrew Bible. Feminist biblical scholarship delineates the origins and offers a thorough analysis of how daughters have been narrativized in the biblical text.

Typically, when a daughter enters the textual space by way of introduction, a description of her beauty, sexuality, the task she performs, and her immediate family connection are mentioned. Accordingly, this review covers an in-depth examination of the scholarship primarily on female virginity, daughters’ household task of water-fetching, and the patriarchal spatial boundary lines (spatial transference) in the ancient West Asian literature and in the Hebrew Bible.

2.2. Bible as Literature

I intend to use a polemic lens to read the five biblical stories that are usually perceived as scripture, or as a historical and theological document, or as literature. I maintain that the narrators tell a

⁷⁹ Robert C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia, PA/USA: Fortress Press, 1976), 41-43.

⁸⁰ Robert Alter, "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 355-368.

⁸¹ Michael W. Martin, "Betrothal Journey Narratives," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 505-23.

⁸² Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 72, no. 1 (January 2010): 69.

compelling story that is extensive and provocative. In narrative form, the narrators do not merely tell a story but motivate the audience to read and re-read. Such perspectival reading demands engagement and interpretation. The reader is motivated to act and engage with the narratives and not be passive recipients. Peter Rogers asserts that literature is something that produces 'incitements' rather than 'conclusions.'⁸³

A literary approach, according to Nathaniel Kravitz, entails how language is utilized in both literal and figurative senses to portray human experiences' connections with motifs, symbols, and archetypes.⁸⁴ Mieke Bal draws attention to the fact that scholarship is interpretive in nature, and thus historical and ideological biases are inherent in positions held by the privileged. Those assumptions are challenged by feminist biblical scholars, paving the way for alternative readings.⁸⁵ She argues, "the other side of male behaviour and women's experience whose traces are all but repressed from the text are magnified, hence, made visible against the tradition."⁸⁶

2.3 Literary Structure of Texts

Robert Culley produced numerous narrative analyses of biblical texts. He assembled groups of stories and compared them in order to discover what is common in their structures. Culley sees two distinct stages in the development of his approach. His earlier research aimed to examine some of the shortest Old Testament stories, identify patterns of narrative action in them, and group them according to similar patterns. Culley reasoned that "it seemed evident that traditional stories were passed on so that both the loyalty to tradition (stability) and the narrator's creativity (variation) were blended."⁸⁷ Culley suggested that "the Bible may reflect the same phenomenon and that the somewhat distorted duplications of narratives in scripture could well be evidence of oral transmission."⁸⁸ In order to present his findings, Culley laid out a series of tables displaying parallel episodes which are explained in the following sections.

⁸³ Peter S. Rogers, *Proust: Speculative Scripture* (Manhattan, Kan./USA: Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, 1993), 26. Michael Beth Dinkler points out in her essay in this collection that biblical studies suffered when it lost sight of the Bible's narrativity.

⁸⁴ Rogers, *Proust: Speculative Scripture*, 26.

⁸⁵ Bal, *Anti-covenant: Counter-reading*, 15.

⁸⁶ Bal, *Anti-covenant: Counter-reading*, 20.

⁸⁷ Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 1 (January 1986): 48.

⁸⁸ Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," 48.

2.3.1. “At the well” Narratives

Outlining the plot of Genesis 24: 10-14, Genesis 29: 1-14, and Exodus 2: 15-21 Culley creates a framework called “at the well,” which is made up of components that are common to all three acts. Each narrative features a meeting at the well that culminates in marriage. As indicated in his table, his study shows seven elements common to the three narratives:

Genesis 24:10-33	Genesis 29: 1-14	Exodus 2: 15-21
Servant sent by Abraham to Aram-Naharaim, to look out for Isaac’s interest.	Jacob (a fugitive?) went to the land of Easterners	Moses, a fugitive, went to the land of Midian
Stopped at a well	Stopped at a well	Stopped at a well
Proposed sign	Discussion with shepherds (learned with relatives)	
A girl came to draw water, and waters camels (i.e., sign happened)	Rachel identified as his relative came to water the sheep.	Seven daughters of the priest came to draw water for flocks
Gave her a gift. Asked her name and learned of her relations to his master; Asked if he can stay;	Rolled away the stone and watered flocks	Saved them from shepherds and watered the flocks
The girl ran home and told	The girl ran home and told	Girls went to the father and told
Brother Laban came to the servant; She invited him home.	Father, Laban, came and brought Jacob home.	Father gave orders to invite Moses
Marriage occurred	Marriage occurred	Marriage occurred

Culley points out that this outline presents a synoptic view of the similarities; 1. The religious hero enters distant, foreign land; 2. he stops at a well, 3. the girl (s) comes to the well, 4. he does something for the girl (s), 5. the girl returns home and reports what happened, 6. The stranger is introduced to the girl's (s) household, and it is then stated that the stranger at the well (or the person for whom he is acting) and the girl marry (one of the girls at the well). Culley's work on structural patterns aims to demonstrate the likelihood of an oral basis for this and other biblical narratives.⁸⁹ Concerning this schema, it can be noted that Culley does not mention nor discuss the ‘water-drawing women’ motif in these narratives. Since his focus was primarily observing a pattern in the structure of the narrative, the present study uses Culley’s framework to classify further the

⁸⁹ David B. Ridge, "Not Quite at the Well: 2 Samuel 11 as an Inverted Betrothal Journey Narrative," *Studia Antiqua* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 4.

multifarious motifs present in the biblical texts using different reading strategies outlined in this work.

2.3.2. Biblical Betrothal Type-Scenes

A few years after Culley's book was published, Robert Alter, in his article 'Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention,' recognizes Culley's insights of a common structure as valuable. Alter, on the other hand, takes a different interpretation. While Culley finds indications of an oral history to the text, Alter discovers a well-organized literary convention that he refers to as a "type-scene." Alter claimed he adapted the notion of a type-scene from his study on Homer's ancient Greek literature, but with "a couple of fundamental alterations."⁹⁰

He applies Walter Arendt's⁹¹ work to the biblical narratives and observes no fixed form in biblical type-scenes whereby common characteristics are exhibited in nearly the same pattern in each narrative. Instead, in each scene, the type-scene characteristics are presented with slight modifications. Alter identifies five elements after examining Culley's 'at the well' scenes:

1. "The future bridegroom or his surrogate journeys to a foreign land, 2. There he encounters a girl—the term '*Na'arah*' invariably occurs unless the maiden is identified as so-and-so's daughter—or girls at a well, 3. Someone, either the man or the girl, then draws water from the well, 4. Afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger's arrival. The verbs 'hurry' and 'run' are given recurrent emphasis, 5. Finally, a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl."⁹²

In comparison to Culley, "Water drawing is expressly mentioned in Alter's framework as a part of the narrative structure. The hero must do something for the girl or girls, according to Culley's framework. In each story, Alter emphasized the act of drawing water, whether by a stranger or by the daughter."⁹³ David B. Ridge comments that "the drawing of water as an act of hospitality is an integral part of the overall structure. One of the parties is hospitably assisting the

⁹⁰ Robert Alter, "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 358.

⁹¹ The identification of type-scenes in an epic literary work was introduced within Homeric studies and published by Walter Arendt, who presented the concept of a type-scene and followed this with a description of the taxonomy of major Homeric type-scenes. Walter Arendt, *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer*, *Forschungen zur Klassischen Philologie* 7 (Berlin: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1933).

⁹² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, new and rev. ed. (New York, NY/USA: Basic Books, 2011), 47, 50-52.

⁹³ Gen. 24: 16, 20; Gen. 29: 10; Exod. 2: 17

other by drawing the water and offering the other a drink or watering their livestock.”⁹⁴ The reference to ‘water-drawing’ is of interest to the present study which further investigates the politics of the gender division of that household labour.

It can be noted that Alter’s biblical type-scenes have influenced many biblical scholars who both improve on or critique his conclusions. James G. Williams agrees with Alter about the use of established conventions in ancient Israel. In his article “The Beautiful and Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes,” he recurrently mentions Alter’s influences on it.⁹⁵ Kenneth T. Aitken’s article “The Wooing of Rebekah: A Study in the Development of the Tradition” is primarily devoted to establishing the development of the patriarchal tradition of Genesis 24.

Acknowledging both Culley and Alter's betrothal type-scene Aitken lists nine elements.

1. “The protagonist travels to a distant land, 2. He waits by a well, 3. A girl(s) approach(es) the well, 4. They encounter one another at the well, 5. The identity of the girl is revealed to the protagonist. (In Gen. 29, however, the girl's identity is revealed to Jacob by the shepherds and before he encounters her (vv. 4-6). The element is absent from Ex. 2.), 6. The girl(s) return(s) home and tell(s) what happened, 7. The householder comes (sends back the girls) to the well, 8. The protagonist is brought to the home of the girl(s), 9. A marriage ensues.”⁹⁶

His two observations are found only in the Genesis accounts of which he does a comparative analysis to the Ugarit tale about Karet.⁹⁷ However, both Williams and Aitken provide the narratives with an additional richness by identifying the motif of journeying, spatial transference, and the traditional patriarchal customs. The present study has drawn from these observations but through a gender and ecocritical perspective.

2.3.3. Betrothal Journey Narratives

Both Culley and Alter provide lists of what they believe are essential elements of the betrothal type-scene, Michael Martin, on the other hand, has re-evaluated the material and established a

⁹⁴ David B. Ridge, "Not Quite at the Well: 2 Samuel 11 as an Inverted Betrothal Journey Narrative," *Studia Antiqua* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 5. Culley mentions the detail about the well, and the girl or girls coming to the well—and also comments about that action benefitting the girls.

⁹⁵ James G. Williams, "The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5, no. 17 (February 1, 1980): 108.

⁹⁶ Kenneth T. Aitken, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Study in the Development of the Tradition," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 9, no. 30 (October 1, 1984): 10-11.

⁹⁷ Aitken cites KTU 1.14:I:1-15:III:25 in his article, fn.13

more comprehensive twelve-point schema.⁹⁸ He argues that the five ‘requisite elements’ of the betrothal type-scene identified by Alter needs to be augmented by seven more elements. According to Martin, the betrothal type-scenes include the following features:

1. The groom-to-be travels to a foreign country, either in flight from or commissioned by his kin, 2. He meets a young woman or young women at a well, 3. Someone draws water, 4. A gift is given, or a service is performed that ingratiates the suiter with the woman and/or her family, 5. The suiter reveals his identity, 6. The young woman/ women rush home with the news of his arrival, 7. Someone from the family returns to greet and/or invite the suiter, 8. A betrothal is arranged, usually in connection with a mean, 9. The suiter resides with his bride's kin, sometimes begetting children, 10. The suiter returns, usually commissioned by the bride's kin, 11. His kin receives the suiter at the end of his journey, 12. The suiter resides with his kin, sometimes begetting children.”⁹⁹

The betrothal schema's journey motif is possibly borrowed in part from the Egyptian story of Si-Nuhe, which has a similar narrative pattern.¹⁰⁰ Martin argues that “this approach is intended to approximate each story's ‘authorial audience’s’ reception.”¹⁰¹ He also asserts that there is little question that the narrator of John 4 is following the traditional betrothal storyline for his Jesus and the Samaritan woman story.¹⁰² Martin includes the Samaritan woman's meeting Jesus ‘at the well’ story but points out how the “earlier four traditional narratives of endogamy are reversed, and the boundaries of Jesus' family are extended to encompass Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile.”¹⁰³ He, however, recognizes the innovation of the pattern by earlier scholars. The present study acknowledges the volume of meanings produced from within the selected texts that serve as a working context for the deployment of gender-ecocritical strategies.

⁹⁸ E. Allen Jones, III, *Reading Ruth in the Restoration Period: A Call for Inclusion* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 70.

⁹⁹ Martin W. Michael, "Betrothal Journey Narratives," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (July 2008): 508-509.

¹⁰⁰ Martin places the elements of the story parallel to his schema— 1. Si-Nuhe, a servant in the royal house of Egypt, travels to Syro-Palestine, in flight from his lord, 3. Near his destination, he is given water to drink by herdsman whom he meets, 7. Upon arrival, he is invited to the house of the ruler of Upper Retenu, 8. A betrothal is then arranged between Si-Nuhe and the ruler's eldest daughter, 9. Si- Nuhe lives with his bride's family and is made “head of his [the ruler's] children,” thus establishing his own household, 10. Si-Nuhe journeys home to Egypt, commissioned by his former lord to return, 11. Si-Nuhe is received at the end of his journey by the Egyptian royal house, its children, the ruler, and so on, 12. Si-Nuhe resides with the royal house, having been given a high position

¹⁰¹ Michael, "Betrothal Journey," 509, fn.11.

¹⁰² Michael, "Betrothal Journey," 509, fn.11.

¹⁰³ Michael, "Betrothal Journey," 508-509.

2.3.4. Hospitality Narratives

Strongly opposing Alter's betrothal approach is Andrew E. Arterbury's argument that all these narratives reflect the ancient custom of hospitality. In particular, he positions his approach alongside ancient exegetes, Philo and Josephus, who expound on many of these stories while depicting them as expressions of ancient hospitality rather than "betrothal type-scenes."¹⁰⁴ Arterbury points out that Alter does unknowingly describe ancient hospitality in his exegesis of the narratives but has mislabeled them as 'betrothal type scenes.'¹⁰⁵ Arterbury is doubtful if an ancient audience would have read the Pentateuchal well scenes that Alter cites with similar assumptions.¹⁰⁶ The present work considers the idea of 'hospitality' identified by Arterbury through a gender critical and water lens.

2.4. Water and Water Symbolism

Traditional biblical commentaries and dictionaries with article entries on 'water' are valuable literature on water, waterworks, and water symbolism. In such works water is approached from various vantage points of analysis. Conversely, this dissertation mainly focuses on the religious, ethical, and alchemic theories of water's situatedness. Such a focus aids in uplifting the interplay between water's presence and absence in the biblical text alongside the current background of ongoing contextual geopolitical crises of water scarcity, drought, and migration.

Water plays a significant role in biblical narratives related to the origins of Israel as a nation. The history of the biblical people is characterized by a series of violent exoduses from fertile geographical regions, be it the Garden of Eden or Egypt's land. Israel's origin as a people takes shape when the Hebrew tribes exit Egypt and enter the promised land—Canaan, employing systematic incursions and land capture. An important detail about water access in this newly occupied land is given to Moses as the new nation now depended on the rain of heaven. During the summer months, the rains cease, but the temporary drought is no threat unless it is abnormally prolonged.¹⁰⁷ The narrator, in Deuteronomy 11:10-11, identified the major dichotomy that characterized the use of water in this region:

¹⁰⁴ Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 72, no. 1 (January 2010): 8.

¹⁰⁵ Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds," 8.

¹⁰⁶ Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds," 8.

¹⁰⁷ Marvin H. Pope and Bezael Gordon, (2nd ed.), "Baal Worship," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica: Ba-Blo*, by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI/USA: Thomson Gale, 2007), 3:12.

For the land that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and irrigate by foot like a vegetable garden. But the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky.¹⁰⁸

Similar to the dichotomy that the text above shows regarding access to water, biblical stories of water are often consistent with people's relationship with water at different times. In this regard, it must be kept in mind, as John Peter Olson states, that the hydraulic technology in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia was governed by the presence of the only three great rivers in the region: the Nile, Tigris, and the Euphrates.¹⁰⁹ The rationale for studying biblical water stories from an Ancient Near East lens lies both in people's relationship to water and their effort to establish their uniqueness amidst their neighbors. Herman Gunkel and his students investigated Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian religions to identify foreign influences that may have influenced the formation of Hebrew religion, much like how Julius Wellhausen studied pre-Islamic Arab religion. Gunkel and his disciples brought into sharp focus how "Israel, as a part of the ancient world, was always in danger of being corrupted by surrounding paganism and yet asserted against it the unprecedented power of her faith."¹¹⁰

One comprehensive work on water in the ancient Near East is a monograph by William Henry Propp. Propp notes the 'place of water and fertility in Ugaritic and other ancient Near Eastern myths and seeks to show how similar motifs are used in different parts of the Old Testament.'¹¹¹ When elucidating the chaotic waters of Genesis 1:2, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi points out that the feminine noun *t'hom*, often translated as 'the deep,' echoes the name of the Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat. According to the Babylonian creation myth, "Tiamat was brutally killed by her rebellious offspring in the process of creating the world."¹¹² The influential historian of religious ideas, Mircea Eliade, points to the fecundity of water which symbolizes wholeness of potentiality when he writes:

¹⁰⁸ Deuteronomy 11: 10-11 (NRSV)

¹⁰⁹ John Peter Oleson, "Water Works," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary. Vol. 6, Si-Z*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1992), 6:883.

¹¹⁰ George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible* (Nashville, TN/USA: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:136.

¹¹¹ William Henry Propp, *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background* (Atlanta, GA/USA: Scholars Press, 1987), 116.

¹¹² Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York, NY/USA: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhood, 2008), 5.

“Water symbolizes the whole of potentiality: it is the *fons et origo*, “spring and origin” the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence. Water symbolizes the primal substance from which all forms came and to which they will return.”¹¹³

Terje Tvedt has produced a comprehensive history of water in nine volumes. This pioneering work is a historical and comparative perspective to understand the complex relationship between water and society. The chapters are written by scholars from various disciplines and countries and present a unique overview of water issues in different countries and geographical regions. Tvedt argues that “as long as the water is abundant, it is easy to stay ignorant and unconcerned about who else may be sharing the same river, lake or aquifer—but, as water becomes relatively less abundant, coordination of its use becomes more complex as well as more crucial.”¹¹⁴

One of the contributors to Tvedt’s volumes on the history of water, Terje Oestigaard, states that “water plays a fundamental role in many ritual practices of the world's religion and is an essential element in many of their underlying concepts.”¹¹⁵ Analyzing religion is to study what humans do and why they do so when they are religiously committed.¹¹⁶ Terje argues that “studying water and religion together enhances one's perception of how religion works and how the devotees see themselves in relation to the rituals and practices.”¹¹⁷ He asserts that “water is a medium that links different aspects of humanity and the divinities into a coherent unit; it bridges paradoxes, transcends the human and divine realms, allows interaction with gods, and enables the divinities to intervene in humanity.”¹¹⁸ Terje is not primarily concerned with theological exegesis but with what devotees actually do in ritual and ritual practice, and he argues that ‘these practices and beliefs can be analyzed from a water system perspective.’¹¹⁹ These literary works are crucial to the present study and serve as a lens to understand the different vantage points from which water can be approached.

¹¹³ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln, NE/USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 188.

¹¹⁴ Tvedt Terje, Graham Chapman, and Roar Hagen, "Water, Geopolitics and Collective Power in the New World Order," in *Water and Geopolitics: In the New World Order*, ed. Terje Tvedt, Graham Chapman, and Roar Hagen, vol. III, *A History of Water* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 2011), 5.

¹¹⁵ Terje Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity and the Rise of Capitalism* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2013) Introduction

¹¹⁶ Terje Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity*, Introduction

¹¹⁷ Terje Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity*, Introduction

¹¹⁸ Terje Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity*, Introduction

¹¹⁹ Terje Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity*, Introduction

Christopher Levin states that “water is the foundation for all life on earth— that is why a sufficient supply of water is one of the great themes for humanity today.”¹²⁰ He compares the ancient world’s civilizations, especially the semi-arid climate of the biblical lands, to the current ecological problems and promotes the idea that water has always been a significant concern. He distinguishes between the first and the second creation stories. The first with abundant water, and the later one compared to an “extremely threatening enemy.”¹²¹

Samuel notes that water is a significant aspect of life that impacts upon cultural symbolism, religious belief systems, economics, politics, classical literature and even myth making.¹²² He also writes, “[h]uman civilizations emerged on river-beds (Indus, Nile, Tigris).”¹²³ Commenting on Water as a Paradigm of Life he says (referring to Ezekiel, and Revelation) “[t]hese passages remind us of a tradition where water serves as symbolism of ‘life.’”¹²⁴

2.5. Water and Gender

This study's primary focus is the dialectics of water-gender in biblical narratives. The apparent imbalances in gendered water chores, the distribution of power in rights, and decision-making will be of crucial concern. This study has relied heavily on comprehensive insights gained from Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt’s scholarly works on the water-gender discourse. In her monograph *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South*,¹²⁵ Lahiri-Dutt begins by invoking Judith Butler’s espousal of gender as ‘never fixed, always fluid.’¹²⁶ Lahiri-Dutt argues that “gender as a social construct also creates differences in the patterns of economic life histories for women and men dealing with water.”¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Christopher Levin, "Introduction," introduction to *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period*, by Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2014), 1.

¹²¹ Levin, "Introduction," 1.

¹²² John Samuel, "Waters of Life and Death: Ethical and Theological Responses to Contemporary Water Crises," in *Waters of Life and Death: Ethical and Theological Responses to Contemporary Water Crises*, ed. Chandran Paul Martin and Sam Peedikayil Mathew (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 208-210.

¹²³ Samuel, "Waters of Life," 210.

¹²⁴ Samuel, "Waters of Life," 208.

¹²⁵ Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South* (Kolkata, WB/India: Stree, 2006), i. (Lahiri-Dutt’s standpoint reflects that of Sandra Harding 1991; Young and Dickerson 1994; Childers and Jooks 1990; Maynard and Purvis 1996)

¹²⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY/USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 5.

¹²⁷ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, ii.

Lahiri-Dutt stresses that instead of 'women' being a unitary, homogenous category, "there are multiple identities that locate them in different classes, ethnic or caste groupings or religions."¹²⁸ It is, therefore, 'challenging to make generalizations about the lived experiences of women.'¹²⁹ She also asserts that "water, like gender, is known for its fluidity, changing its shape, and taking new forms; it plays a unique role in the environment's social and cultural construction."¹³⁰ This dissertation has worked on the same premise and used the water-gender theory as a frame of reference to bring out new meanings of the water-fetching narratives. It has helped me to understand the interplay between water and the gender networking represented in the narratives and the ongoing water-gender deliberation.

2.6 The literature on Biblical Daughter Narratives

It can be noted that retrieving the lives of daughters in the biblical period is difficult. Tal Ilan argues that it is "difficult because the primary source – the Hebrew Bible, focuses on national concerns rather than on the lives of ordinary individuals, and also because it's principal interest is in the lives of men rather than those of women."¹³¹ Hence, she affirms that "a multidisciplinary approach, using biblical data and information produced by archaeology and ethnographic data and interpretive models from anthropology, can bring the women of ancient Israel into view."¹³²

It is worth bringing to memory, *The Women's Bible Commentary* (WBC),¹³³ edited by Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, which mainly dealt with the Old and New Testaments' canonical texts. Eloise Rosenblatt specifies that fifteen among forty-one contributors to the WBC were Jewish feminists.¹³⁴ Significant among the fifteen, because of their seminal work in unearthing women's visibility in biblical narratives were Drorah Setel, Judith Romney Wegner,¹³⁵ Tikva Frymer-

¹²⁸ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, ii.

¹²⁹ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, ii.

¹³⁰ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, ii.

¹³¹ Tal Ilan, "Woman," (The Historical Perspective: Biblical Period) in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, Mich. /USA: Thomson Gale, 2007), 21:156-157.

¹³² Ilan, "Woman," 156-157.

¹³³ Carol Ann Newsom, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 9th ed. (Louisville, KY/USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)

¹³⁴ Eloise Rosenblatt, "Collaborations: Jewish and Christian Feminist Biblicists," *The Way Supplement* 97 (2000): 119.

¹³⁵ In her book, *Chattel or Person?* Wegner discussed women's lives as found in the Mishnah. She states that the Mishnah treats women as chattel or sometimes as full persons. However, patriarchal control over female reproductive functions is key. See Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988)

Kensky,¹³⁶ Amy-Jill Levine, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, and Carol Meyers.¹³⁷ Each contributor to the WBC provided an introduction that summarized consensus scholarship. Jewish and Christian feminists together chose the following methodology to amplify women's roles in biblical narratives:

“They focused on scenes with female characters and examined themes such as the divinity in female imagery, woman's sexuality, hints of her status and power expressed or suppressed, harmful gender language, family roles, activities in worship, her use as a symbol, and polemics against her work as teacher or prophet.”¹³⁸

Carol Meyers has noted that “women often performed a wide range of indispensable and highly skilled activities, which demanded more technological expertise than males' typical tasks.”¹³⁹ In some passages, a woman, especially an unmarried woman, had a unique tie with her “mother's house” (*bet em*). Rebekah (Gen 24: 28) and the lover's darling (Song 3: 4; 8: 2) seem to have belonged to their mother's living quarters while single, though daughters indeed were members of their extended family, that is, their “father's house.”¹⁴⁰ Naomi expected her two daughters-in-law to go back to their mother's living quarters, to their pre-marriage state (Ruth 1: 8).¹⁴¹ These references affirm that the “mother's house” held an influential space of authority and safety for women in biblical times which is often overlooked.

Contributors in the WBC analyzed how androcentric authorship both determined and distorted the portrayal of women. Tikva Frymer-Kensky reasons that narratives of biblical daughters are limited. “Daughters are liminal creatures living in an uncertain space, at risk both in their father's house and outside.”¹⁴² Biblical portrayal of daughters is minimal compared to heroic stories about kings, judges, prophets, poets and sons in general. However, certain narrative styles

¹³⁶ Frymer-Kensky reads each daughter/women-stories intently with different approaches in order to consider them collectively, as a group. She reads them connecting them to one another. She identifies patterns of type-scenes and plotlines which she labels as “Woman as Victor: Woman as Victim”, “Woman as Virgin (bride to be)”, and “Woman as Voice”. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York, NY/USA: Schocken [Imprint], 2004), xvii.

¹³⁷ Carol L. Meyers *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, NY/USA: Oxford University Press, 1991)

¹³⁸ Rosenblatt, “Collaborations: Jewish,” 119.

¹³⁹ Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125-135.

¹⁴⁰ David Toshio Tsumara, “Family in the Historical Books,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, by Richard S. Hess and Mark Daniel Carroll Rodas (Grand Rapids (Mich.), USA: Baker Academic, 2003), 61-62.

¹⁴¹ Tsumara, “Family in the Historical,” 62.

¹⁴² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 126.

improvise stories in order to bring out what tradition has concealed. Judith Plaskow reasons that to reconstruct women's history, "there has not been any ancient document or artifact that can be acquired from women directly. Women's experiences must be deduced from the works that are filtered through a male perspective and removed from the reality of women's lives."¹⁴³ Ilona Rashkow, using a psychoanalytical reading of Genesis, claims that after the first three chapters of Genesis, "the Hebrew Bible avoids daughters almost altogether." Once the collective catastrophe of Genesis 6: 4 brought about by the generic "*daughters of men*" occurs, there seems to be a total avoidance of daughters.¹⁴⁴ However, after a close examination, Johanna Stiebert asserts that "daughters are far from absent. They feature alongside fathers in the family narratives of Genesis, and the accounts of the Judges, and monarchy periods, and in the laws of Torah, in prophetic metaphors and royal psalms, in genealogies and example stories."¹⁴⁵ Narrativizing women as symbols of Israel's subjugation is a strong symbolic motif that integrates women in the wider story of Israel's history.

Cheryl Exum claims that the "traditional approach to female narratives organizes them in motif-driven ways that reflect 'established notions of literary unity.'"¹⁴⁶ Exum challenges biblical interpreters to "expand upon this material by stepping outside the assumed ideology of the text to develop a plurality of interpretations."¹⁴⁷ She questions the Bible's androcentrism in female narratives as a "means to control female sexuality."¹⁴⁸ While this study maintains the same thought process, I attempt to challenge and destabilize biblical androcentrism through gender and ecocritical analysis.

Exum argues that, "the ideology reflected in the Bible is not just a fear of female sexuality, but a conscious effort by the biblical writers and editors to redeploy female enterprise for the community's dynastic or epic purposes."¹⁴⁹ However, Esther Fuchs notes what we have in the Bible is "an ideology that affirms women in their ability, and willingness to support the patriarchal

¹⁴³ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, 4th ed. (New York, NY/USA: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 47.

¹⁴⁴ Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN/USA: Fortress Press, 2000), 73.

¹⁴⁵ Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

¹⁴⁶ J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub) versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, Penn./USA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 153.

¹⁴⁷ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 154.

¹⁴⁸ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 154.

¹⁴⁹ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 154.

arrangement.”¹⁵⁰ She asserts that “the traditional biblical interpretation of women deepens our understanding of cult practices and male prerogatives, but it insufficiently illuminates anything about these women as female agents.”¹⁵¹ We diminish Rebekah and Rachel's particular features when we designate them as Davidic ancestors; they become just instruments in Israel's wider history.¹⁵² The extensive literature on daughters is beyond the scope of this study, but it does strive to understand the layers that have obscured the rich details about daughters that the texts contain through the use of multiple perspectives and reading strategies.

2.6.1 Sanskrit “*Duhita*” Daughter Etymology

The general overview on literature about daughters in biblical narratives and the challenges in unearthing their roles, voices, and lived experiences have been outlined in the previous section. It will be helpful in this literature review to also touch upon the etymology of the word daughter and what can be gleaned from this as this will be of relevance to the wider study on water-fetching daughters in the chapters to follow. I look at the etymology of the word in two of Indian languages – one the ancient Sanskrit, and the other my mother tongue Telugu, that is spoken in two states of India. The English word “daughter” is derived from the Middle English *doughter*, from Old English *dohtor*, which means: “female child considered with reference to her parents.”¹⁵³ The origin of the expression “daughter” has a special connection with the Sanskrit word *duhita/duhitri*, which is also “daughter.” The similar-sounding modern German word *tochter* and the cognates from outside the Germanic languages are found in Greek *thygater*, Persian *duxtār*, Lithuanian *dukte*, and Old Slavic *dusti* – all of which appear to originate in an ancient Indo-European root.¹⁵⁴ Mehmet Kurtkaya explains that the words “water” and “daughter,” are related in sound and meaning in the Sumerian language. He argues that the kinship term closest to the sound of “*uḡatar*” (water, progeny semen) is “*duḡatar*” (daughter, to be born). In modern Turkish, these two words

¹⁵⁰ Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (London, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 158.

¹⁵¹ Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 158.

¹⁵² Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 158.

¹⁵³ “Daughter,” in Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=daughter>.

¹⁵⁴ Patricia T. O’Conner and Stewart Kellerman, “The Daughter of Time,” *Grammarphobia* (blog), entry posted October 3, 2009, accessed December 11, 2020, <https://www.grammarphobia.com/blog/2009/12/the-daughter-of-time.html>.

mean “giving birth,” where “*doḡ*” means “to be born.”¹⁵⁵ Historian and archaeologist Ananth Altekar claims that “a daughter's birth is a much less auspicious event than the birth of a son.”¹⁵⁶

2.6.2. Daughter in the Telugu Language (Folk Etymology)

One Telugu word for woman is *Aadadhi*, which means: “she who belongs ‘there’ – meaning belongs in her in-law's house.” The word for girl is *Aada Pilla*— where “*Aada*” means “there,” and “*pilla*” means ‘girl’- literally “the girl who belongs there.” In this understanding and generally in the Indian worldview, a daughter's family begins with an assumption that she does not belong to them but that she belongs to someone else. *Aada+pilla* means a girl who belongs to that (other) place, not theirs (parents). *Aada*’ is derived from ‘*Akkada*’ “that place—not this place.” It is related to the fact that the girl belongs to the house of in-laws and adopts their in-laws' surname. This firmly rooted idea stems from the oppressive patriarchal belief that their dependence on their husbands defines daughters. Therefore, from a spatial perspective, a daughter cognitively experiences spatial distancing right from her birth and grows to believe that she “belongs” to someone else and has to live in another’s space.

Several Telugu gendered proverbs reinforce a daughter’s place in the home. For example, *Aadadi thirigi chedutundi—Magavaadu tiragaka chedutaadu.*” Loosely translated this means, “A girl gets defiled by wandering out of the house, and a boy gets defiled if he does not go out of the house.” Another proverb: “*Aada pilla, siggu billa— paluvuri lo kanipincha raadhu,*” can be translated roughly as “a daughter, and her shame-covering disc should not be seen in public.” The *siggu-billa* is a small flat disc-shaped ornament worn with a string around the hip by girl babies to cover the pubic area. It is worn to avoid the unnecessary sexual gaze by men and used as a symbol to protect her “honour.” The implication here is that the honour of the family lies in protecting her ‘chastity’ or in other words, in controlling her sexuality.

Altekar notes that “a female child's birth evokes many responses from the family - feeling let down, disappointed and burdened, anxious about expenses incurred at her marriage, wondering what her in-laws will be like, and an overall sense of indifferent acceptance.”¹⁵⁷ A daughter's birth

¹⁵⁵ Mehmet Kurtkaya, "Daughter," <http://sumerianturks.org/> (blog), entry posted October 10, 2019, accessed January 24, 2021, <http://sumerianturks.org/etymology-daughter-milker-child-tribe-family-clan.htm>.

¹⁵⁶ Anant Sadashiv Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, reprint ed. (New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidas, 1962), 29-30.

¹⁵⁷ Altekar, *The Position of Women*, 25-30.

is considered a penalty for the sins committed in a former state of existence. A daughter is always viewed as a liability. The parents' indifferent acceptance of her makes a female child realize that her status is secondary to a male child. The experience of feeling rejected and the compulsive need to create acceptance for herself compels her to conform to the family's norms and expectations.¹⁵⁸

Swami Vivekananda asserts that "a boy's father demands a very high price for his son, but a poor man sometimes has to sell everything to get a husband for his daughter."¹⁵⁹ The great difficulty of the Hindu's life is the daughter. Moreover, curiously enough, the word daughter in Sanskrit is *duhitâ*.¹⁶⁰ He explains that the actual derivation is that, in ancient times, the family's daughter was accustomed to milk the cows. The cow's value, 'not as a god or deified ancestor, but as a possession'¹⁶¹ for the first Aryan occupants of Northern India is proven in the Rig Veda. The 'daughter of the house was the *duhitâ* or milkmaid'¹⁶² and so the word "*duhita*" comes from "*duh*," "to milk," and the word "daughter" in that sense means a "milkmaid." Later on, the word "*duhita*" or the milkmaid, took on a new second meaning i.e., 'she who milks away all the milk of the family.'¹⁶³ These kinds of coded attitudinal prejudices against daughters, both in Hebrew and Hindu cultures, make the need to contest biblical narrativization of daughters compulsory.

2.7. Methodology

2.7.1. Narrative Criticism

This dissertation is classified under the rubric of biblical hermeneutics and therefore primarily appropriates the use of various reading strategies to interpret the selected texts to demonstrate an interplay between water, women, and water scarcity. It is noteworthy that standard critical

¹⁵⁸ David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 1:82.

¹⁵⁹ Swami Vivekananda, "Women of India," Complete-Works / Volume 8 / Lectures and Discourses /, last modified January 18, 1900, accessed May 3, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_8/lectures_and_discourses/women_of_india.htm.

¹⁶¹ May refer to cow's milk and butter, its use for plowing, and perhaps in early times also for its flesh.

¹⁶² James Ferguson, *Tree and Serpent-Worship, or, Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the first and Fourth Centuries after Christ*, (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1868), quoted in *Calcutta Review* v. 51, (Calcutta: Thomas and Smith, 1870), 320.

¹⁶³ Vivekananda, "Women of India," Complete-Works / Volume 8 / Lectures and Discourses /, http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_8/lectures_and_discourses/women_

commentaries on the books of Genesis,¹⁶⁴ Exodus,¹⁶⁵ 1 Samuel,¹⁶⁶ and John's Gospel¹⁶⁷ have undertaken an extensive linguistic and historical-critical analysis of the selected texts in their original Hebrew and Greek languages. Although such commentaries and interpretations touch on the topics of water and gender, the links between gender, water fetching, and water-management do not find a place in these approaches. Their vast contributions to each narrative, however, are worth mentioning. They function as a background ideological context to the present textual analysis. This research relies on the existing exegetical literature as primary data, which sets the premise for this study.¹⁶⁸

This work aims to focus on the literary characteristics of biblical 'water fetching' stories, and therefore, narrative criticism is the interpretive method best suited for this study. The five texts selected are in the narrative genre of the biblical text. Narrative criticism is the most applied tool in the field of biblical studies. David M. Gunn writing almost thirty years ago already insinuated that "literary criticism" is becoming the new orthodoxy in biblical studies.¹⁶⁹ It can be recalled that Walter Brueggemann suggested that the historical-critical method worked within the evolutionary concept where a crude document over time becomes a sophisticated material, where an archaic

¹⁶⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), Hermann Gunkel, Mark E. Biddle, and Ernest Wilson Nicholson, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, USA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989)

¹⁶⁵ Brevard Springs Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 7th ed. (London: SCM Press, 1991); Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary, Issue 613* (Tennessee, USA: Spring Arbor Distributors, 1962); Tremper Longman, David E. Garland, and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis - Leviticus*, revised edition. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009)

¹⁶⁶ David Jobling, *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996); Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pbk. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012)

¹⁶⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary (Johannine Monograph)* (Eugene, Oregon/ USA: Wipf & Stock, 1856); Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009)

¹⁶⁸ This study focuses more on the cultural vitality of the text as it has increasingly resonated over time, the study thereby experiments with the possibilities within the English translations, primarily the one translated by Prof. Robert Alter and the following ones including a Telugu translation: Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, paperback ed. (New York, NY/USA: W.W. Norton, 2008), *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, King James Version* (New York, N.Y.: American Bible Society, 2010), Coogan, Michael David, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version: with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, *Telugu Bible*. Revised Edition ed. Bangalore, India: Bible Society of India, 2001

¹⁶⁹ David M. Gunn, "New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative", in Sources for Biblical and Theological Study Old Testament Series, by Paul R. House, vol. 2, *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* (Winona Lake (Indiana), IN/USA: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 412.

superstition over time evolves into a highly ethical norm.¹⁷⁰ As Robert Alter argues, the heart of the matter in narrative criticism is to agree to a diachronic process of the text and adapt a synchronistic approach to look at meaning from the final redaction.

2.7.2. Gender Archaeology

Carol Meyers writes that gender archaeology emerged to remedy the gender bias in archaeology i.e., the tendency to see everything through male eyes. Men and women are seen as polar opposites, and women are viewed mainly in terms of maternal roles. Gender archaeology contests these notions by recovering the activities and identities of women and men, recognizing that they are different but not oppositional, and establishing that both are integral to household and communal life.¹⁷¹ Meyer uses gender archaeology and ethnographic observations to identify several tasks performed by women in ancient Israel. She comments on the phrase in Genesis 24:11 which states, “The time when women go out to draw water,” and argues that “this phrase indicates that, in the division of labour by gender characteristic of traditional societies, the task of fetching water is assigned to women.”¹⁷² However, apart from mentioning these tasks, Meyer does not problematize the gendering of water fetching. This thesis has attempted to articulate further the issue of the under-calculation of the effort involved in the water fetching task. Meyers challenges the ‘patriarchy model as an adequate or accurate descriptor of ancient Israel’¹⁷³ and calls for a ‘closer examination to understand it more as a social theory rather than a biblical concept.’¹⁷⁴

2.7.3. Gender Criticism and Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis

In this thesis, the hermeneutical strategies applied to the five texts are primarily gender/feminist criticism and ecocriticism. Daniel Boyarin noted that “feminist literary theory seeks to restore the

¹⁷⁰ Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY/USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 1-13.

¹⁷¹ Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

¹⁷² Carol L. Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston, USA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), n.a.

¹⁷³ Carol Lyons Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (2014): 8.

¹⁷⁴ Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel," 8.

woman's voice or critique the woman's suppression within the texts of male literary culture.”¹⁷⁵ On gender criticism, Ken Stone affirms that it is “most often practiced as a multidisciplinary enterprise.”¹⁷⁶ The concepts associated with gender and gender criticism are man-manhood and woman-womanhood, male and female, masculinity and femininity. Stone argues that “gender criticism critically analyses the cultural norms and social processes that function to differentiate ‘men’ from ‘women’ and differentiate some men or male characters from other men or male characters, and some women or female characters from other women or female characters.”¹⁷⁷ It also highlights instances in which gender takes unexpected forms or fails to conform to dominant assumptions, including “widespread assumptions that can always be understood in strictly binary terms.”¹⁷⁸

Stone also notes that culture and society organize and give meaning and significance to biological sex differences.¹⁷⁹ The construction and organization of such differences are therefore analyzed under the rubric of “gender.”¹⁸⁰ Joan Scott calls gender “a social category imposed in a sexed body.”¹⁸¹ Gayle Rubin defines the sex/gender system as a “set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.”¹⁸² She notes that “if human economic systems transform raw materials into goods and property, often in ways that result in economic inequality, so also ‘sex/gender systems’ transform biological elements.”¹⁸³ The biological raw material of human sex and procreation are transformed ‘into social relations of gender, usually in ways that result in inequality between sexes.’¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Boyarin, "The Politics of Biblical Narratology: Reading the Bible like/as a Woman," *Diacritics* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 31.

¹⁷⁶ Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., by Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 183.

¹⁷⁷ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 183.

¹⁷⁸ Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., by Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 183-184.

¹⁷⁹ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 185.

¹⁸⁰ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 185.

¹⁸¹ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 5 As quoted in Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., by Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 185.

¹⁸² Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes of the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 159.

¹⁸³ Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," 159.

¹⁸⁴ Rubin, "The Traffic," 65.

Judith Butler adds that her reading of Gayle Rubin's "Traffic in Women" inspired her to think that sexual practice has the ability to destabilize gender.¹⁸⁵ She wanted to demonstrate that normative sexuality strengthens normative gender. She also brings up the idea that one is a woman according to this framework to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame, and that questioning the frame may result in one losing some of one's gender identity.¹⁸⁶ In this study however, I am wary about entirely relinquishing the binaries that are present in everyday life. Women's rights are harmed in societies where institutionalized patriarchy persists, especially in India, where caste is another onerous weight on women. Judith Butler's concept of performative gender helps understand specific bodily sexual practices in their various manifestations. However, in the biblical narratives and contemporary patriarchal societies, the household chore of the daughter's role as a water-fetcher is imposed on her because she is female.

The taboo of incest is a social mechanism that operates to enforce exchanges of daughters between groups of men other than within the family. The incest taboo thus prohibits certain sexual partners. As a result, men's daughters and sisters are exchanged with daughters and sisters from other kinship groups.¹⁸⁷ The outcome of such exchanges forms a network of social alliances that keep together traditional kinship societies. In this transaction, "women are often objectified and serve as the 'conduit of relationship' between men."¹⁸⁸

As a gender critical study, this study calls attention to the likelihood of any nuances of sex/gender systems found in the biblical narratives. Ken Stone argues that any recognition of this possibility may well "provide openings for the destabilization and transformation of those systems."¹⁸⁹ He proposes some questions that gender criticism can ask about the biblical text:

"what norms or conventions of gender seem to be proposed by the text? How are assumptions about gender used in the structure of a particular plot/story or manipulated for characterization? How is gender symbolism related to other types of symbolism used in the text? How does the influence of gender assumptions relate to the supposed theology or ideology of the text? How does our attention to these and other questions contribute to our understanding of gender and the bible?"¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY/USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), xi.

¹⁸⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xi.

¹⁸⁷ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 185.

¹⁸⁸ Rubin, "The Traffic," 174.

¹⁸⁹ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 192.

¹⁹⁰ Stone, "Gender Criticism," 192.

Adeline Fehribach uses a historical-literary perspective in her studies of women in John's gospel. She explains how a first century reader would have understood women's characterizations in John. Fehribach notes that John's gospel "relied on the literary and cultural conventions of the day to portray the female characters to support the descriptions of Jesus as the messianic bridegroom."¹⁹¹ These literary and cultural traditions are familiar to the readers, she adds.¹⁹² The Samaritan woman signifies that he, as the messianic bridegroom, 'wedded' himself to the Samaritan people.¹⁹³ This study has relied on Fehribach's approach and her use of Claude Lévi-Strauss¹⁹⁴ and Gayle Rubin's understanding of 'gift-giving' in the exchange of women during betrothal.¹⁹⁵

2.7.4. Hermeneutical Strategies

Hermeneutics has been traditionally defined as the study of the locus and principles of interpretation, "mainly applied to an ancient text's interpretation."¹⁹⁶ Hans-Gadamer believed that the "hermeneutical task should go beyond the scientific investigation of the text to gain the truth."¹⁹⁷ Gadamer argued that interpreting a text involves a fusion of horizons where the scholar finds ways that the text's history articulates with their own background.

In the following subsections I attempt to summarize the hermeneutical strategies that this study will be based on.

2.7.4.1. Ecotheology and Ecological Hermeneutics

It is remarkable that Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his foreword to the book *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, edited by Norman Habel, begins with the words "The Planet Earth is in

¹⁹¹ Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn./USA: Glazier, 1998), 9

¹⁹² Fehribach, *The Women*, 9.

¹⁹³ Fehribach, *The Women*, 71.

¹⁹⁴ Lévi-Strauss claimed that the principle of reciprocity, the recognition that gifts set up a series of mutual obligations between those who give and receive them, lies at the core of human culture. (Carsten, Janet "Kinship." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 5, 2012. [https://www.britannica.com/topic/kinship.](https://www.britannica.com/topic/kinship))

¹⁹⁵ Fehribach, however, treats this concept being reversed, as Jesus becomes the Gift offered by God to the Samaritan woman in order to establish familial bonds.

¹⁹⁶ Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2016), 4.

¹⁹⁷ Obielosi Dominic and Ani Donpedro, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics and its Relevance to Biblical Interpretation," *PREORC Journal of Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2017): 3.

crisis.”¹⁹⁸ He points out the scientists' claim that the rainforests holding as many as eighty percent of the world's animal and plant species are being destroyed at an alarming rate. As humans are part of the problem, he argues that humans are also the part of the solution, and in order to resolve the crisis, “humans need to come to terms with the forces that have created this crisis and the resources within our traditions that can motivate us to resolve the crisis.” He names “our biblical heritage’ as one of those traditions.”¹⁹⁹ In line with the same sentiment, this research relies on the threefold hermeneutic of suspicion, identification, and retrieval proposed by Norman Habel to explore the five biblical narratives in question. For Habel, ecological hermeneutics should extend the “ecojustice principles.”²⁰⁰

Mary Grey’s ecofeminist theology focuses on a comparative analysis of the Miriam story, and the women of Rajasthan, in India. Grey points out that Miriam's biblical story leads us into the reality of desert communities' suffering from drought and hunger. In light of the present research on the intersection of women-water and drought, it has been worthwhile to appropriate Grey’s approach, which is shaped by her own fifteen-year experiences with the women of Rajasthan who struggle in search for water in the drought-stricken Thar desert. Grey identifies a two-fold link which uplifts two urgent issues: the first is the global situation of water and the threat of privatization following specifically from global capitalism, and the second issue of what that means for justice and liberation theology. Grey draws parallels between the desert of Sinai and the Thar Desert to make connections between women, wilderness, and water and uncover the specific effects of globalization on the lives of the women who live there.²⁰¹

In her autobiography *Unbowed*, Professor Wangari Maathai, a Noble Laureate, shared her story of grassroots empowerment, ecological responsibility, and her love of trees. Wangari Maathai launched the Green Belt Movement in 1977, igniting a historic poor people's environmental movement centered on women's empowerment that spread across Africa. “Why don't we plant trees?” Wangari Maathai asked her colleagues at a UN conference in Mexico, who

¹⁹⁸ Desmond Tutu, Archbishop, foreword to *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, by Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 7-8.

¹⁹⁹ Tutu, Archbishop, foreword to *Readings*, 7-8.

²⁰⁰ Norman C. Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 38-53.

²⁰¹ Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 22-26.

focused on basic needs such as clean drinking water, food, and energy (mostly from firewood).²⁰² The tree was a magical symbol for her, which she used to improve the economic life of women and communities.²⁰³ The Green Belt Movement's vision for ecological literacy is mainly disseminated through grassroots organizations, publishing many publications. Her books promote environmental knowledge and encourage people to participate in tree-planting and sustainable development.

Ernest Conradie, in his review of the “Earth Bible” series, further explores that the literary analysis of biblical literature from an ecological perspective “recognizes the earth’s voice that was hitherto marginalized.”²⁰⁴ Conradie argues that:

“in literary terms, Earth—or more concretely waters, mountains, rivers, plants, trees, insects, birds and animals—should not merely be understood as a way of describing the narrative scene or context. Non-human creatures are actors that play an active role in history, and that is influenced by human history.”²⁰⁵

This notion supports the philosophical and rational disposition of the present work in which the multiple non-human characters within each of the five narratives are recognized as part of and coexist with the so-called protagonist. The ecological perspective related to water are significantly developed by coalescing indigenous knowledges of water, especially those of the Anishnaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, who stresses the point that “water is not a single, discrete aspect of the environment; it is part of a greater, interconnected whole.”²⁰⁶ She argues that “a focus on just drinking water is misguided. It is not in keeping with the traditional principles of ... the interdependence of all living things.”²⁰⁷ Sylvia Earle adds that “The planet's shroud of salty water, in reality, even the freshwater in the polar ice, lakes, streams, groundwater, and clouds – all will disappear without the replenishing mother-source of water, the ocean.”²⁰⁸

²⁰² Wangari Maathai, "Fifteen Million Trees for Fifteen Million Kenyans," *RSA Journal* 154, no. 5528 (April 2007): 61.

²⁰³ Maathai, "Fifteen Million," 61.

²⁰⁴ Ernst M. Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project (Review Article)," *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 131.

²⁰⁵ Conradie, "Towards an Ecological," 131.

²⁰⁶ Deborah McGregor, "Traditional Knowledge: Considerations for Protecting Water in Ontario," *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 3, no. 3 (2012): 3.

²⁰⁷ McGregor, "Traditional Knowledge, 3.

²⁰⁸ Sylvia A. Earle, *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Ocean's Are One* (Washington, DC/USA: National Geographic, 2009), 10-11.

This study emphasizes that it is the water towards which the daughters are drawn to demonstrate the importance of water as having the life-giving potential. “Although water has no biological life of its own, it enables life the moment it is brought into contact with living matter.”²⁰⁹

2.7.4.2. Ecofeminism

Melissa Leach states that the years during the 1980s saw the rise of unprecedented environmental concern. It was an

‘era of major, media-prominent droughts and famines in Africa, and land and soil degradation (‘desertification’) and deforestation especially became prominent issues for policy and on which development agencies were expected to act. In this context, the notion that women have a special relationship with the environment first began to be highlighted in development circles.’²¹⁰

Although ecofeminism believes that women are ‘close to nature’ in a spiritual and conceptual sense, in this dissertation, the ‘maternal altruism’ idea is used with caution and criticality, considering the stereotypical nature of that argument. Maria Mies theorizes that;

“[Women] conceived of their own bodies as being productive and creative in the same way as they conceived of external nature as being productive and creative. They co-operate with their bodies and with the earth in order to ‘let grow and make grow.’”²¹¹

The idea that women’s household work is an extension of her physiology, which includes giving birth and nurturing, has justified the marginalization of women’s water-fetching tasks. However, worth stating and of particular interest to this dissertation are Mies’ theories of the origins of the sexual division of labour. Her critique of ‘biological determinism’ is an aspect that is of importance to the present study. Mies argues that the concept, paraphrased by Sigmund Freud as “anatomy is destiny,” is possibly the most deep-rooted cause for the asymmetry in the division of labour between men and women. The water fetching task assigned to daughters, according to this idea then, stems out of the theory that their bodies are inherently in association with nature, and

²⁰⁹ Andreas Wilkens, Wolfram Schwenk, and Andreas Wilkens, *Understanding Water: Developments from the Work of Theodor Schwenk* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Floris Books, 2005), 9.

²¹⁰ Melissa Leach, "Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables or How a Strategic Notion Rose and Fell," in *Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development*, by Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead (Malden, MA/USA: Blackwell, 2008), 68.

²¹¹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (North Melbourne, Vic./Australia: Spinnifex Press, 1999), 56.

therefore ‘nature activity,’ and such tasks consequently are not considered ‘human labour’ which is reserved for men's productive work under capitalist conditions.²¹²

The far-reaching consequences these concepts have had historically are critiqued in this study to propose a gender analysis that opposes and dismantles such hierarchization of human labour. Scholars such as Mellissa Leach and James Fairhead have pointed out the complexity in defining nature in dualistic terms. They argue that “a woman’s procreative role is by no means necessarily seen to place her closer to a universally-conceived nature and to exclude men from this relationship.”²¹³

2.7.4.3. Ecocriticism

Cheryll Glotfelty proposes ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”²¹⁴ While this definition is broad, it nonetheless facilitates a diverse range of typically interdisciplinary studies identifying themselves with the field today. Glotfelty then proceeds to acknowledge the centrality of the concept of interconnectedness to ecocritical theory, declaring that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that the human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it as affected by it.”²¹⁵ Ross Murfin and Supriya state that “ecocriticism addresses the relationship between writers, texts, and the world from a truly global perspective—one on which ‘the world’ is the entire ecosphere, not just human society.”²¹⁶ Timothy J. Burberry submits that “Christian literary scholars can play a part in combating environmental problems, given our interest in the role of religion and narrative.”²¹⁷ Furthermore, as eco-philosopher Max Oelschlaeger argues, “there are no solutions for the systemic causes of eco-crisis apart from the religious narrative.”²¹⁸

²¹² Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, 45.

²¹³ James Fairhead, Melissa Leach, and Dominique Millimouno, *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-savanna Mosaic*, reissued. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Introduction.

²¹⁴ Harold Fromm and Cheryll Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, nachdr. ed. (Athens, GA/USA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2009), xviii.

²¹⁵ Fromm and Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii.

²¹⁶ Ross C. Murfin and Supriya M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA/USA: Bedford, 2009), 125.

²¹⁷ Timothy J. Burberry, "Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship" *Christianity and Literature* 61, no. 2 (2012): 190.

²¹⁸ Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 280–353. On a similar vein, Professor Douglas J. Moo claims that “a number of contemporary environmentalists are convinced that some form of religion is needed to provide motivational power for the transformation of human attitudes toward the natural world.” Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 450.

Roger Gottlieb noted that “religion offers a language of moral seriousness within a value-oriented context, shaping institutional and individual behaviour. It provides models for humane and compassionate engagement that are useful for environmental activism and economic reform.”²¹⁹ Serpil Oppermann reasons that:

“The task of ecocriticism, then, is to formulate a conceptual foundation for the study of interconnections between literature and the environment. Literature can be perceived as an aesthetically and culturally constructed part of the environment since it directly addresses the questions of human constructions, such as meaning, value, language, and imagination, which can, then, be linked to the problem of an ecological consciousness that humans need to attain. Within this framework, ecocritics are mainly concerned with how literature transmits certain values contributing to ecological thinking. They state that the environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies.”²²⁰

Lawrence Buell considers that “Ecocriticism is an umbrella term used to refer to the environmentally-oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice.”²²¹ Jim Dwyer defines ecocriticism as “a critical perspective on the relationship between literature and the natural world, and the place of humanity within – not separate from – nature.”²²² Ecocriticism arose from developing a greater understanding of ecological processes, “concern over the intensification of global environmental degradation, deep ecological philosophy, the green movement, and ecofeminism.”²²³

Ecocriticism functions against the framework of two key concepts – the anthropocene and human exclusivism. The question as to what role nature plays in the text is the focus of this approach. With the onset of climate change and ecological crises, ecocriticism has become an essential discipline in literary studies to raise political and ethical questions on how nature is portrayed in narratives.

In the five narratives, several keywords describe the daughters' activity and their connection to the water source and the surrounding natural features. The symbiotic allusion to the natural geographical features such as place, location, land, landscape, water, wells, water-drawing; and

²¹⁹ Roger S. Gottlieb, "Religious Environmentalism: What it is, Where it is Heading and Why We Should be Going in the Same Direction," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2007): 81-91.

²²⁰ Serpil Oppermann, "Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder," *Journal of Faculty of Letters* 16, no. 2 (December 1999): 30-31.

²²¹ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA/USA: Blackwell, 2008), 138.

²²² Jim Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (Reno, NV/USA: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 1.

²²³ Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books*, 1.

the presence of animals like sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, cattle, plants; and the human conversations near the wells in each narrative involves rich enigmatic artistry – the meanings of which need to be deciphered. Observing consistencies and variations in the shaping of each of these narratives offer fresher insights of interest to the careful contemporary reader.

Buell rightly observes that “environmentalism itself is, or at least entails a faith commitment . . . so grounding that commitment in the scriptures would seem to be a plausible move.”²²⁴ The biblical text and literature are areas of human culture in which this questioning and refashioning of the human-nature or water-women relation can be represented and examined. This implies that creative writers and literary scholars (critics) addressing ecological degradation are pivotal. William Howarth describes an ecocritic as “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action.”²²⁵

So far, no socio-historical or ecological readings have devoted attention to the physical depictions of the environment in the five texts. Hence, this study manifests the central theory that the natural world and humans have to be considered on an equal basis, not in a dominating or hierarchical relationship preferring the humans. An important thrust of ecocriticism is towards action and politics, translating theory into practicing sustainability, good ethical behaviour, political, and societal change. Such core values of ecocriticism inspire the readings of the five biblical texts.

2.7.4.4. Animal Studies

In this dissertation, the domestication of animals to serve humans is discussed by politicizing the usage of camels, sheep, donkeys, and cattle for human benefit. Jeanne Kay observes that “the bible characterizes animals and sometimes plants in ways very reminiscent of religions' pantheistic nature that Judaism is supposed to disparage.”²²⁶ She gives the example of the Eskimos, who

²²⁴ Lawrence Buell, "Religion and the Environmental Imagination in American Literature," in *There before Us: Religion, Literature, and Culture from Emerson to Wendell Berry*, ed. Roger Lundin (Grand Rapids, Mich./USA: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 234. (This edited work explores the place of faith in the lives of writers —religious and national consciousness in the writings of literary scholars)

²²⁵ William Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 7th ed., ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 69-91.

²²⁶ Jeanne Kay, "Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible," in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Lanham, MD/USA: Lexington Books, 2001), 89.

regard all nature as living—“both animals and people have true souls.”²²⁷ The “Hebrew word *Nefesh* is used in the Bible both as a human spirit and also for animal spirits.”²²⁸ Kay notes that the biblical concept of nature is therefore strongly anthropomorphic.²²⁹ In Genesis, God commands animals to be fruitful and multiply, along with Adam and Noah (Gen. 1:22; 8: 17):

“Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”²³⁰

God creates plants simultaneously with their reproductive potentials.²³¹ Domestic animals are to observe the Sabbath and refrain from murder.²³² In the book of Psalms, hills are girdled with joy, valleys shout for joy (65: 13), floods clap their hands (66: 1-4). In 1 Chronicles 16: 23-33, the fields exult and the trees and the wood sing for joy. Like humans, ‘nature also fears God’ (Ps. 68: 9) and ‘trembles at God’s presence.’²³³ Stating from a literary perspective, Ralph Pite points out that ‘the natural world’ is always social, both in itself and in its relation to humans.²³⁴ According to Steven Mithen, “neither pet keeping nor animal domestication would ever have been possible without anthropomorphism.”²³⁵ Mithen notes that “anthropomorphism is heavily reliant on the human/animal binary, and because humans have nurtured relationships based upon domination, we were in a unique position to project our qualities and social systems onto nonhumans.”²³⁶ Sara Guyer further articulates this idea in her critique of the novel “The Friend,”²³⁷ where her arguments on anthropomorphism go beyond human-animal to the anthropogenic climate and machines²³⁸—this study attempts to elaborate on human-animal companionship.

²²⁷ Kay, "Concepts of Nature, 89.

²²⁸ Kay, "Concepts of Nature, 89.

²²⁹ Kay, "Concepts of Nature," 89.

²³⁰ Genesis 8:17 (New Revised Standard Version).

²³¹ Genesis 1: 11- 12 (New Revised Standard Version)

²³² Deuteronomy 5: 14; Genesis 9: 7 (New Revised Standard Version)

²³³ Kay, "Concepts of Nature," 90.

²³⁴ Ralph Pite, "Wordsworth and the Natural World," in *Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, by Stephen Gill (Cambridge, England: ProQuest, 2011), 181.

²³⁵ James A. Serpell, "People in Disguise: Anthropomorphism and the Human-Pet Relationship [in] Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism," in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (Chichester, UK: Columbia University Press, 2007), 124.

²³⁶ James A. Serpell, "People in Disguise," 124.

²³⁷ A moving story by Sigrid Nunez—of love, friendship, grief, healing, and the magical bond between a woman and her dog. A story in celebration of human-canine devotion.

²³⁸ Sara Guyer, "Critical Anthropomorphism after #MeToo: Reading *The Friend*" (unpublished manuscript (Draft), University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI/USA, n.d.), 19.

Ken Stone states that “animals wander in and out of biblical literature from beginning to the end.”²³⁹ He argues that “the books between Genesis and Revelation are variously populated with different types of animals, who appear, disappear and reappear in numerous passages and multiple genres.”²⁴⁰ Israel’s “narrative emergence is inextricably intertwined with domesticated animals, especially goats and sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels.”²⁴¹ Stone deploys animal hermeneutics and proposes three emphases that are useful for biblical interpretation: 1. “the constitutive importance of companion species for human history and culture, 2, the instability of the human-animal binary, and 3, the ubiquitous association between different species and difference among humans, particularly in the case of this text, gender, and ethnic differences and the designation of some humans as slaves.”²⁴² As pointed out above, animals feature as accompanying species with the daughters in the narratives, and therefore, I rely on this approach as it is of paramount importance to this study.

2.7.4.5. Narrative Geography

Biblical narratives consist of geographical information. This study’s five texts reference topography, geology, hydrology, climate, land use, and water. Innovative studies by George Adam Smith have influenced people to read the text with geographical awareness. John A. Beck takes the same perspective and affirms that “geography shaped biblical history events (and) attention to ‘narrative geography’ recognizes that the biblical writers used geography to provide the setting of events and achieve strategic, literary ends.”²⁴³ In a similar vein, Shimon Bar-Efrat remarks that “places in the narrative are not only geographical facts, but are to be understood as literary components in which intrinsic meaning is embodied.”²⁴⁴ The five narratives studied in this dissertation have not yet been approached or interpreted from this direction. Hence, this method is applied to all the “at the well” narratives in the present study.

²³⁹ Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, California/USA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 2.

²⁴⁰ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

²⁴¹ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible*, 28.

²⁴² Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible*, 28.

²⁴³ John A. Beck, "Geography and the Narrative Shape of Numbers 13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (July 2000): 271.

²⁴⁴ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 194.

2.7.4.6. Spatiality

The motif of journeying and meeting at water sources in the five stories solicit an understanding of space and spatial transference. John A. Beck underlines that “in the Hebrew Bible, gender is an important aspect of how the body and space interact.”²⁴⁵ He notes that “some spaces are permissible for males while others for females. This creates a cartography of gender and a set of third-space practices that can create and resist the construction of space while creating and resisting the social construction of gender.”²⁴⁶ Understanding space and spatial transference in the five narratives as outlined by Beck will be part of this study’s analysis.

2.7.4.7. Rhetography

The five narratives are popular stories that evoke pictographic imaginations of the well scenes. The study also intends to interpret select art and cinema depictions of daughters as water-fetchers in their locales. As a theory, rhetography “refers to graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text.”²⁴⁷ A distinctive feature of using this analysis method is the interactive relation of pictorial narration found in the texts used in this study. The research points out how women’s water-fetching scenes in the narratives are illustrated and pictured in the readers’ minds.²⁴⁸ Other than demonstrating a knowledge of the approach to be sensitive to visual representation within these stories, it was beyond the scope of this study to correctly apply this form of analysis. The diverse emotional and intellectual insights that the visual evokes are important as it relates to similar accounts in the current context.

²⁴⁵ Jon L. Berquist, "Part I- Spatial Constructs," *Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World* in *Imagining Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 28.

²⁴⁶ Jon L. Berquist, "Part I- Spatial Constructs," *Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World* in *Imagining Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 28.

²⁴⁷ Vernon K. Robbins, "Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text," in *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy's Rhetoric of the New Testament*, by C. Clifton Black and Duane Frederick Watson (Waco, Tex. /USA: Baylor University Press, 2008), 81.

²⁴⁸ The collage of art on the first page of this dissertation was created by five different artists from different geographical regions, and depicts the five biblical scenes of water-drawing daughters. The names of the artists are listed in clockwise sequence: Alexandre Cabanel, *Rebecca et Eliézer*, 1883, Paris, France; Otto Semler, *Jacob and Rachel*, Pinterest; Ciro Ferri, *Moses and the Daughters of Jethro*, Italian artist, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas/USA; James Tissot, *Saul Questions the Young Maidens*, 1904, Jean de Brunhoff, Paris, France; Jesus Mafa, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 1973, art in the Christian tradition, <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48282>, Cameroon.

2.7.5. Ecumenical Water Network

This dissertation draws on Ecumenical Water Network's,²⁴⁹ water stories from developing countries, which promotes awareness about the connections between water and life, peace, justice, and the ethical and spiritual aspects of water issues.²⁵⁰ Another global network dedicated to mainstreaming gender in water resource management is the Gender and Water Alliance. They create well-researched current documents on themes such as gender, water scarcity, and drought.

2.7.6. Secular Scholarship on Water and Women

Several books are being written on the politics and ecology of water. Philip Ball's *H2O: A Biography of Water*²⁵¹ provides an excellent scientific overview of the alchemy of water. He states that “the Judeo-Christian distinction between flesh and blood is a distinction between the earthy and watery aspects of the corpus of the world.”²⁵² Ball presents a synopsis of water's importance in the Hebrew, Hindu, Russian, Omaha Native American, Mayan Central American, Norse, and Chinese mythological and religious beliefs. Tina Wallace and Anne Coles' book²⁵³ on the topic of women and water is intriguing. They observe that:

“an analysis of current policy and practice shows that organizations providing improved water supplies to poor communities typically neglect the gendered nature of access to and control over water resources — the resulting gender bias causes inefficiencies and injustices in water provision and reduces the effectiveness of well-meant efforts.”²⁵⁴

Their scholarship, which is the result of research conducted in Southern Africa, Nepal, and India, reveals how gender has been an important aspect in water provision in different environmental, historical and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, I sought to provide a literature review of commentaries and texts on the following narratives: Genesis 24: 1-21, Genesis 29: 1-14, Exodus 2: 11b-21, 1 Samuel 9: 1-14, and

²⁴⁹ The Ecumenical Water Network, is a World Council of Churches programme that brings together churches and church-related groups to promote water conservation, responsible management, and fair distribution. It is founded on the belief that water is a divine gift, a shared good, and a basic human right.

²⁵⁰ Su-san Kim and Maïke Gorsboth, *Ripples in the Water: Success Stories of Churches Striving for Water Justice* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2015), xv.

²⁵¹ Philip Ball, *H₂O: A Biography of Water*, 5th ed. (London, UK: Phoenix, 2004) Page??

²⁵² Philip Ball, *Life's Matrix: A Biography of Water* (Berkeley, CA/USA: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

²⁵³ Anne Coles and Tina Wallace, *Gender, Water and Development*, English ed. (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2005).

²⁵⁴ Coles and Wallace, *Gender, Water*, 96.

John 4: 1–26. The second section covered biblical research on water and water symbolism, as well as daughters and water-gender dialectics. The chapter concluded with a review of the literature on the methodology utilized in this narrative analysis. The theme in the following chapter begins with a study of water symbolism.



CHAPTER 3: Water Symbolism

3.1. Introduction

The idea of water as the ‘original symbol of life’²⁵⁵ is articulated in the ‘sacred texts of most religious traditions.’²⁵⁶ Water embodies a radical duality; water kills but also gives life.²⁵⁷ Such concepts of water occupy a substantial measure of literary space in the biblical narratives. The primary function of water in the Hebrew Bible is its use as a symbol. A motif,²⁵⁸ by definition, is ‘a recurrent image, idea or symbol that develops or explains a theme.’²⁵⁹ So also, the water-motif constitutes a recurrent theme in the biblical narratives as is evident in the five ‘daughters fetching water from the well’ stories selected for this study. Whenever the water-motif literary device is deployed, it illustrates how the narrator casts the relationship between the characters and their waters, wells and springs. Progressively, this chapter attempts to demonstrate how the motif of water intersects with the gender dynamics functioning within the narratives.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides a conceptual background to people-water dialectics, principally discoursing how different indigenous and religious environmentalisms have shaped water stories. The second is a dialogic on the current debates and

²⁵⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, mythos pbk. ed. (Princeton, N.J./USA: Princeton University Press, 1991), 151. See also Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln, NE/USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) where Eliade writes: "Water symbolizes the whole of potentiality: it is the *fons et origo*, "spring and origin," the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence. Water symbolizes the primal substance from which all forms came and to which they will return. Eliade explains that symbolism plays a decisive part in the religious life of humanity; through symbols the world becomes transparent, it can show the transcendent.

²⁵⁶ Rudhardt Jean, "Water," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, NY/USA: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 5:350-58. Rudhardt Jean argues that "most religions and faith communities associate water with creation, birth, divining powers, rites of initiation, life, sexuality, wisdom, knowledge, and/or purity."

²⁵⁷ Belgian Philosopher Gerhard Dorn writes about the alchemy of water (sea) (*Speculativae philosophiae*), p.303. Carl Jung builds on Dorn's idea of "solution" and argues, "The alchemists frequently point out that their stone grows like a child in its mother's womb; "they call the *vashermeticum* the uterus and its contents the fetus." What is said of the *lapis* is also said of the water: "This stinking water contains everything it needs." It is sufficient unto itself, like the Uroboros, the tail-eater, which is said to beget, kill, and devour itself. *Aqua est, quae occidit et vivificat*, meaning, "the water is that which kills and vivifies." (cf. I kill, and I make alive—Deut. 32: 39) C. G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects*, trans. R. F. C Hull, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 227.

²⁵⁸ William Freedman, "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1971): 128.

²⁵⁹ Freedman argues that "[A motif] is generally symbolic— in that, it can be seen to carry a meaning beyond the literal one immediately apparent. It represents on the verbal level something characteristic of the structure of the work, the events, the characters, the emotional effects or the moral or cognitive content. It is presented both as an object of description and, more often, as part of the narrator's imagery and descriptive vocabulary. Finally, the motif achieves its power by appropriate regulation of that frequency and improbability, by its appearance in significant contexts, by the degree of which the individual instances work together toward a common end or ends. When it is symbolic, by its appropriateness to the symbolic purpose or purposes, it serves."

meanings of water. The final section discusses the scholarship on water, gender, and the ongoing geopolitical water crisis.

Specifically, this chapter aims to discuss water concepts and symbolism found in the sacred stories of select Indigenous peoples of Canada, India, and South Africa, thereby placing them alongside the Judeo-Christian water symbolisms found in their sacred texts. The purpose is to articulate how these water-stories have contributed to one's perception of water, the subsequent consequences for the water-deprived people, and the gendering of water-drawing/management tasks. As has been ideologically maintained in this dissertation, water's meaning is given by the people who share water's life-giving quality and in their dialectical relationship to it.

3.2. Dialectical Human-Water Relationship

This dissertation draws attention to the dialectical relationships people and societies have with their waters. In his monograph, *What is water?* Jamie Linton develops the idea that “water is what we make of it.”²⁶⁰ He describes a relational and dialectical thought about the subject of water. Simon Meisch further explains that “water is appropriated symbolically and culturally in various ways, and thus acquires its meaning through social and cultural circumstances in which it performs its roles while simultaneously shaping people's identities.”²⁶¹ Viewed from this lens, the human relationship with water is hence dialectical, in that, water is “a product of historically sedimented social actions, institutions, struggles and discourses, which in turn help to shape the social relations through which it is produced and enacted.”²⁶²

Simon Meisch, however, argues that “since early modernity, reductionist notions of water have prevailed.”²⁶³ They tend to “reduce water to a single universal material, symbolized by the molecule H₂O, which circulates in the water cycle and whose visual depictions do not generally contain individuals or societies” in all of its diverse cultural and social manifestations.²⁶⁴ Jamie Linton describes this “truncated conceptual perspective as the main characteristic of ‘modern

²⁶⁰ Jamie Linton, *What Is Water? The History of a Modern Abstraction* (Vancouver, BC/Canada: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

²⁶¹ Simon P. Meisch, "I Want to Tell You a Story: How Narrative Water Ethics Contributes to Re-theorizing Water Politics," *Water* 11, no. 631, (2019): 3.

²⁶² Perreault, Tom, “What kind of governance for what kind of equity? Towards a theorization of justice in water governance,” *Water Int.* 2014, 39, 233–245.

²⁶³ Meisch, "I Want," 3.

²⁶⁴ Jamie Linton, “Modern water and its discontents: A history of hydrosocial renewal.” *Wiley Interdiscip. Rev. Water* 2014, 1, 111–120.

water.²⁶⁵ He argues that European modernity turned water into the alien ‘Other;’ – an object that could be conceptually excluded from and mastered by Culture.”²⁶⁶

These conceptions of water have repeatedly been criticized and dismissed. For instance, Harmut Bohme strongly pleads against the “suppression of the religious, philosophical, aesthetic, and phantasmatic water dimensions.”²⁶⁷ He reasons that “detaching water from its cultural embedding ultimately made way for blind and ruthless exploitation, water waste, and environmental destruction.”²⁶⁸ Eric Swyngedouw asserts that “water is inherently political, and therefore contentious, and subject to all manner of tensions, conflicts, and social struggles over its appropriation, transformation, and distribution, with socio-ecologically, unevenly partitioned consequences.”²⁶⁹ Jamie Linton claims that recent scholarship has explored how “society shapes, is shaped by, water, materially and discursively, and how water is not external to social relations but instead embeds and expresses them.”²⁷⁰ Hence, drawing on the understanding that historically, the meanings and symbolisms of water emerge from how humans related with water and how they valued and associated with their waters and watersheds, this chapter methodically seeks to tell the stories of the symbolisms.

²⁶⁵ Linton, J. “Modern Water,” 111-120. Current methods to water governance, it is suggested, are dominated by Modern Water, “whereas the separation of water from its social context is thus considered at the root of contemporary water crises.”

²⁶⁶ Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of 'Stuff'* (Dallas, TX/USA: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985) As cited by Simon P. Meisch, “I Want to Tell You a Story: How Narrative Water Ethics Contributes to Re-theorizing Water Politics,” *Water* 11, no. 631, (2019): 3-4. Similar to the gender definition given by Simone de Beauvoir: “woman is the “other”— “a relational theory of femininity that asserts that the category of woman is defined by everything man is not.” (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, new ed. (New York, NY/ USA: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 2011), 6.) See also Sherry B. Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1972): 13-14.

²⁶⁷ Jamal Malik argues that the “European colonialism denied the existence of indigenous religion—which strengthened their goals of conquering and displacing those people. By taking over their religious space and enforcing foreign religion—it created a situation where the indigenous people struggled in their new colonial circumstances.

²⁶⁸ Böhme Horst, “Umriß einer Kulturgeschichte des Wassers: Eine Einleitung,” In *Kulturgeschichte des Wassers*; Böhme, H., ed.; Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/Main, Germany, 1988; pp. 7–42. (In German) As cited by Simon P. Meisch, “I Want to Tell You a Story: How Narrative Water Ethics Contributes to Re-theorizing Water Politics,” *Water* 11, no. 631, (2019): 3-4.

²⁶⁹ Erik Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power: Water and Contested Modernities in Spain, 1898-2010* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 20.

²⁷⁰ Jamie Linton and Jessica Budds, “The Hydrosocial Cycle: Defining and Mobilizing a Relational-Dialectical Approach to Water,” *Geoforum* 57 (2014): 174.

3.3 Judeo-Christian Water Stories

Jewish and Christian traditions share common tenets of the environment in general, although each has its distinctive theologies of creation of the physical world. This commonality consequently meant that both Judaism and Christianity were indicted for the cause of the current environmental crisis. Lynn White Jr. supposed that the “anthropocentrism of the Judeo-Christian tradition made it possible to exploit all nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”²⁷¹ He claimed that the Genesis 1: 29 command ‘to fill the earth and subdue it’ is proof that the “Judeo-Christian tradition puts humans above the rest of creation and regards all the other forms of life as subordinate.”²⁷² While some Christian thinkers²⁷³ have defended themselves against that claim through the articulation of environmental ethics,²⁷⁴ the Jewish response began at the same time, but ‘environmentalism was not a major concern for Jewish thinkers.’²⁷⁵

Biblical scholar Phyllis Tribble has contested White's claim in her interpretation of “dominion over all the earth.” She argued that ‘it belongs to the scheme of harmony, and that harmony does not require homogeneity.’²⁷⁶ In response to White's drawing a contrast between the East and the West religions, she reasons that in the Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism, “harmony with nature includes, indeed depends upon, the manipulation of nature. By exercising dominion over nature, the Buddhist creates rock gardens, flower arrangements, miniature trees, and other artistic expressions of faith.”²⁷⁷ Thus, she argues that it is misleading merely to contrast the two phases “dominion over the earth” and “harmony with nature” as describing opposing views in Western and Eastern thought (as White has maintained throughout his article). The issue is not East versus West. Within both traditions are resources for understanding and controlling pollution. In other words, pollution results from man's [sic] disobedience, not from his [sic] dominion.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ Lynn Townsend White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767: 1205.

²⁷² Townsend White, Jr., "The Historical Roots," 1205.

²⁷³ It is worth noting that theologian Ernst Conradie draws attention to the emergence of Christian Ecotheology during this time— partly also as a reaction to the Club of Rome on the *Limits to Growth* (Donella H. Meadows et al., *The limits to growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), and “equally contested thesis by Lynn White...” he goes on to say that “Ecotheology could be equated with renewed attention to the doctrine of creation, anthropology and environmental ethics” Ernst M. Conradie, "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate," *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (2020): 1.

²⁷⁴ Hava Tirosh-Samuels, "Nature in the Sources of Judaism," *Daedalus* (30, nos. 4 (Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?) (Fall 2001): 99. Roderick Nash responds to Lynn White's thesis and gives a history of Christian thinking about the environment in his article “Greening of Religion” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed Roger S. Gottlieb (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 194-229

²⁷⁵ Tirosh-Samuels, "Nature in the Sources," 194-229.

²⁷⁶ Phyllis Tribble, "Ancient Priests and Modern Polluters," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, January 1, 1971, 78-79.

²⁷⁷ Tribble, "Ancient Priests," 78-79.

²⁷⁸ Tribble, "Ancient Priests," 78-79.

Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan draws attention to the fact that “although a Jewish environmental movement exists today, ecology is not high on the Jewish agenda.”²⁷⁹ She claims that “for the past fifty years, during which the ecological movement became prominent in public discourse, the Jewish people's physical and spiritual survival rather than the survival of the earth and natural habitats have dominated Jewish concerns.”²⁸⁰ She, however, points to the “principle of ‘do not destroy’ that support a range of environmental policies such as conservation of natural resources, prevention of water pollution, reforestation, proper disposal of waste products, energy conservation and reduction of material consumption,”²⁸¹—“these policies presuppose human responsibility toward the physical environment and expect humans to take the right action toward the environment.”²⁸²

On another note, Alon Tal suggests that the Bible is filled with an environmental perspective that is being appreciated only now. He observes that “from the moral imperative of biodiversity preservation by Noah (Gen 6-9) during the flood, to the laws of *shmitah*, the earth's sabbatical year (Exod. 23:10-11), or to the Bible's almost reverential attitude toward the cleansing power of water (Lev 15:1-27), the Torah is anything but a how-to manual for plundering the planet.”²⁸³

These literary extracts of the lives of the Israelites can be characterized by persistent periods of liminality²⁸⁴ when they submitted to the ambiguity of water's abundance and absence. Biblical accounts of drought and famine,²⁸⁵ in which people endure thirst and then struggle to get water, are examples of this. The abundance of water is first mentioned in Genesis. Adam and Eve's departure from the Garden while the Garden of Eden was fertile with overflowing rivers is a

²⁷⁹ Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, "Religion, Ecology and Gender: A Jewish Perspective," *Feminist Theology* 13, no. 3 (2005): 373.

²⁸⁰ Tirosh-Samuelsan, "Religion, Ecology and Gender," 373.

²⁸¹ Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, "Nature in the Sources of Judaism," *Daedalus* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 116.

²⁸² Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, "Religion, Ecology and Gender: A Jewish Perspective," *Feminist Theology* 13, no. 3 (2005): 397. Also—Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, "Nature in the Sources of Judaism," *Daedalus* (30, nos. 4 (Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?) (Fall 2001): 116-118.

²⁸³ Alon Tal, "What's Jewish about Jewish Environmentalism?," *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 20, no. 1 (2009): 163.

²⁸⁴ The word "liminal" comes from the Latin *limen*, "threshold," and originally referred to passing from one state in life to another, usually a rite of passage. Victor Turner observes that, the concept of liminality "has been extended far beyond its original sense of an intermediate or marginal ritual phase and has taken on a new meaning as an autonomous and sometimes enduring category of people who are 'betwixt and between.'" Barbara G. Myerhoff, Linda A. Camino, and Edith Turner, "Rites of Passage," ed. Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 386.

²⁸⁵ Examples: Jeremiah 14: 1(The Great Drought) and Deuteronomy 11: 17 "for then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you."

paradox that marks a critical stage in the historical narrative about the human struggle for food and water.

Humanity hereafter needed to innovate new tools to procure, preserve, and manage food and water. The rivers that span from the Euphrates and the Indus indicate the size of the Garden of Eden. In his lecture, Robert Fysh reasons that it must have been difficult for them when they were ejected from the garden.²⁸⁶ Daniel Hillel reasons that the biblical text embodies the religious experience, lore, mythology, and spiritual quest of generation after generation of the Israelites—living and struggling in and around the land—first called Canaan. It tells the story about a group of pastoral desert nomads who settled permanently on land and learned how to care for soil and water.²⁸⁷

The geographical regions surrounding Israel have their own distinct water stories. The Egyptians, for example, believed in a primordial watery mass, deep and infinite, from which the sky, the earth, and everything in them had emerged.²⁸⁸ The liquid mass, which was personified and given the name Nu'—the masculine counterpart of Nut—likewise meaning "the watery one," contained the germs of all life, human and divine.²⁸⁹ It was eternal, part male and part female. James Allen explains their belief that "the Nile sprang from the tremendous watery abyss and divided into two rivers—the Nile of Egypt and 'the other' of which it was said, 'Great and mighty is the river of the sky, flowing across the heavens and through the *Duat*, the world of night and thick darkness, and on that river floats the boat of *Ra*."²⁹⁰

Notably, 'water was sacred and possessed all qualities of wellbeing, and in all lakes, rivers, fountains, wells and streams, the divine essence was resident.'²⁹¹ So, all fish were sacred and were venerated. Since water possesses divine character, it was considered fortunate to be drowned, and

²⁸⁶ Robert Fysh, "The Bible and Literature: A Personal View by Northrop Frye - Program 03 'Images of Paradise: Trees and Water,'" Lecture by Prof. Northrop Frye and Discussion video, 27.15, <http://heritage.utoronto.ca/content/bible-and-literature-personal-view-northrop-frye-program-03-images-paradise-trees-and-water>.

²⁸⁷ Daniel Hillel, *Rivers of Eden: The Struggle for Water and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (New York, NY/USA: Oxford, 1994), 5.

²⁸⁸ Budge Ernest Alfred Wallis, Sir, *The Gods of the Egyptians, or, Studies in Egyptian Mythology* (London, UK: Methuen & Co., 1904), 1:283-284.

²⁸⁹ James Peter Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, (San Antonio (Tex.), USA: Van Siclen Books for Yale Egyptological Seminar, Yale University, 1988), 4.

²⁹⁰ Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 4.

²⁹¹ Samuel Alfred Browne Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water and Water Gods," in *Suffering-Zwingli*, ed. James Hastings and John A. Selbie, vol. 12, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, NY/USA: Scribner, 1951), 708.

‘a drowned person is sometimes regarded as a deity.’²⁹² The greatest service one could render a god was to be drowned and thus be united with him [sic]. Mercer further notes that ‘the Egyptian word for ‘drown,’ *hys*, originally meant praise.’²⁹³ Juan Eduardo explains that “in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the symbol of water is a wavy line with small sharp crests, representing the water’s surface—when tripled, the same sign symbolizes a volume of water, that is, the primeval ocean and prime matter.”²⁹⁴

The universe is divided into the heavens, the earth, and the sea—personified as gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea in the Babylonian creation account. The ‘great deep,’ or Apsu, the fresh water seas, encircled the earth and served as the source of all irrigation as well as the abode of Ea, the god of waters.²⁹⁵ The rivers, “Euphrates and the Tigris as the ‘great deep’ children were the ‘soul of the land’ and the ‘bestower of blessings,’ but there was a sense in which the waters were regarded as an agent of destruction in their appearance in the form of violent rains and floods—in this case, they were personified as Tiamat, the salt water oceans.”²⁹⁶ Water was revered as a deity because it was heavenly and holy. It was used in omens and oracles, as well as various forms of sorcery. It has the power to cast out devils, cleanse sickness, and cleanse sin. It worked as a divine power in ordeal choices, and the blood of the gods flowed through it. The Babylonians thought that all rivers were inhabited by real and legendary living creatures, some of which were beneficial and others harmful.²⁹⁷

Gerald Klingbeil has identified a vast semantic domain of nouns associated with water finding expression in the Hebrew Bible. He asserts that ‘even without including verbal forms involving water manipulation, the list is extensive.’²⁹⁸ The ‘most frequently used term for water is *Mayim*, phonetically—*mah'-yim*—appears nearly six hundred times in the Old Testament.’²⁹⁹ It can indicate a literal body of water—as in Exodus 2: 10, where it refers to the Nile River from which Moses had been saved. It is also used as a metaphor for Yahweh in the phrase “*meqor mayim*

²⁹² Browne Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water and Water Gods," 708.

²⁹³ Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water," 710.

²⁹⁴ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, NY/USA: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 364.

²⁹⁵ Samuel Alfred Browne Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water and Water Gods," in *Suffering-Zwingli*, ed. James Hastings and John A. Selbie, vol. 12, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, NY/USA: Scribner, 1951), 708.

²⁹⁶ Browne Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water and Water Gods," 708.

²⁹⁷ Browne Mercer, "(Babylonian) Water and Water Gods," 708.

²⁹⁸ Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Water," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, Tenn. /USA: Abingdon, 2010), 818.

²⁹⁹ Klingbeil, "Water," 818.

khayyim —‘the fountain of living water’—which is held up in contrast to a cistern whose inside plaster is broken and thus cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13) and the force of Yahweh's judgment is compared to the force of the water rushing down a steep mountain.’³⁰⁰

Heinz-Josef Fabry signals that in the Hebrew worldview, water is found in a wide range of natural sources, comprising the sea (*yam*), rivers (*Nahar*), *wadis* or seasonal stream-beds (*Nahal*), springs (*‘ayin*) and wells (*be’er*). The source of all these water types in a more cosmic setting is the primordial ocean —*tehom*. The primary reference of *mayim* is to the colourless, usually tasteless liquid, which occurs as a natural substance in these varied sources. Fabry notes that “water is considered basic to the sustenance of life in Israel, and as such, it soon acquired strong cosmic importance in Israelite cosmology—giving it the force of primal power and investing it with the will and intelligence attributes.”³⁰¹

3.3.1. Sea/Tehom

In the opening verses of Genesis 1, the narrator describes the primordial background to creation:

Genesis 1	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 1	“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

The opening verse of the Hebrew Bible offers a vivid description of the divine origins of the physical world—time, space, earth-matter, formless void, darkness, the sea, the wind and the waters. The narrative begins with ‘the world was a mass of chaotic materials.’³⁰² Biblical scholars for a long time believed that the Priestly (P) creation account of Genesis 1 is interconnected to the Babylonian creation epic—*Enúma Elish*. The Hebrew word for ‘the deep,’ the primeval waters over which the spirit of God moves, is ‘*tehom*.’ Scholars find a cognate in Tiamat, the sea monster slain by the Babylonian god Marduk to create the world. At the first glimpse, the sea symbolizes the ineffable. To walk on the sea ‘is to trample on the being which can engulf people with its waves

³⁰⁰ Klingbeil, "Water," 818.

³⁰¹ Heinz-Josef Fabry, “Mayim,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 8: 267.

³⁰² Powis J.M. Smith, "The Syntax and Meaning of Genesis 1:1-3," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 44, no. 2 (January 1928): 114-115.

and swallow them in its deep.³⁰³ Bruce Malina says, for Jesus to walk on the sea “is evidence of his place in the hierarchy of cosmic powers.” The Greek god Poseidon/Neptune travelled the sea on a horse-drawn chariot while the Israelite God also walked across the sea, trampling it. The prophet Habakkuk captures this as, “You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters.”³⁰⁴

Tehom variously translated as “the ‘deep,’ the ‘Sea,’ the ‘floods,’ is the Hebrew version, not fully depersonalized, of the Babylonian Tiamat—the monstrous sea-embodiment that likewise was believed to challenge Marduk for the divine and cosmic supremacy.”³⁰⁵ Paul Kang-Kul observes that “a basic geographical significance of ׁ, usually translated “sea” or “ocean,” is as a general designation of that part of the surface of the earth that is covered by water: the watery sea as opposed to the dry land (Gen 1:26; Exod 20:11; etc.).”³⁰⁶ W. F. Albright argues that *ruah* is properly ‘the wind’ and Genesis 1:1 is part of the original narrative. In order to emphasize its coherence, he insists that the “role of the wind is to ‘impregnate the ocean’ and that the subsequent appearance of light ‘represents the child of the union,’”³⁰⁷ and “the wind of Yahweh is the ‘ultimate expression of his power and supreme cosmic authority.’”³⁰⁸ Theodor Gaster says that “in the ancient world, many perceived wind and the control of its powers as god-related. In the Greek world, the blowing of winds was in the hands of Aeolus, the son of Hippotes. Stormy winds were attributed to his caprices.”³⁰⁹

Otto Eissfeldt suggests an Ugarit influence.³¹⁰ He claims that the goddess *Baau*—whose name sounds similar to the *bohu* in *tohu vobohu*—is at the center of the Phoenician account of the universe's origin. Philo quotes a verse that depicts a ‘primal landscape,’ with the two ancient

³⁰³ Pieter F. Craffert and Pieter J.J. Botha, “Why Jesus Could Walk on the Sea But Could Not Read and Write,” *Neotestamentica* 39, no. 1 (2005): 10.

³⁰⁴ Hab. 3: 15 (NRSV)

³⁰⁵ Robert Luyster, “Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZAW)* 93, no. 1 (1981): 1-2.

³⁰⁶ Cho, Paul Kang-Kul, *The Sea in the Hebrew Bible: Myth, Metaphor, and Muthos*. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University. 2014, 59.

³⁰⁷ W. F. Albright, Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43 (1924), 363 ff. As cited by Luyster, “Wind and Water,” 8.

³⁰⁸ Luyster, “Wind and Water,” 8.

³⁰⁹ Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James Frazer’s Folklore in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 807–808, and the notes on p. 868.

³¹⁰ Otto Eissfeldt, “Das Chaos in Der Biblischen und in Der Kosmogonie,” *Kleine Schriften*, Vol. II, Tiibingen, As cited by Admiel Kosman, “And the Spirit of God Hovered: A Dialogic Reading of the First Lines of Genesis,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 8-9.

elements of wind and chaos blowing over the dark chaos,³¹¹ followed by a ‘somewhat surprising description of this wind as possessed with sexual desire.’³¹² Eissfeldt argued that the hovering wind of God over the *bohu* waters in the Hebrew Bible represents a similar scene—the intercourse between God's masculine element and the feminine element of the abyss (*tehom, tuhu vabohu*). Furthermore, while the motif of ascension is characteristically symbolized as an ascent into the divine and departure from the earth, here the opposite is true: the wind descends into the earth and the earthly— in a gesture of lying down or bending over. It may be argued that the Bible presents here a familiar scene in the ancient world. As it appears in the Phoenician myth, it is one of divine copulation that fertilizes the earthly world and enables all further procreation in it.

Catherine Keller suggests that *tehom* carries the meanings ‘ocean,’ ‘deep,’ and ‘abyss,’ related to but not similarly derived from the Babylonian goddess *Tiamat*—‘the motherly principle subsumed into the syncretic biblical creation tale.’³¹³ In her theological usage, she believes that “the term calls upon its depersonified Hebrew meanings, echoing a range of Semitic and mythic significations.”³¹⁴ Keller argues that patristic Christian readings of Genesis have interpreted the void introduced in 1: 2 as either nothingness from which God created the cosmos *ex nihilo* or as a chaotic, fluid, and maternal principle tamed by a monogenetic masculine God. She reasons that “waves are membranes of energy from which matter forms and stabilizes . . . waves transition between states of energy, operating across the matter, gender, and species.”³¹⁵

Stephan Helmreich suggests that ‘the sea as a feminine force and flux has a storied history in the crosscurrents of Judeo-Christian thought.’³¹⁶ “The ocean has been a motherly amnion, fluid matrix, seductive siren, and unruly tide.”³¹⁷ Sometimes, “the ocean is also masculine—the embodiment of Poseidon or Yahweh, or the virile power of storms and vigorous hydrotherapy.”³¹⁸

³¹¹ Eissfeldt, "Das Chaos, 8-9.

³¹² Eissfeldt, "Das Chaos, 8-9.

³¹³ Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 9.

³¹⁴ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 239.

³¹⁵ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 232.

³¹⁶ Stefan Helmreich, "The Genders of Waves," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1\2 (Spring/Summer 2017): 29. Helmreich methodically questions the gynomorphism (and anthropomorphism, zoomorphism) of “symbolism of the waves. She also questions how the symbol was has configured narratives of women's social history—particularly of “the waves of feminism” in the United States. The relation between “waves” and “women” tell of the gendering of those symbolisms.”

³¹⁷ Helmreich, "The Genders of Waves," 29.

³¹⁸ Helmreich, "The Genders of Waves," 29.

She argues that the “ocean waves are icons of rhythmic and predictable motion, as well as of chaos and destruction.”³¹⁹

John Jarick explains that ‘the appropriateness of *yam* lies partly because the Israelites, as non-seafaring folk, seem to have had a distrust of the sea.’³²⁰ This is evidenced in that their national foundation legend itself speaks of the Lord holding back the waters of the sea so that the Israelites might cross, not by boat but on dry land, and of the bringing back of the waters to engulf the Egyptians. This outcome was celebrated in a song recorded in Exodus 15, which includes the line “You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.” (Exod. 15: 10)

John Jarick suggests that the Seas have a habit of not remaining calm but being stirred up to threaten small crafts and the sailors upon them. Even experienced sailors are no match for the sea in the story of Jonah: “The men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and stormier against them” (Jonah 1: 13). The churning sea is one of the most awesome and powerful things imaginable to an Israelite poet.³²¹ They were “more majestic than the thunders of the mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord” (Pss. 93: 4; 89: 8-9). In the book of Proverbs, “the way of the ship on the high seas” is an example of something “too wonderful for me,” something “I do not understand” (Prov. 30: 18-19). The prophetic literature employs the image of a raging sea in their imaginings of doom and destruction: “Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of the mighty waters!”³²²

There are numerous Christian references to the sea and seafarers in art and literature. Maritime imagery was typical in the biblical contexts and the work of early church fathers and, as such, often had theological or religious significance to those who adopted it.³²³ About visual works, Jensen notes that fish, fishers, and anchors were all prevalent themes in early Christian art and that these subjects had clear biblical and Greco-Roman parallels.³²⁴ She says that subjects like fish, sea

³¹⁹ Helmreich, "The Genders of Waves," 29.

³²⁰ John Jarick, "The Four Corners of Psalm 107," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April 1997): 271, 279-281.

³²¹ Jarick, "The Four," 271, 279-281.

³²² Isaiah 17: 12; cf. Jer. 6: 22-23; 50: 41-42; Ezek. 26: 3

³²³ Janet Wade, "The Eternal Spirit of Thalassa: The Transmission of Classical Maritime Symbolism into Byzantine Cultural Identity," abstract, *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association (JAEMA)* 14 (2018): 61.

³²⁴ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, transferred to digital printing ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 19.

creatures, fishers, and sailing vessels could symbolize various Christian concepts, including baptism, resurrection, the sacraments, or the cross. Jensen notes that particular symbols, such as fish-*Ichthys* and cross-anchor, were widely understood by Christians and became “shorthand references to certain aspects of the Christian faith.”³²⁵

It can be observed that these ideas of the creation of waters have influenced religious perceptions of water and water management in most of the monotheistic faiths— Judaism and Christianity. In operations like wastewater treatment and desalination, humans also separate 'water from water.' In flood protection techniques such as dams and flood channels, agricultural tile drainage, and the like, they try to keep water 'gathered' so that 'dry ground [will] appear.' A monotheist would argue that water engineering began with the creation of the world and has continued to this day.³²⁶

The migrant refugee deaths that occur in the Mediterranean and the Libyan waters are a tragedy that amplify the majestic nature of these seas. To the slaves from African countries, these waters symbolized danger and death. Gabeba Baderoon draws attention to the colonial sufferings endured by the slaves and enserfed indigenous people on either side of the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. She underlines that a crucial link between the African and the Atlantic oceans was the slavery due to the spice trade.³²⁷ The Atlantic was the route of the traffic in goods and slaves from Africa to Europe.³²⁸ In this sense, Baderoon poignantly recounts that “the oceans are also a connecting tissue to memories of a life before and outside of slavery.”³²⁹

As narrated above, the vast bodies of waters signify gendered connotations considering their oscillation between the need for God to control the movements of water, especially when they tend to become destructive. A dichotomous gender dialectic wherein a male God controls and manages a female sea can be understood. This aspect relates to how women have been and are

³²⁵ Jensen, *Understanding Early*, 46-51.

³²⁶ Ryan Lefers, Roberts G. Maliva, and Thomas M. Missimer, "Seeking a Consensus: Water Management Principles from the Monotheistic Scriptures," *Water Policy* 17, no. 5 (October 2015): 988.

³²⁷ Gabeba Baderoon, "The African Oceans—Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture," *Research in African Literatures* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 91. She recounts that this was the path taken by Sarah Baartman—the woman known as the “Hottentot Venus.”

³²⁸ Baderoon, "The African Oceans," 91

³²⁹ Baderoon, "The African," 95.

controlled just like how water needs to be controlled and managed. While, it is a male God and men who exercise control and management of the waters, it is women who actually are epistemologically connected to water by their dialectical relationship to water. Women fetch water and carry it to ensure that the water reaches home to be consumed and used for various household purposes. The oceans and seas are indeed the ultimate source of all waters, and their gendered symbolisms have significant bearing on the gender dynamics involved in water-fetching as evidenced in the five daughters at the well narratives of this study.

3.3.2. Rivers

Genesis 2	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 10-14	<p>“A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there, it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land are good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”³³⁰</p>

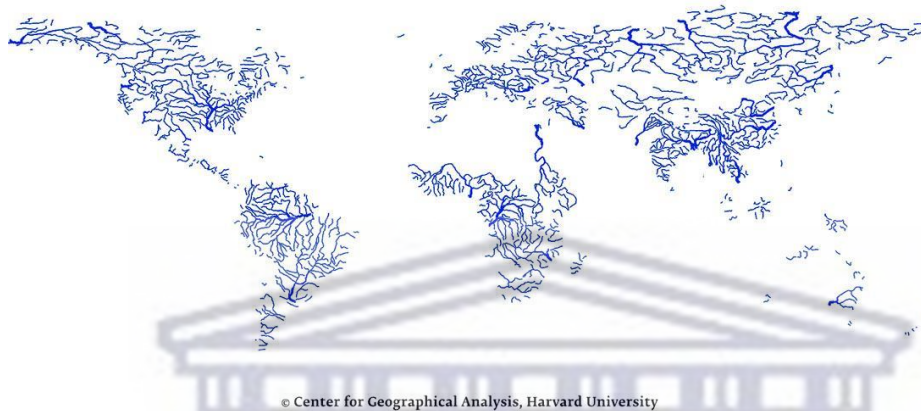
The narrative landscape the text paints is a vivid dynamic display of the physical world: A river flow separating into four branches, Eden's lush garden, the earth materials, and precious stones. An ecocritical cognizance of these ecological details is vital as each entity is characterized in the narrative. In his commentary, Calvin comments extensively on Genesis 2:10, which refers to the river in the Garden of Eden that splits into four different rivers. This verse raised considerable difficulties for exegetes. Questions such as these were raised and addressed: “Where were the four rivers that were mentioned to be placed? Furthermore, could those four rivers also be identified in the present?”

August den Hollander explains that “the Euphrates and the Tigris could be identified, but not Pishon and the Gihon. There was a difference of opinion among exegetes about the interpretation of this verse. Josephus held that the latter two rivers were referring to the Ganges and the Nile.”³³¹ This view remained current throughout the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas had

³³⁰ Genesis 2: 10- 14 (New Revised Standard Version).

³³¹ August Den Hollander, "Biblical Geography: Maps in Sixteenth-Century Printed Bibles from the Low Countries," *Church History and Religious Culture* 99 (2019): 144.

surmised in his *Summa* that they were underground rivers. Others pointed to the Danube and the Indus as possibilities. Tsumura's study culminates by proposing that 'ēden means "place where there is abundant water supply."³³²



Rivers occupy a unique place not only in Israel's geographical and theological experience but rivers and streams are the arteries and veins of the earth, as is illustrated by the figure above. They are the lifelines in the most fundamental sense. The river waters nourish, cleanse, and carry away waste and hence the need to keep them clean is vital to the ecosystem as a whole. River systems have been the origin of civilizations all throughout the world. They are woven into society's social and economic fabric and penetrate deep into the psyche of the people living around them.³³³

The Hebrew *nāhār* corresponds to similar ancient Near Eastern terms, all carrying the same meaning and translated as 'flow, stream.' There could be a connection between *nāhar*, 'be radiant,' and *nāhār*, 'river' if one were to think of a great river's glittering surface.³³⁴ The noun *nāhār* is masculine and occurs 110 times in the Old Testament. In ancient Semitic and Greek mythology, river deities are usually gods, not goddesses.³³⁵ Some of the rivers mentioned are the Abana and

³³² David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, Ind./USA: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 24.

³³³ Vandana Shiva and Kunwar Jalees, *Ganga: Common Heritage or Corporate Commodity?* (New Delhi, India: Navadanya, 2003), 6.

³³⁴ J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges, a Commentary* (Philadelphia, USA: Westminster Press, 1981), 110. Cited by Fabry "nāhār," 263.

³³⁵ G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 263.

Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus (2 Kgs. 5:12), the Ahava (Ezr. 8: 15), the Tigris and Euphrates (Gen. 2: 14). A *Nahar* is a perennial river, and it is rare for it to run dry (Nah. 1: 4).

The universal rule of the ideal king in the Bible is also described in reference to rivers: “May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72: 8); or “His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth” (Zec. 9: 10). These texts define western and eastern boundaries, the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, but use *Nahar* synonymously with *yam* to refer to the ocean surrounding the world.³³⁶ The river's notion as a boundary is echoed in the phrase ‘beyond the river,’ which refers to a foreign land with different laws (Ezr. 8: 36; Neh. 2: 7, 9; 3: 7). Beyond the river lies a distant, sinister, hostile world (Isa. 7:20; Jer 2: 8). Joshua recalls that Israel's ancestors dwelt beyond the Euphrates, where they served other gods (Josh. 24:2).

Rivers and seas act as obstacles for human beings and animals. Several texts refer to Yahweh's help in such situations, for example, when standing by the returning exiles when they are blocked by water or fire: “when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you” (Isa. 43: 2). Here water and fire stand for dangers of any element.³³⁷ In Job 14:11, the drying up of a river serves as a metaphor for human life's fading. Both promises of salvation and oracles of judgment draw on the notion of rivers as bringers of life and prosperity. Yahweh punishes the nations by making the rivers cease to flow and the springs run dry, thus depriving the people of life's necessities.³³⁸

Herbert G. May has marshalled a rich body of evidence around the fertility or fecundity of the cosmic deep.³³⁹ Concerning the river in Ezekiel 37, May reasons that, since tributaries did not feed it, it must have been the cosmic deep which was the source of this river, the subterranean ocean from which all fertility was derived.³⁴⁰

Ephraim Avigdor Speiser argues that ‘the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine distinguished two deeps:’³⁴¹ ‘One was the source of the saltwater oceans and the enemy of world order; the other was the freshwater ocean beneath the earth, which is the source of our

³³⁶ Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, *TDOT*, 263.

³³⁷ Westermann Claus, *Isaiah 40-46*. OTL (Eng.trans.1969), 118. Cited by Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," 11:265.

³³⁸ Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," 11:265.

³³⁹ Herbert G. May, “Some Cosmic Connotations of *Mayim Rabbim*” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, v. 74(1955), 9-21.

³⁴⁰ May, “Some Cosmic Connotations,” 9-21.

³⁴¹ Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, "Ed in the Story of Creation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 140 (December 1955): 9-11.

sweet water streams and springs, and, therefore, the source of life.³⁴² The river in Genesis 2:10 is from the underground freshwater deep in Paradise and is the source of the world's rivers.³⁴³ To this river, the Psalmist makes symbolic reference when he describes God's people as drinking from 'the river of thy delights,' for with God alone is the "spring of life" (Ps. 36:8-9).

Rivers are considered feminine in India and are given feminine names. They are powerful emblems of power and fertility. Tutun Mukherjee draws attention to the polar temperaments of the river: "hope-giving and nourishing contrasted with the terrifying and destructive force."³⁴⁴ She explains that the "riverbed is like a womb that can generate and revive life."³⁴⁵ Although the rivers drown the people and their villages, yet the river commands the people's fear and worship. The riverine imagery used in Bengali and other regional languages is filled with gendered metaphors of the river.³⁴⁶ Lahiri-Dutt explains that "the river's wild behaviour represents the free-living manner of the lower class girls, and contributes to the gendering of the river and the complexities of caste, class, and behavioral codes."³⁴⁷ Similarly, River Charsa's image in the film *Jal*³⁴⁸ "is of such a free woman often described as a seductive and flirtatious whore."³⁴⁹

When juxtaposed against the Semitic understanding, where rivers are seen as masculine, yet the idea that rivers are not just powerful metaphors but also of fertility becomes evident. While the Indian imagery characterizes rivers as feminine and thus as fertile and hence also worthy of worship and fear,—it expediently relates to how daughters are 'allowed' to step out of their homes to these waters to fetch water when viewed from a spatial transference perspective.

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³⁴² Speiser, "Ed in the Story of Creation," 9-11.

³⁴³ Speiser, "Ed in the Story of Creation," 9-11.

³⁴⁴ Tutun Mukherjee, "How Fares the Well? A Study of the Interstices of the Welfare State: Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People* (1943), Mahasweta Devi's *Jal/Water* (1976), and Vinodini's *Daaham/Thirst* (2005)," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, July 2017, 7.

³⁴⁵ Mukherjee, "How Fares," 7

³⁴⁶ Mukherjee, "How Fares," 7.

³⁴⁷ Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South* (Kolkata, West Bengal/India: Stree, 2006), 387-408.

³⁴⁸ The film *Jal*— (Jal transl. Water) —is a film about water scarcity and the resolve of a water diviner. The film (2013) is set in the Kutch region of Gujarat, India.

³⁴⁹ Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South* (Kolkata, West Bengal/India: Stree, 2006), 387-408.

3.3.3. Springs and Streams

Deuteronomy 8	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 7	“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills” ³⁵⁰

The narrator’s description of the new land that the Israelites will occupy³⁵¹ is filled with an abundance of water and water sources. The gender-ecocritical connotations embedded in this picturesque textual representation are to be cited and appreciated for its optimism. This verse alone draws together God, people, land, water, water-sources, valleys, and hills—demonstrating ecocriticism’s fundamental principle of interconnectedness.

Because perennial streams are rare in the region, most early settlements depended on springs for their water supply. The flowing spring water's physical phenomenon inspired biblical narrators and poets to utilize it as a symbol of God's benevolence.³⁵² Spring water is fresh and sweet, and several terms denote the water spring. *Mabbakh* occurs only once in Job 28:11 and, based on the root in Ugaritic, has been translated as ‘sources of the rivers.’ A more common word for spring is *ma‘yan*, which indicates a freshwater source desperately searched for in times of drought (1 Kgs. 18:5). In wartime, freshwater springs can be stopped as part of a comprehensive war effort (2 Kgs. 3: 19, 25; 2 Chr. 32:4). Related to *ma‘yan* is ‘*ayin* ‘fountain, source, spring,’ a term generally indicating an eye, but which is used in several instances as a reference to a source of water (Gen. 16:7; Num. 33:9), most likely because phenomenologically, the eye is the source of tears. Other terms referring to a spring include *maqor* in Jeremiah 51:36, Hosea 13: 15 and *mabbua* in Isaiah 35: 7; 49:10.

³⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 8: 7 New Revised Standard Version.

³⁵¹ Although historically, and the current Israel-Palestine relations are incessantly problematic—the access to water for people on either sides has been a contentious issue. Hence this study is aware that at all times, the occupiers during their occupation made it difficult for native Canaanite women to access these water sources. Even today, the colonized (Palestinian) women’s access to these water resources are totally cut off by the settlers giving them untold hardships. See "Jewish Settlers Cut Electricity Supply to Palestinians," *Palestine Chronicle* (blog), entry posted October 30, 2020, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/jewish-settlers-cut-electricity-supply-to-palestinians/>. Amnesty International laments that “50 years on, Israel continues to control and restrict Palestinian access to water in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories) to a level which neither meets their needs nor constitutes a fair distribution of shared water resources.” See also Amnesty International, "The Occupation of Water," Amnesty International, accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/>.

³⁵² Psalm 87: 7; 104: 10; 107: 35

The noun *'ayin*' denotes a spring 19 or 23 times in the OT depending on whether it is interpreted as a toponym or as a reference to a spring as in Judges 7: 1; 1 Samuel 29:1; 1 Kings 1:9; and Nehemiah 2: 13. Strictly, it means 'spring site,' but it is used simply in the sense of spring. The usage takes a word that refers primarily to an organ of the human body and applies it to a geographical feature. The transference is found in all Semitic dialects, including Akkadian and Ugaritic; it also appears in other languages.³⁵³

'When a spring is called *'ayin*,' or 'eye,' it is reasonable to assume that springs are thought of as 'eyes upon the face of the earth' or as the 'eyes of a monster dwelling in the depths,' in the waters under the earth. The rare phrase 'eye of the whole earth' (Exod. 10 5; Num. 22:5, 11) refers to the earth's surface or land. The springs of the deep mentioned in Proverbs 8: 28 or Deuteronomy 8:7 in the context of creation represents an attempt to portray the heights and depths of the whole world. The deluge narrative, the mythological nature of which is generally quite clear, speaks of the *ma'yenot tehom* in Genesis 7:11; 8: 2. This phrase can refer only to the springs of the primal deep, not to the eyes of the chaos monster. The use of *'ayin*' in conjunction with water refers to the bright play of light on a spring. The expressions *hammayim*, 'bright water' in Genesis 16: 7; 24:13, 43 and *enotmayim* in Numbers 33:9 have no mythological overtones. Especially in bright sunlight, a spring bubbling out of the earth gleams like an eye.³⁵⁴

In the Middle East, especially at the edge of the desert, water is precious. Springs are generally rare, with their fresh bubbling, hence 'living water' and they are preferred to cisterns and are very important for water supply. Even in Nile valley, where the river provides the needed water, the single major freshwater spring not far from Heliopolis was highly esteemed since time immemorial. Its importance was less economical than mythological and theological: "The Egyptians considered the water of this spring to be the milk of the heavenly ocean in which the sun god was wont to bathe his countenance."³⁵⁵

With no significant river to provide water for irrigation, Palestine was dependent on rainfall. Here, economic significance of springs was primary and had theological implications. Especially in times of war, the availability of springs was critical. In essence, a besieged city had to have access to a spring with a reliable flow of water, as illustrated by the water supply systems of

³⁵³ Heinz-Josef Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, by G. Johannes Botterweck (Grand Rapids, MI/USA: W. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 11:44.

³⁵⁴ Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," 11:45.

³⁵⁵ Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," 11:45.

Jerusalem, Hazor, and Megiddo. An army invading a foreign territory had to find springs. It was not without good reason that religious ceremonies were performed at springs during the military campaigns of Mesopotamian rulers.³⁵⁶ For the same reason, it was essential to block the flow of springs outside the city in the face of an approaching enemy (2 Chron. 32:3-4). When an enemy was annihilated, all the springs were stopped (2 Kgs. 3:19), removing or sharply restricting one of life's necessities.

Streams are barriers to caravans and armies³⁵⁷ and so function as boundaries. In the books of Numbers and Joshua, "the Arnon stream and Jabbok and the Jordan are mentioned as tribal and national boundaries."³⁵⁸ Tony Benson mentions that "there are very few naturally flowing springs in the Judean hills, the most famous being the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem's Kidron Valley."³⁵⁹

Springs are symbolically associated with fertility and life, a nexus of ideas reflected in similes and figurative language. A wife and mother are the wellsprings of the family. This is evidenced in the biblical language of love where she is called 'a garden spring, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon' (Song of Sol. 4: 15). In texts of caution to young men it is said, "Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?" (Prov. 5: 16). Tova Forti says that this is probably a caution for inexperienced men not to waste their resources on a strange woman or *isha zara*.³⁶⁰ Michael Fox argues that "to a man, other men's wives are all "strange" or "other" in the sense that *zarah* is used here. But women are hardly condemned for this "strangeness." Only a woman who fornicates is anathematized, not for being strange or "other" but for her decadent behavior."³⁶¹ He further states that "This dichotomy has nothing to do with the "whore or goddess" syndrome often imputed to patriarchal thinking."³⁶²

Spring symbolism in biblical narrative conveys gendered notions of both sexual purity, and fertility, yet those notions reinstate the importance of a marital bond. For instance, the text in Proverbs 5 is addressed to sons or husbands. They are advised against having sexual relations with

³⁵⁶ Fabry, "ayin ma'yān," 11:45.

³⁵⁷ Joshua 24: 11; Isaiah 47:2; 43:2

³⁵⁸ Fabry, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, v.9, s.v. "nāhār," 264.

³⁵⁹ Tony Benson, "How did the Ancient Israelites Get their Water?" *The Testimony*, March 2006, 85.

³⁶⁰ Tova Forti, "The *Isha Zara* in Proverbs 1-9: Allegory and Allegorization," *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): 91.

³⁶¹ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 260.

³⁶² Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 260.

the seductress. About this chapter, Kojo Okeyere points out that ‘the language used is explicitly erotic and probably functions as a double entendre.’³⁶³ The narrator (teacher) uses several images—water, cistern, spring, and fountain to persuade the son that right sexual behavior takes place only within the confines of marriage. McKane and Clifford interpret “springs and streams” (Pro. 5: 16, 17) as representing the man's sexual potency. Here, William McKane reasons that “if a man does not utilize his domestic water supply, the wells will overflow and the water will go [sic] waste. Should this indeed be the picture it would not symbolize the unfaithfulness of the wife, but simply the failure of the husband to cultivate her fertility and the wastefulness consequent on his neglect.”³⁶⁴ Water is thus dialectically linked to gender.

3.3.4. Rain

Deuteronomy 10	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 11- 14	“However, the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky, a land that the Lord your God looks after. If you will only heed every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul— ¹⁴ then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil.” ³⁶⁵

In these four verses, the narrator conveys how the people of Israel will receive their water. The idea that rainfall is a conditional gift from God based on their faith affirmation is apparent. People heeding every commandment becomes the criterion that solidifies the bond between God and people causing God to cause the rains to fall.³⁶⁶ From an ecocritical angle, it can be perceived that the narrator’s phraseology connects elements representing the physical world i.e., to land, the journeying motif, hills and valleys, water from the rain, seasons, and the produce of grain, wine

³⁶³ Kojo Okeyere, "The Pedagogy of Sexual Morality in Proverbs Five," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 32, no. 2 (2013): 111.

³⁶⁴ William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia, USA: Westminster Press, 1970), 319.

³⁶⁵ Deut. 10: 11- 14 (NRSV)

³⁶⁶ There are many biblical references that portray that the God of Israel is the one who sends rain when the people are obedient, and if not, God withholds the rains: Jer. 14: 22; Exod. 14: 16; Isa. 30: 23; Jer. 10:3; Pss. 65: 11; 68: 9; 135: 6; 147: 8, 16, 17, 19; Prov. 3: 20; Job 26: 8-9; 36: 27-28; 37: 6. Lev. 26: 24; Deut. 26: 12;

and oil, to the metaphysical. Genesis 2: 5-6 introduce the motif of the correlation between the springing up of plant life and the fall of rain upon the earth:

“when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground, but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground.”³⁶⁷

The stream that arises from the earth indicates the water’s presence beneath the earth and its role in keeping the ground watered for the forthcoming plants and trees. Theodore Hiebert points out that this garden is a temporary location and it is “neither the real home nor the actual world in which the story unfolds.”³⁶⁸ He bases his argument on the idea that ‘all agriculture is ultimately dependent on rainfall.’³⁶⁹ Keeping in mind the terrain of the promised land in context, which is mainly a hilly region marked by slopes and valleys, Hiebert reasons that irrigation was impractical and therefore such a land entirely depends on rainfall to produce the crops.³⁷⁰ Geographer Yehuda Karmon remarks that ‘rainfall in the right climate plays a determining role in the existence of people, plant life, and agriculture.’³⁷¹ The prophet Ezekiel says these words of assurance:

“I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.”³⁷²

The people need to obey the laws of God to avoid disgrace because of famine. Daniel Hillel observes that historically, the people of Israel lived in constant threat of being deprived of water. He argues that they had no idea about how rain and snow occurred i.e., in the sense that the “water that evaporates from the earth’s surface and condenses on the upper atmosphere to form clouds.”³⁷³ He also states that the Israelites ‘never imagined that all water flowing in the many springs and mighty rivers could result from seemingly insubstantial sources such as rain and snow—the very

³⁶⁷ Genesis 2: 5-6 (NRSV)

³⁶⁸ Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Minneapolis, MN/USA: Fortress Press, 2008), 32.

³⁶⁹ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's*, 36.

³⁷⁰ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's*, 36

³⁷¹ Yehuda Karmon, *Israel: A Regional Geography* (London, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1971), 27.

³⁷² Ezekiel 36: 30 New Revised Standard Version.

³⁷³ Daniel Hillel, *Rivers of Eden: The Struggle for Water and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (New York, NY/USA: Oxford, 1994), 28. Hillel reasons that water vapour seemed too thin and transparent to be considered substantial. The classical Hebrew word for 'insubstantial' is *hevel* literally meaning "vapour". Hence the nihilistic opening statement of Ecclesiastes— "vapour of vapours, all is vapour"—is translated into English as "vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

notion seemed ridiculous, especially given the Nile, which appeared to rise out of the rainless desert.³⁷⁴

Besides, Raphael Patai points out that “fertility relied wholly on the yearly rainfall.”³⁷⁵ He argues that ‘it was generally held that the ‘upper waters’ are male, whereas the earth and the ‘lower waters’ which are in it are female,’³⁷⁶ thus, symbolizing the relation between water and sexuality.³⁷⁷ In many ancient cultures, “water is the source of creation, and rain symbolizes mothers, the celestial God's conception force.”³⁷⁸ The falling of rain was “symbolically likened to the cohabitation of man and woman—the rain, the male waters, came down from heaven to earth, and the latter opened unto them ‘as female opens unto the male.’”³⁷⁹ Prophet Isaiah echoes this when he says:

“Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, and make it give birth, and cause it to sprout.”³⁸⁰

Studies show that the concept of male and female waters has many parallels among other peoples.³⁸¹ Some people groups around ancient Palestine have tried to secure the rain's falling “utilizing sympathetic magic, by sending young girls to the fields naked or dressed only in leaves, and by pouring water upon them or by letting the girls pour water upon the earth.”³⁸²

The reference to rainfall is a decisive theme to those communities that depend on the timely monsoons. In terms of its contemporary relevance, it must be mentioned that sixty percent of agricultural land in India is both groundwater and rain-dependent. With over six hundred million farmers, India is the world's second-largest producer of rice and wheat. Severe economic

³⁷⁴ Hillel, *Rivers of Eden*, 28. (Hillel notes that the biblical definition of the desert is “the land unsown”)

³⁷⁵ Raphael Patai, “The Control of Rain' In Ancient Palestine: A Study in Comparative Religion,” *Hebrew Union College Annual (Published by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion)* 14 (1939): 251-252.

³⁷⁶ Patai, “The Control,” 261. Patai mentions that Rabbi Abbahu calls the upper water “bridegroom” and the lower water “bride.”

³⁷⁷ Patai points out that “In this connection, they mention the pregnancy of the earth. (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, as cited by Patai, “The Control,” 261.)

³⁷⁸ Zohreh Behjati-Ardakani et al., “An Evaluation of the Historical Importance of Fertility and Its Reflection in Ancient Mythology,” *Journal of Reproduction and Infertility* 17, no. 1 (January/February 2016): 7. (Warner R. *Encyclopedia of World Mythology*. 1st ed. London: Galahad; 1975. 252 p., Hinnells JR. *Persian Mythology*. 1st ed. New York: P. Bedrick Books; 1985. 143 p.)

³⁷⁹ Behjati-Ardakani et al., “An Evaluation,” 7.

³⁸⁰ Isaiah 55: 10 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

³⁸¹ Patai, “The Control,” 262.

³⁸² Patai, “The Control,” 262.

difficulties resulting in poverty for these farmers are caused by ground water depletion and failure of monsoon rains ‘which fill up the lakes and rivers.’³⁸³

Rainfall is an important event that farmers wait upon for their crops to grow. The right amount of waterfall is essential to the survival of the sown seeds, and so if the rain arrives at the wrong time or falls heavily, it impacts the farmer a lot. Ernst Conradie draws attention to the Anthropocene age highlighting how humans have meddled with weather patterns, thereby questioning the efficacy of praying for rain during the acute drought crisis in South Africa. He laments that praying for rain should include protest, confession of insincerity, and prayer for guidance.³⁸⁴

3.3.5. Dew

Deuteronomy 33	Translation (NRSV)
Verse 28	“So Israel lives in safety, untroubled is Jacob’s abode ³⁸⁵ in a land of grain and wine, where the heavens drop down dew.” ³⁸⁶

In this verse, the narrator portrays the significance of the untroubled fountain of water, grain and wine in the land and the dewdrops essential for the safety of Israel’s people. “Dewfall provides a critical water source in the subtropical and semi-arid regions.”³⁸⁷ Dew is a gift from God, and like the rain—a symbol of abundance and pleasantness.³⁸⁸ Geographers document the dewfall in the mount of Hermon and say that “it is renowned for its copiousness, especially below the snowline.”³⁸⁹ So the ‘dew of Hermon’ ‘is a literal symbol for heavy dew disposition.’³⁹⁰ John A. Beck interprets dew from a narrative-geographical perspective. He explains that the dew plays a critical role in the ancient agricultural cycle. In his studies, he observes that crops like grapes, figs, pomegranates, and melons mature during the summer rainless months, requiring dew to reach

³⁸³ Jim Erickson, "Indian Agriculture," *UDaily-Research (University of Delaware)*, February 25, 2021, 0, accessed March 5, 2021.

³⁸⁴ Ernst M. Conradie, "Praying for Rain? Reformed Perspectives from the Southern African Context," *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 3 (October 2017): 325-326.

³⁸⁵ Fountain of Jacob (RSV Translation)

³⁸⁶ Deuteronomy 33: 28 (NRSV)

³⁸⁷ F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015), 337.

³⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 33: 28, Psalm 133: 3

³⁸⁹ G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (London, 1931), 65; cf. Weiser, *Psalms*, 784; Anderson, *Psalms*, 886.

³⁹⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp, "Psalm 133," 15. Dobbs-Allsopp says that the Mount Hermon’s high peaks are covered with snow almost year-round—in Arabic it is— *Jabal al-Thalj* “Snowy Mountain.”

maturity. Hence, he argues, “dewfall is not just an interesting physical phenomenon in the promised land, it is an essential dimension of the agricultural cycle.”³⁹¹

The Judges narrative about Gideon collecting dew on fleece is an instance to recall considering the competing claims about the provision of dew by the gods of the Canaanites and the Israelites. Ugaritic texts portray Baal as the cloud-rider who provides “the dew of heaven,”³⁹² while the Hebrew texts reveal that “there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”³⁹³ Beck mentions that in the third scene of the unnatural manipulation of the dew, “it is not so much the presence of dew but the amount of water in the fleece that captures the reader's attention.”³⁹⁴ When Gideon rose early the next day “and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.”³⁹⁵

The concept of compressing water was “an ancient technique used by the Greeks, who supplied sufficient water for Theodosia.”³⁹⁶ In some chronic dry regions of the world, collecting drinking water from the mist is a new reality. Abel Cruz, a Peruvian, harvests the heavy mists that drift across the country's parched environment using vast sheets of mesh stretched up on hillsides.³⁹⁷ The water drops collected are channeled into containers and then used for crop irrigation and as drinking water. The people can collect 200-400 litres of fresh water.³⁹⁸ Countries like Bolivia, Columbia, Morocco, Namibia, and Mexico are using this innovative method in the water-scarce regions of the world to collect water.

3.3.6. Wells and Cisterns

Genesis 16, 21, 26	Translation (NRSV)
Genesis 16: 7	The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

³⁹¹ John A. Beck, "Gideon, Dew, and the Narrative-Geographical Shaping of Judges 6:33-40," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (January/February 2008): 35.

³⁹² John Beck quotes the The “Ba’lu Myth,” which reads, “She [’Anatu] gathers water and washes, dew of heavens, oil of earth, the showers of the Cloud-rider.” Quoted in Beck, "Gideon, Dew," 36, fn., 30.

³⁹³ 1 Kings 17: 1b (NRSV)

³⁹⁴ Beck, "Gideon, Dew," 37.

³⁹⁵ Judges 6: 38

³⁹⁶ Marlene Tomasziewicz et al., "Dew as a Sustainable Non-conventional Water Resource: A Critical Review," *Environmental Reviews* 23, no. 4: 425.

³⁹⁷ Miguel Trancozo Trevino, "The Ethereal Art of Fog-catching," *BBC* (London, UK), February 23, 2020, Future Planet: Water.

³⁹⁸ Trevino, "The Ethereal," Future Planet: Water.

Genesis 16: 13- 14	So she named the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi,’ for she said, ‘Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him? Therefore, the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.
Genesis 21: 19	“Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.” ³⁹⁹
Genesis 26: 18a	“Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father.” ⁴⁰⁰

These excerpts from Genesis 16, 21 and 26 are about wells. In these verses, the narrator describes the angel of the LORD⁴⁰¹ finding pregnant Hagar by a spring of water which she calls *Beer-lahai-roi* literally meaning, “Well of the One Who Lives and Sees Me.”⁴⁰² This is the first mention of a spring of water or a well, in the Bible. Later on, taking note of Sarah’s animosity with Hagar, Abraham sends her and his young son Ishmael into the wilderness of Beersheba with some bread and a skin of water. Again, in Genesis 21: 19, the Lord comes to her rescue, showing her a well of water. This graphic episode contains potential evidence of water’s intersecting character with the wilderness, gender, and racial jealousy. Adi Mariana Waqa reasons that “the story of Hagar crying in the wilderness represents the feminization of water poverty.”⁴⁰³ Hagar’s story has counterparts worldwide where women struggle with little water to manage in a precarious condition of water scarcity and water crisis.

While the natural sources of water are the springs, streams, rivers and the Sea of Galilee, artificial sources are wells and cisterns. Wells and cisterns played a crucial role in the human strategy to secure water access during drought and seasonal variations. Roland Hyman draws attention to the fact that “wells are an invention of human knowledge and skill.”⁴⁰⁴ Digging wells required advanced technology and tools strong enough to penetrate deeply into earth and rock to reach the water beneath. Clark Youngblood explains that “they also required the technical ability to strengthen the wells’ supporting walls so that the water is not absorbed back by the earth.”⁴⁰⁵

³⁹⁹ Genesis 21: 19 (NRSV)

⁴⁰⁰ Genesis 26: 18a (NRSV)

⁴⁰¹ The NRSV Bible uses capital letters ‘LORD’ for the divine name, *YHWH*, which is connected to the Hebrew verb *hayah*, ‘to be.’

⁴⁰² Genesis 16: 14 (NRSV), footnotes ‘g.’

⁴⁰³ Adi Mariana Waqa, "Feminization of Water Poverty: Women's Perspective on Water Justice," *Ecumenical Water Network: Reflections 2020*, 2020, 1, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/reflections-2020/feminization-of-water-poverty-womens-perspective-on-water-justice>.

⁴⁰⁴ Ronald T. Hyman, "Multiple Functions of Wells in the Tanakh," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2006): 188.

⁴⁰⁵ Clark R. Youngblood, “Wells,” *Biblical Illustrator* 13 (Fall 1986), 42.

Peter Olson mentions that “the earliest wells were shallow and narrow measuring a depth of about 70 to 150 feet.”⁴⁰⁶ The biblical texts ‘do not specify the depth, circumference, or design of the wells it mentions.’⁴⁰⁷

William Hull remarks that “wells in Eastern countries have always been of the highest importance as objects of possession and historical landmarks.”⁴⁰⁸ It was one of the special privileges accorded to the Israelites that they should possess wells that they had not dug.⁴⁰⁹

Hence, the water well has been a site of contention, as the Genesis 26 narrative illustrates. The herders of Abimelech vandalized the wells dug by Abraham's servants, and they also quarreled with the herders of Isaac when the wells he dug had water in them (Gen. 26: 18-19). Earlier on in this narrative, Rebecca's beauty is seen as a threat to her safety, so Isaac lies to the men of Gerar that she is his sister. However, when Abimelech finds ‘Isaac fondling his wife Rebecca,’ in response to Isaac, he says, “One of my people might have easily lain with your wife,” indicating her vulnerability to be exploited. From a gender-ecocritical perspective, it can be pointed out that women and water are both “precious possessions” that are sites of contention and both are vulnerable to be exploited by the men in power. Taking note of similar instances in the Genesis, Jessica Richard has highlighted that water is both a site for conflict and also a sign of God's communion with a group of the people. She further comments that both in Abraham's case and in Isaac's case, they had to clear the falsehood concerning Sarah and Rebekah before they could become prosperous. Richard observes “a link here between ownership (owning up) of relationships, loyalty of relationships and oaths, and justice in resource sharing. Justice in relationships within the family and with neighbors seems to precede the just sharing of water resources.”⁴¹⁰

The quarrelsome shout, “The water is ours,” resonates with similar conflicts between ethnic, national and international communities about water ownership in the current geopolitical

⁴⁰⁶ John Peter Oleson, "Water Works," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 6, Si-Z, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1992), 6:886.

⁴⁰⁷ Oleson, "Water Works," 6:6:886. Quoted from Immanuel Benzinger, "Well," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12 (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1907), 500.

⁴⁰⁸ William E. Hull, "Well," in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents, including the Biblical Theology*, by James Hastings, et al. (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 914.

⁴⁰⁹ Deuteronomy 6: 11

⁴¹⁰ Jessica Richard, "Water, Justice and Community Building," *Waters of Life and Death*, ed. Sam P. Mathew and Chandran Paul Martin (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 217-218.

scenario.⁴¹¹ In Numbers chapter 20, we understand that the protection of wells and the land was a high priority.

The well is a significant constituent in women's lives. They spent time there as water-drawers, shepherds feeding their flocks, and socializing with others. Wells around the world are frequented by women carrying water pots on their shoulders, heads and hips. Veronica Strang has observed that changes in culture generate and reflect changes in meaning. She reasons that there is “a fundamental difference between carrying (female) vessels of water from the (female) well and pumping an ejaculative stream of it out of the earth through a (male) sprout.”⁴¹² The invention of “homologous male objects”⁴¹³ for water management “is a telling analogue of the technological development that is generally acknowledged to have enabled male social and political dominance.”⁴¹⁴ In the same vein, I align with the argument but add that the penetrative aspect of well-digging is also understood in gendered and sexualized terms. As mentioned above, the use of sharp instruments in digging the well is a sexual imagery that violates the earth forcefully⁴¹⁵ that is not cognizant of the fact that the earth is occupied with multiple bio-organisms that depend on the moisture of the water for their sustenance. Well-digging thus disturbs their habitat by displacing the ecosystem’s microorganisms. These aspects are not discussed in well-digging engineering—be it for water or any precious earth elements—merely because the focus of unearthing water is solely for humans and their domesticated animals.

⁴¹¹ In the early 2000s, the Plachimada Coca-Cola Struggle was a series of protests aimed at closing the Coca-Cola factory in Plachimada, Palakkad District, Kerala, India. Villagers reported that their wells began to run dry shortly after the facility opened, and the available water became contaminated and toxic. According to journalist Shaji, the residents of the area have been opposing the company's water exploitation and its consequences for over 19 years. Because the government is doing so little, it is the people that suffer from poor water quality. This indicates geopolitical apathy about water issues, especially when multinational corporations are involved in global exploitation by stealing water that belongs to the people and life-forms who reside near the well. Shaji K. A., "People Power Shut Coke Down In Plachimada, But Wells Are Still Dry," *HuffPost India* (New Delhi, Delhi/India), January 23, 2019, News.

⁴¹² Veronica Strang, *The Meaning of Water*, repr. ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2006), 24.

⁴¹³ Strang explains that homologous can be described as objects that echo the human form and are often, therefore, gendered (I would add, sexualized) in their meaning. Veronica Strang, "Familiar Forms: Homologues, Culture and Gender in Northern Australia," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 1 (March 1999): 77, 85.

⁴¹⁴ Strang, *The Meaning*, 24.

⁴¹⁵ Francis Bacon is notable for attributing femininity to nature. Sandra Harding recalls Bacon’s comparison between the scientific method and rape/torture. He says; “think of it as rape; think of it as forcing apart the slender thighs of an unwilling woman with your knees, pinning her under your weight as she kicks and screams in your years, grabbing her poor little jaw roughly with your fist to shut her mouth, and trying to thrust your penis into her dry vagina; that is what experimental method is all about.” Quoted in Noretta Koertge, *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science* (New York, USA: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 198.

3.4. Indigenous Water Stories

Globally, five percent of the population consists of indigenous peoples. It is estimated that they constitute about one-third of the world's underprivileged rural population in that, “they lack access to water, they suffer pollution of their water resources, damaging to their health, livelihood, and cultural survival.”⁴¹⁶ A belief that “everything within creation is sacred and interrelated is common in Indigenous communities.”⁴¹⁷ They also believe that human beings have a relationship with the seen and unseen worlds—the entirety of the physical environment that includes trees, animals, birds, fish, insects, and waterways.⁴¹⁸ Indigenous ideas of water found in the pre-colonial histories of Canada, India, and South Africa are essential for this chapter. Intriguingly enough, they are closely related to the ‘pagan’ contexts of the biblical stories of land settlement.

3.4.1. Canada

As a whole, Canada can be considered a freshwater-rich country. Its waters are found in the rivers, lakes, snow, ice and groundwater. Canadian geographer Karen Bakker states that “Canada’s relationship with water is rife with contradictions.”⁴¹⁹ On the one hand, “people are fiercely protective of Canada’s water, yet hugely wasteful of it”⁴²⁰ The principle of reciprocity and responsibility are the hallmarks of indigenous people’s relationship with water – their ontologies of water are thus “more-than-human person.”⁴²¹ There appears to be a dichotomy between Yukon First Nations⁴²² and settler perspectives on water, which is reflected in all elements of Canadian law and policy, as well as its ramifications for water conflict and governance.⁴²³ Access to clean drinking water and contamination of water bodies have been prevailing issues for indigenous people for decades. Despite Canada having significant amounts of renewable freshwater bodies, there is a notable discrepancy in who has access to these sources. It is not widely recognized that

⁴¹⁶ Moa Cortobius and Alejandro Jiménez, comps., *Post 2015 Development Process: WATER (Briefing Report)* (Copenhagen, Denmark: IWGIA - International Work Group For Indigenous Affairs, 2014), 1.

⁴¹⁷ Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong, "Untapping Watershed Mind," in *Thinking with Water*, by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 238.

⁴¹⁸ Christian and Wong, "Untapping Watershed," 238.

⁴¹⁹ Karen Bakker, *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water* (Vancouver, BC/Canada: UBC Press, 2007), 1.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ Nicole J. Wilson and Jody Inkster, "Respecting Water: Indigenous Water Governance, Ontologies, and the Politics of Kinship on the Ground," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (2018): 517.

⁴²² It can be noted that there are about 14 Yukon First Nations and 8 language groups. They also consist of the Northwest Territories and British Columbia Aboriginal groups who possess traditional territory in Yukon. It is estimated that 25 percent of Yukon’s population are Aboriginal Peoples. (<https://yukon.ca/en/find-out-about-yukon-first-nations>)

⁴²³ Nicole J. Wilson and Jody Inkster, "Respecting Water: Indigenous Water Governance, Ontologies, and the Politics of Kinship on the Ground," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (2018): 517.

there is a crisis in many indigenous communities around water management, specifically for safe drinking water.⁴²⁴

Indigenous Anishinaabe-Métis⁴²⁵ scholar and lawyer Aimee Craft asks what indigenous water laws or the *Anisinaabe nibi inaakonigewin* (our water law) might improve decision-making about water.⁴²⁶ She reasons that the Anishinaabe water law focuses more on responsibility, which emphasizes relationships between humans and non-humans, unlike other traditions that emphasize ‘human rights and obligations between the individual and the state.’⁴²⁷ While Indigenous ontologies are frequently cast as cultural constructions and relegated to the realm of ‘myth’ or ‘belief,’ Paul Nadasdy calls for the “need to take Indigenous peoples’ assumptions (of water) as literal, metaphorical truth rather than as symbolic.”⁴²⁸

When water is viewed as a ‘resource,’ rather than as ‘a living being’ it leads to claims of ownership claims and consequently exploitation.⁴²⁹ “Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies were violently suppressed and marginalized through settler colonialism.”⁴³⁰ Julian Yates and his team claim that “[i]n contrast to modern ontologies of water-as-a-resource, water-as-lifeblood ontologies lead to an understanding of water as loving, interconnected and unbounded.”⁴³¹ La Boucane-Benson invokes the Cree elders’ ideas about water:

⁴²⁴ Laura MacLean, "Indigenous Legal Methodologies and Water Governance in Canada" (unpublished Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto, Ontario/Canada, May 4, 2017), 11.

⁴²⁵ Anishinaabe are a group of culturally related indigenous peoples who live in parts of the United States and Canada. Métis people have been present in Eastern Canada since the 1600s. They were the offspring of European fishermen and their indigenous brides.

⁴²⁶ Aimee Craft, interview by Christina Gray, Manito Api Site, Wiigwam Teaching Lodge, Whiteshell Provincial Park, Manitoba/Canada, May 24, 2018.

(<https://www.cigionline.org/articles/decolonizing-water-conversation-aimee-craft>)

⁴²⁷ Wilson and Inkster, "Respecting Water," 531. Quoted from Craft A (2017) Giving and receiving life from *Anishinaabenibiinaakonigewin* (our water law) research. In: Thorpe J, Rutherford S and Sandberg LA (eds) *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. London: Routledge, pp. 105–119.

⁴²⁸ Paul Nadasdy, "The Gift in the Animal: The Ontology of Hunting and Human-Animal Sociality," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (February 2007): 26.

⁴²⁹ Nicole J. Wilson and Jody Inkster, "Respecting Water: Indigenous Water Governance, Ontologies, and the Politics of Kinship on the Ground," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (2018): 41.

⁴³⁰ Nicole J. Wilson and Jody Inkster, "Respecting Water: Indigenous Water Governance, Ontologies, and the Politics of Kinship on the Ground," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (2018): 517. Quoted from Wolfe P (2006) Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 387–409.

⁴³¹ Julian S. Yates, Leila M. Harris, and Nicole J. Wilson, *Multiple Ontologies of Water: Politics, Conflict and Implications for Governance*. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (Vancouver: In Press, 2017), 6.

“water-as-lifeblood is inextricably (and relationally) linked to human bodily health—there is no separation between the water and human beings—we are the water, and the water is us.”⁴³²

This beautifully captures the interconnectedness of water as a living entity that is actively connected to all living beings.⁴³³ Marlow Sam explains that *En'owkin* is a philosophical idea that all life forms, like humans, must be protected because they equally possess status, rights and privileges.⁴³⁴ Water as *siwlkw* is another meaning-laden concept signifying that water is not only a consuming resource, but that ‘it is more than processes of emergence.’⁴³⁵ In their studies of Yukon First Nation’s concept of respect, both Shaun Wilson and Eugene Atleo observe that the ‘principle of relationality’ is of paramount importance.⁴³⁶

It is important for the purposes of this study to keep in mind that indigenous wisdom on water’s interconnectedness that may have existed in the cultures living alongside the canvas of the selected biblical narratives may have had an impact on the Israelites’ conception of water.

3.4.2. India

India’s stories about water are described in Hindu mythologies ‘as the foundation of the whole world— the basis of life and the elixir of immortality.’⁴³⁷ The Hindu scripture, *Atharva Veda*, contains a prayer that says “May the waters bring us well-being.”⁴³⁸ Mircea Eliade says “that there are many such descriptions about the quality, use, sanctity and symbolism of water.”⁴³⁹ Jean Rudhardt explains that “in Hindu cosmogonies, waters are often represented as a receptacle of the divine egg or seed, which grows in the water, carrying the God full of activity.”⁴⁴⁰ In old Sanskrit,

⁴³² Yates, Harris, and Wilson, *Multiple Ontologies*, 7.

⁴³³ Yates, Harris, and Wilson, *Multiple Ontologies*, 7.

⁴³⁴ Marlowe Gregory Sam, "Oral Narratives, Customary Laws and Indigenous Water Rights in Canada" (Ph.D. diss., The University of British Columbia (Okanagan), September 2013), 5.

⁴³⁵ Jeannette Armstrong, "Water is *Siwlkw*," in *Thinking with Water*, by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 104-105.

⁴³⁶ Atleo, 2004; Wilson, 2009 (Shaun Wilson, Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods. Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd., 2009) & Atleo, Eugene Richard, "Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis," UBC Press, 2012)

⁴³⁷ Rana P. B. Singh, "Water Symbolism and Sacred Landscape in Hinduism: A Study of Benares (Vārāṇasī)," *Erdkunde* 48, no. 3 (July- September 1994): 201.

⁴³⁸ *Atharva Veda* II. 3.6

⁴³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln, NE/USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 188.

⁴⁴⁰ Jean Rudhardt and Erica Meltzer (Translated from French), "Water," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, by Mircea Eliade, 15:352.

the term for water is *apah*, or ‘that which pervades.’⁴⁴¹ Water is primordial in the various Hindu water stories. In one story, the Lord Narayana is depicted as floating on water, carefree and happy—symbolizing a state of rest and formlessness.⁴⁴²

Water is also the ‘symbol of life’ with a ‘wash away sins’ aspect that signifies the running water’s importance in cleansing impurities.⁴⁴³ The water of the river Ganges ‘symbolized as the liquid divine energy, transfers energies to the sacred ponds and wells,’⁴⁴⁴ and hence they are known for their ‘sanctity and their bestowing of miracles.’⁴⁴⁵

3.4.3. South Africa

Water’s importance in the mindset of the people of South Africa is well articulated by President Nelson Mandela, when he says:

“Among the many things I learnt as a president was the centrality of water in social, political and economic affairs of the country, the continent and the world—I am therefore a totally committed water person.”⁴⁴⁶

These words of acknowledgement are validated in the South African constitution, which enshrines the idea that ‘water is a right’ of its citizens.⁴⁴⁷ In consequence, each person is entitled to a minimum quantity of 25 litres per day.⁴⁴⁸ Although water is a fundamental right, the challenges of droughts, floods, desertification and population rise pose real threats. The multiple African countries share all major water basins. The need to share these international waters becomes crucial for the sustainability of the peoples in the regions. Many studies have shown that gender equality is a critical component in policy making in water decisions for securing water for poor populations. This is a point to keep in mind when analyzing the narratives of the water-fetching daughters and their role in being bridges in fair sharing of water.

⁴⁴¹ Sudhindra Sharma, "Water in Hinduism: Continuities and Disjunctures Between Scriptural Canons and Local Traditions in Nepal," *Water Nepal: Journal of Water Resource Development* 9/10, no. 1/2 (July 2003): 216.

⁴⁴² Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1971) 190.

⁴⁴³ Singh, "Water Symbolism," 210.

⁴⁴⁴ Singh, "Water Symbolism," 225-226.

⁴⁴⁵ Sharma, "Water in Hinduism," 217.

⁴⁴⁶ Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, "No Water, No Future" (speech, Opening of the Waterdome: World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, Gauteng/ South Africa, August 28, 2002).

⁴⁴⁷ Hamed Deedat, "The Gendered Analysis of Free Basic Water Services in South Africa: An Activist's Perspective," in "The Politics of Water," special issue, *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 25, nos. 2 (88) (2011): 80.

⁴⁴⁸ Deedat, "The Gendered," 80.

Symbols of water are entrenched in the religion, spirituality, myths, legends and rituals within African traditions. Camille Tounouga identifies the symbolisms of water— as the ‘source of life,’ ‘instrument of purification,’ and ‘locus of regeneration.’⁴⁴⁹ She argues that throughout Africa, “water has played an integral role in the fertility of fields and the fecundity of beings and things since the times of Pharaohs.”⁴⁵⁰ Water found in the form of “rain, river, spring, pond, lake, and sea water cupped in the hollow of a tree, dew has great significance.”⁴⁵¹ In the Bantu people’s belief system “the place of birth, of creation, is a great whirlpool of water and the Fali people of Cameroon associate water with fish.”⁴⁵² Among the Bamileke people, the father blesses the daughter on her wedding day with water-soaked in *fefe* leaves.⁴⁵³

In his study on water availability, Kobus van der Walt cautions that “South Africa is facing increasing water demands to meet the needs [of] growing population, and the subsequent growth in the economy.”⁴⁵⁴ The Western Cape Province faced a severe drought and April 12, 2018, was declared Day Zero with no water for Cape Town.⁴⁵⁵ Retief Müller points out that “a dialectic relationship existed between the pre-colonial and the contemporary regarding water rituals, and more specifically, rainmaking in southern Africa.”⁴⁵⁶ As Kevin Behrens reminds, “a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of human beings is emphasized in African environmentalism.”⁴⁵⁷ Swedish missionary Axel-Ivar Berglund calls to mind that the Zulu people went on collective pilgrimages to certain hills in an attempt to end the drought.⁴⁵⁸

At this critical moment of the water crisis, it is important to note that Bishop Thabo Makgoba cautioned about decreasing water levels in the dams. He bemoaned that “the water crisis affected

⁴⁴⁹ Camille Talkeu Tounouga, "The Symbolic Function of Water in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Cultural Approach," *Leornado* 36, no. 4 (August 2003): 283.

⁴⁵⁰ Tounouga, "The Symbolic," 283.

⁴⁵¹ Tounouga, "The Symbolic," 283.

⁴⁵² Tounouga, "The Symbolic," 283.

⁴⁵³ Tounouga, "The Symbolic," 283.

⁴⁵⁴ Kobus van der Walt, "South Africa's Water Crisis - An interdisciplinary approach," *The Journal of Humanities* 58, no. 3 (September 2018): Abstract.

⁴⁵⁵ B. E. Akinyemi, A. Mushunje, and A. E. Fashohbone, "Factors Explaining Household Payment for Potable Water in South Africa," *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no. 1464379 (April 16, 2018): 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Retief Müller, "Rain and Water Symbolism in Southern African Religious Systems: Continuity and Change," *Exchange* 42 (2013): 142.

⁴⁵⁷ Kevin Gary Behrens, "An African Relational Environmentalism and Moral Considerability," *Environmental Ethics* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 64.

⁴⁵⁸ Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Cape Town, Western Cape/South Africa: David Philip, 1976), 17, 32.

his mind on how precious water is and how devastating the effects of scarcity can be.”⁴⁵⁹ A Zulu prayer for rains during drought cries to the Lord of the Sky to “open its containers and let its daughters descend on us in that rain falls.”⁴⁶⁰ On occasions of severe drought, the men and the women pray:

“We say, have mercy on us and give us our daughters (i.e., drops of rain) we say, Lord of Heaven, do not destroy us.”⁴⁶¹

The gendering of rain-drops as symbolism for daughters is undeniably a fascinating idea in the Zulu water stories.

3.5. Meanings of Water

The meanings humans attach to water – be they individual or communitarian ways of knowing how we relate to water through symbolic attachments to elements and facets – inform our water meanings.⁴⁶² Water writers convey that, as humans, we are attracted to water. “Rivers, ponds, rainstorms, coastlines, even puddles, have an undeniable sensual charisma.”⁴⁶³ Waters also carry spiritual meanings; ‘they are central to stories, identities and our memories.’⁴⁶⁴ All life forms are essentially composed of water, and hence, it is important to recognize our shared location and the meanings we articulate.⁴⁶⁵

3.5.1. Hydrosociality

Society's relationship with water is dialectical. We relate with water when we drink it or write stories and study about it, or manage it. In all these circumstances, we are unquestionably attached to water. It becomes apparent that there is a seamless link between water and human society. Jamie Linton and Jessica Budds call for a streamlining of this “relationship” between water and society. They also claim that water scarcity, water privatization and transboundary river basin management

⁴⁵⁹ Thabo Cecil Makgoba, Abp, "Water Is Life, Sanitation Is Dignity," *Anglican Theological Review* 100, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 113.

⁴⁶⁰ Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-patterns and Symbolism*, 22nd ed. (Bloomington, IN/USA: Indiana University Press, 1989), 38.

⁴⁶¹ Berglund, *Zulu Thought-patterns*, 45.

⁴⁶² John M. Whiteley, Helen M. Ingram, and Richard Warren Perry, *Water, Place, and Equity* (Cambridge, MA/USA: MIT Press, 2008), 271-276.

⁴⁶³ Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis, "Toward a Hydrological Turn?" Introduction to *Thinking with Water* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis, "Toward a Hydrological Turn?" Introduction to *Thinking with Water* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Chen et al., *Thinking with Water*, 5.

have motivated individual scholars and interested people to articulate this field of interest.⁴⁶⁶ Their interest arises from a realization that water management is people's responsibility and, therefore, political. It involves human values, behaviors, and how we organize water, taking precedence over mere technical-scientific management approach.⁴⁶⁷ Hence, the need to grapple with the risk it (technical scientific management approach) causes to the social link we have with the water becomes crucial. In this dialectical relationship, humans realize that water is not an object subjected to social control but an entity that is “shaped by and also shapes social relationships, and structures and subjectivities.”⁴⁶⁸

Social anthropologist David Mosse suggests that “the relationship between water and society is as complicated a historical, sociological, and regional problem as any that can be imagined.”⁴⁶⁹ In his statement, the multidimensionality of water is put forward. He draws a juxtaposition between the hydrologic cycle and the hydrosocial cycle, thereby articulating the link between water and society. He argues that whereas the hydrologic cycle represents the flows of water in the hydrosphere, the hydrosocial is representative of the social nature of the flows. The idea that water has agency signifies “the dialectical and relational processes through which water and society interrelate.”⁴⁷⁰

3.5.2. Valuing Water

The values we attach to water can further enrich the dialectical relationship society has with its water. Typically, we value water for its usefulness. When we drink it, thirst is assuaged, and we feel refreshed; when we wash, it cleanses the impurities. Water thus affects our bodies and minds positively. Leah Gibbs calls this valuing narrow and “utility-based.”⁴⁷¹ She argues that “water is not just water— river water, rainwater, bore water all have different values.”⁴⁷² Water also dramatically impacts people, be it the rainfall in different stages or some rains that cause flash floods or glacial bursts. These experiences shape how people value water. As an entity, water is

⁴⁶⁶ Jamie Linton and Jessica Budds, "The Hydrosocial Cycle: Defining and Mobilizing a Relational-Dialectical Approach to Water," *Geoforum* 57 (2014): 170.

⁴⁶⁷ Linton and Budds, "The Hydrosocial," 170.

⁴⁶⁸ Linton and Budds, "The Hydrosocial," 170.

⁴⁶⁹ David Mosse and M. Sivan, *The Rule of Water: Statecraft, Ecology and Collective Action in South India* (Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

⁴⁷⁰ Linton and Budds, "The Hydrosocial," 170.

⁴⁷¹ Leah M. Gibbs, "Valuing Water: Variability and the Lake Eyre Basin, Central Australia," *Australian Geographer* 37, no. 1 (March 2006): 73.

⁴⁷² Gibbs, "Valuing Water," 73.

thus entangled with people's way of life, native histories and cultures.⁴⁷³ The different ways water is received reiterates the multidimensionality of water's reception and the multilayers of values given to. These facts point to the idea that water values are multifaceted depending on people's geographical location. Gibbs censures any 'anthropocentric, reductionist hegemonic approaches to valuing water— since they fail to capture these complexities.'⁴⁷⁴

Values are overarching concepts that influence attitudes and behaviour. Women are socialized to appreciate others' needs more than men, and as a result, they are more helpful and selfless.⁴⁷⁵ Environmental behaviour is a distinct type of help that intersects with ecological value orientations. Stern and Dietz propose three distinct value orientations: self-interest (egocentric), human-interest (anthropocentric), and ecosystem-interest (ecocentric). Women have higher ecocentric values and are more concerned about harmful environmental effects on others and the ecosystem. These ecocentric principles associated with female socialization show that women have a more extensive "other" orientation, which leads to more pro-environmental behaviour.

In India, all rivers are valued for their divine purifying properties. Hindus believe that washing in sacred rivers can cleanse them of sins and help them acquire virtuous acts. The Ganges (river Ganga) wipes away the moral dirt that millions of visitors have left behind.⁴⁷⁶ When rivers become dumpsites for rubbish and untreated sewage, it demonstrates India's river mismanagement. Because marine life, animals, and humans get sick and die from sickness. The paradox of both giving value and mistreating the river is meaningless. A segment of Indian society insists on exploiting rivers by polluting them irresponsibly and breaking environmental laws. As a result, the stalemate between river guardians who venerate them as goddesses and those who abuse the rivers continues.

3.5.3 Water Scarcity

Given the rationale of population growth, fluctuations in the hydrological cycle, and the poor management of fair water distribution that result in water scarcity although in debates and global

⁴⁷³ Gibbs, "Valuing Water," 83.

⁴⁷⁴ Gibbs, "Valuing Water," 83.

⁴⁷⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass. /USA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 73.

⁴⁷⁶ Govindasamy Agoramoorthy, "Sacred Rivers: Their Spiritual Significance in Hindu Religion," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 3 (June 2015): 1081

declarations, it is often misrepresented to be 'absolute and monolithic.'⁴⁷⁷ In the table below, Lyla Mehta distinguishes the 'real scarcity' and the 'manufactured water scarcity.'⁴⁷⁸

Real Scarcity (Biophysical phenomena- ecological & sociological consequences)	Manufactured Scarcity (Construed problem)
Dwindling Aquifers	Scarcity is universalized
Declining Grass cover	Scarcity is natural
Long trudge for women—to fetching water (the underprivileged)	Anthropogenic causes are overlooked
Cyclical (periods of abundance and dearth)	Relief and drought industry-powerful stakeholders benefit from scarcity
Relative to agriculture (Meteorological Hydrological factors)	Scarcity as permanent

The idea that water scarcity is linked to the ecological and socio-political aspects is frequently unnoticed. As a renewable resource, water availability depends on the hydrological cycle in any particular geographical region. On the other hand, groundwater is less renewable. Lyla Mehta informs that these are 'biophysical and ecological attributes' that determine water availability.⁴⁷⁹ A failed rainfall or extended periods of drought decide the water-scarce regions of the world.

In the water stories of the arid regions discussed above, it is obvious how people traversed through situations of an abundance of water and the lack of water indicating their knowledge of water scarcity's temporal and cyclic dimensions.⁴⁸⁰ Although water scarcity is not a permanent crisis, the acute suffering of people, livestock and the ecosystem is real. Women who trek long distances in search of water can voice the predicament when faced with water scarcity. Kenneth Nsah, in his ecocritical reading of the play 'Hill Barbers,'⁴⁸¹ reports how women explain that deforestation is responsible for water scarcity. They equate the forest as a "store of water for us

⁴⁷⁷ Lyla Mehta, "Contexts and Constructions of Water Scarcity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 48 (November 29, 2003): 5066.

⁴⁷⁸ Mehta, "Contexts and Constructions," 5071.

⁴⁷⁹ Mehta, "Contexts and Constructions," 5071.

⁴⁸⁰ Mehta, "Contexts and Constructions," 5066.

⁴⁸¹ This play by Ekpe Inyang is about the "barbing" of forests in Cameroon. Giving human qualities to the forests, and the farmers and hunters as 'barbers' who cut the trees without being solicited, and the consequence of water scarcity felt by women because they have to walk long distances to fetch water are the main points in his Kenneth Nsah's reading.

like the mother is of milk for her baby.”⁴⁸² It is women who have to walk when these forests are barbed.

Also, water scarcity affects people differently based on their class, ethnicity, caste or gender and also considering the purchasing power and coping mechanisms or strategies each has access to. Mehta argues that "these socially constructed differentiations often "legitimize unequal access and control of water."⁴⁸³ Erik Swyngedouw's studies on urban areas observe that a high percentage of urban residents do not have indoor piped water. Consequently, they depend on sandpipes, own wells, and purchase water from private vendors.⁴⁸⁴

3.5.4 Implications for Drought and Migration

As previously noted, a gender-ecocritical reading of these five narratives has important implications for the ever-present phenomenon of drought, which triggers migration. Ecomigration is a type of migration that occurs as a result of environmental disruption. Environmental migrants are people who are compelled to move away from their homes when ecological disasters such as cyclones, flooding, and fires devastate houses and assets while also displacing people and animals. Rise in sea-level, changes in rainfall patterns, and droughts, put pressure on livelihoods and food and water supplies, leading to decisions to relocate in quest of better livable living circumstances.⁴⁸⁵ Other hydroclimatic factors appear to be included in this definition. People can sometimes move within their country and internationally. Antonio Vitorino, the director general of the International Organization of Migration cautions that Climate change has an impact on people's livelihoods, health, and safety, as well as their migration decisions. According to the World Bank estimates, by the year 2050, more than 200 million people in the world might be internal climate migrants or displaced.⁴⁸⁶

This study of the five biblical ‘daughters at the well’ narratives contain the motif of migration. After her marriage to Isaac, Rebekah migrates to Gerar, Jacob’s family migrates to

⁴⁸² Kenneth Toah Nsah, "'No Forest, No Water. No Forest, No Animals': An Ecocritical Reading of Ekpe Inyang's *The Hill Barbers*," *Ecozon* 19, no. 1 (2018): 96-97.

⁴⁸³ Mehta, "Contexts and Constructions," 5071.

⁴⁸⁴ Erik Swyngedouw, "Water, Money and Power," *Socialist Register*, 2007, 196.

⁴⁸⁵ Marie McAuliffe, Binod Khadria, and Céline Bauloz, *World Migration Report 2020*, 253.

⁴⁸⁶ Antonio Vitorini, "IOM Director General's Message on the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26)," Youtube video, 01:35, <https://www.iom.int/cop26>, posted by International Organization for Migration (IOM):United Nations, October 29, 2021, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyrzSkq0448>.

Egypt, Moses and Zipporah migrate back to Egypt, Saul crosses geographical boundaries, and so does Jesus and his disciples towards Jacob's well in Samaria. Remarkably, Joan M. Maruskin has argued that the biblical narrative begins with God's spirit moving over the waters, thus signifying a moving God. In her definition— "to move is to migrate."⁴⁸⁷ Hence, the Bible is interspersed with stories of migrants moving from one place to another, searching for greener geographical regions for themselves and their animals and birds. James Karl Hoffmeier argues that "migrations of peoples have been a part of human history since the time when God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and they settled east of Eden (Gen. 3: 22-24)."⁴⁸⁸ The following story of Cain wandering to the land of Nod is also about his migration. There are several biblical reports of families, clans and tribes migrating to foreign lands. Within this dissertation's purview, the story of Abraham is one where he and his family migrated to the region of Canaan from his land of Ur. The story of Israel's ancestors begins to take shape from there. Abraham migrated to Egypt because of famine; Jacob and his whole family migrated to Egypt because of severe famine (Gen. 45-47).

It can be noted that the "dramatic epic of Joseph's displacement and his rise to power in Egypt sets the stage for Israel's massive migration to the land of Pharaohs. Here, they will be saved from the terrible famine in Palestine, and they eventually become permanent resident aliens."⁴⁸⁹ The current migrant crossings of the Mediterranean Sea point out that migration is also associated with political instability, corrupt governance, lack of economic infrastructure for jobs in the countries where water is scarce. This interplay between drought events and the subsequent mass migration is a global phenomenon visualized each day. In the terminology of migration theory, "water plays the role as both a push and a pull factor for migration."⁴⁹⁰ The absence or the abundance of water determines the movement of people from one geographical region to another.

Except for plants and trees, animals, birds, ocean life, and humans keep migrating from one place to another in search of better areas for sustaining life. When water is scarce, the water-dependent employment sectors such as agriculture, forestry and industry are jeopardized— leading

⁴⁸⁷ Joan M. Maruskin, *The Bible as the Ultimate Immigration Handbook: Written by, for, and about migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers*, work in progress ed. (Elkhart, IN/USA: CWS Immigration and Refugee Program, 2006), 1.

⁴⁸⁸ James Karl Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill./USA: Crossway Books, 2009), 23.

⁴⁸⁹ Timothy N. Lenchak, "Israel's Refugee Ancestors," *The Bible Today* 35 (1997): 11-15.

⁴⁹⁰ Michela Miletto et al., *Migration and Its Interdependencies with Water Scarcity, Gender and Youth Employment* (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2017), 16.

to a compromise in a steady economic income for young men and women; this predicament triggers migration.⁴⁹¹ Thus, a frustrating situation arises, leading people to move from a drought area towards a water-rich area.

One example can be drawn from the story of Rebekah. Her marriage to Isaac follows the story of the scene at the well in Gen 24. Genesis 26 begins with the line:

“Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines.”⁴⁹²

In these words, the reasons for Isaac and Rebekah’s move to the Philistines’ land directly result from a famine caused by a lack or absence of water. They crossed their geographical border to enter an alien terrain. The narrative evolves into the intertwining of issues: water scarcity, famine, migration, conflicts over water wells. In Isaac and Rebekah’s case, we understand that the area they lived in —inadequate rainfall decreases the food production, making the population vulnerable to hunger. William Shea has noted that ‘if the shortage of rainfall is severe and widespread, and if it lasts a long time, the population may experience a famine severity that some persons die from starvation.’⁴⁹³ Abraham and Jacob migrated to Egypt when there was a famine in Canaan because Egypt had a more stable irrigation system that relied on the waters of the Nile. Isaac and Rebekah “simply moved farther North in Canaan from Negeb. In doing so, he moved from a zone of lower rainfall to one of higher rainfall.”⁴⁹⁴

The intensity, incidence and severity of drought, desertification and floods are soaring, particularly in the drylands of Africa, where 70% of the populations are primarily young and dependent on a single agricultural livelihood.⁴⁹⁵ Sub-Saharan Africa is where most of the refugees reaching the Mediterranean coasts in the last year come from. Most of them are youth. The countries around the Mediterranean reached by these migrants are considered the fault line of political, economic, societal and environmental insecurities. The scope of the study about the correlation between water scarcity and ecomigration is vast and beyond the purview of this dissertation, yet the area is worth exploring.

⁴⁹¹ Miletto et al., *Migration and Its Interdependencies*, 21.

⁴⁹² Genesis 26: 1 (NRSV)

⁴⁹³ William H. Shea, "Famine," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 769-773.

⁴⁹⁴ Shea, "Famine," 769-773.

⁴⁹⁵ Miletto et al., *Migration and Its Interdependencies*, 23.

3.6. Water and Gender

The dynamics that link water and gender are intriguing. As discussed, humans are connected socially and politically to water. In these complex imbalanced relations, gender is an important component. Gender decides the access to and the control of water. Although the image of the archetypal water carriers draws our attention to the weight of the water they carry, the politics of how water is accessed, managed and distributed is gendered. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt describes the unique aspects that water plays in the gender processes.⁴⁹⁶ She affirms that “water, like gender, is known for its fluidity, for changing its shape and taking new forms— it plays a special role in the environment's social and cultural constructions.”⁴⁹⁷

3.7. Daughters as Water-Fetchers

As revealed in the statistics, historically, women have typically been held responsible for obtaining and managing water for their family worldwide. The politics of the gendered nature of water-fetching has not been discussed in the scholarship of biblical studies. However, the water-gender dialectical premise outlined in this chapter calls for revisiting the texts that depict daughters as water-fetchers. As alluded to earlier, Lahiri-Dutt points out that the archetypal water fetchers provide a symbolic icon of feminine burdens of water— mirroring the many daughters of the developing countries who continue to struggle to carry out their daily water fetching chores.⁴⁹⁸ The images of ‘bodies’ carrying their water burdens create metaphors around both water and gender. In the chapters that follow, I will increase the depth of analysis on daughters' tasks as water fetchers by interpreting five biblical narratives.

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the symbolisms of water. As a natural phenomenon, water is an entity of its own in myriad forms and temperaments, each having its own symbolic and realistic function in people’s minds. The way people engage with water and describe it in dualistic terms are but limited contextual water imaginings. As Ivan Illich has suggested, ‘water has a nearly unlimited ability to convey metaphors.’⁴⁹⁹ The magnificent oceans and seas and the various water

⁴⁹⁶ Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South*, second proof copy received from the author by email on 28, July, 2016 ed. (Kolkata, West Bengal/India: Stree, 2006), iii.

⁴⁹⁷ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, iii.

⁴⁹⁸ Lahiri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*, i-iii (2nd Proof Copy from Author)).

⁴⁹⁹ Ivan Illich, *HO and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of 'Stuff'* (Dallas, TX/USA: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985), 24.

expressions through rain, rivers, springs and dew reveal water's multifaceted role in the health of the ecosystem as a whole. Water, therefore, carries multiple ontologies and symbolisms. Human dialectical relationship with water is an essential component in understanding the gravity of the water issues that aquatic, plant, animal, and human life face at cataclysmic levels. Human negative intervention into the natural hydrological cycle is crucial to climate change, drought and water scarcity and policies need to be altered. Water and gender share the common fluidity and the need to affect change is also important. Religious notions of water-sacrality are important to affect changes in how religious adherents value water. This chapter's discussion enabled the knowledge about human responsibility in water care not only because it is a resource, but by developing the understanding that water is nothing, but what we make of it. We understand water in conjunction with the processes of water in a dialectical relationship to it.⁵⁰⁰

This chapter attempted to heighten how religion should value water and water symbolisms as fundamental for cosmic harmony. The meanings and different types of water and water resources and their contextual understandings were discussed. Also, water's symbolic meanings were articulated. To this core, one needs to speak to realize the radical ethical challenges about water sensitization. The uses of new ecocritical reading strategies elicit new meanings worth noting for enhanced insight into the Bible's water motifs. The following chapter examines two biblical narratives depicting Rebecca and Rachel as water-fetchers to demonstrate how water and gender intersect in those stories.

⁵⁰⁰ Jamie Linton, *What Is Water?: The History of a Modern Abstraction* (Vancouver, BC/Canada: UBC Press, 2010), 5.

CHAPTER 4: Daughters in Biblical Narrative: Rebekah and Rachel

4.1. Introduction

This chapter studies two narratives dealing with daughters as water-fetchers to investigate/analyze the intersections of gender and water through ecocritical and feminist lenses. The previous chapter's insights into water symbolism will lend specificity to the rereading of the 'daughters at the well' stories from Genesis 24: 1- 21 and Genesis 29: 1-14. Primarily, I will study the pictographic scenes of the daughters, Rebekah and Rachel, arriving at a water spring/well where a male is already present.⁵⁰¹ Vernon K. Robbins explains that rhetography is "graphic pictorial narration."⁵⁰² These narratives are essential because of how they blend into contemporary lived experiences of daughters in their settings, as well as in literary narratives, as discussed in this study. Rhetography focuses primarily on how the text's spatial dimensions contribute to its rhetorical and imaginative effect on readers and listeners.⁵⁰³ The narrator's use of spatial language and natural features indicate the text's potential for its persuasive function. The frequent occurrence of water motifs in the five narratives read from a gender-ecocritical lens will also draw out the narratological importance of the repeated appearances of women at the springs and wells.

The analysis of these stories by standard biblical commentaries⁵⁰⁴ are often inclined to focus on the socio-historical-linguistic aspects of the narratives. This study takes cognizance of those findings as such methods of inquiry have yielded many details about the socio-historical and anthropological backgrounds. However, to a large extent, biblical scholars have used those

⁵⁰¹ Even though both these stories do not depict any friction between the water-fetchers and the males chapter five of this dissertation which explores other texts will elaborate on the politics and dangers of male presence at the community wells, and water sources.

⁵⁰² He further notes that "as Christian discourse unfolds, it regularly blends "biblical" pictorial narration into its ongoing pictorial narration. He relates the example of the story of Elijah and Elisha in the Hebrew Bible which blends in with the story of Jesus' raising of the son of the widow of Nain in Luke 7: 11- 17." See Vernon K. Robbins and Jonathan M. Potter, *Jesus and Mary Reimagined in Early Christian Literature* (Atlanta, USA: SBL Press, 2015), 17.

⁵⁰³ Annang Asumang, "The Presence of the Shepherd: A Rhetographic Exegesis of Psalm 23," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* NA:3.

⁵⁰⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), Hermann Gunkel, Mark E. Biddle, and Ernest Wilson Nicholson, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, USA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), Brevard Springs Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 7th ed. (London: SCM Press, 1991), Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary, Issue 613* (Tennessee, USA: Spring Arbor Distributors, 1962), Tremper Longman, David E. Garland, and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis - Leviticus*, revised edition. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), David Jobling, *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pbk. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary (Johannine Monograph)* (Eugene, Oregon/ USA: Wipf & Stock, 1856), Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009)

findings to linearize the fragmented stories with their own genealogical, patriarchal, and theological agendas. Robert Alter, who identified the 'Betrothal Type-Scenes' literary motif,' indicates that the Bible 'is a collection of texts that in its abundant narrative and poetic portions uses manifestly literary means to serve chiefly religious and covenantal ends.'⁵⁰⁵ According to Esther Fuchs, conventional readings of these texts help us to acquire insight into ancient Israel's political and civic notions, ancient Near Eastern inheritance practices, and David's dynastic importance.⁵⁰⁶ She also points out that historical-critical interpretations have not shown any interest in gender issues, and I would add neither have they given importance to the physical environment. As a result, their interpretations cannot be found to be beneficial in understanding women and the physical environment. Moreover, they do not inform one about the presence of other life-forms in the physical world. She notes that the Bible promotes "an ideology that affirms women in their ability and willingness to support the patriarchal arrangement."⁵⁰⁷

Furthermore, I seek to demonstrate how diverse reader contexts have shaped their imaginations of these visual scenes over a long period within primarily a Jewish and Christian memory. I will attempt to recover previously neglected, unnoticed thematic elements of the physical world in each story. Cognizant of the fact that these stories are written down after centuries of oral transmission, it must be noted that their influence on readers has generated diverse interpretations through visual artistic representations.

4.2. Methodology: Gender-Ecocritical Analysis of Genesis 24: 1-21 and Genesis 29: 1-14

This narrative analysis deploys a variety of literary perspectives, the primary of these being gender and ecocritical perspectives. I intend to bring them into dialogue with biblical studies. The five chosen narratives are taken individually and subjected to analyses using hermeneutical strategies from the fields of gender and ecocriticism. The five narratives are:

Genesis 24:1-21; Genesis 29:1-14; Exodus 2:11b-21; 1 Samuel 9:1-4; John 4:4-15;

These texts have much potential to apply gender-ecocritical and cognate approaches. While biblical scholars have studied several aspects, even ecological approaches focused on the texts in

⁵⁰⁵ Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (May 1983): 116.

⁵⁰⁶ Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 158.

⁵⁰⁷ Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 158.

question, have not fully engaged with how the physical world is depicted within these texts.⁵⁰⁸ In light of this lacunae, my analyses will employ ecocriticism more deliberately in an effort to explore the texts in a new detailed and in-depth analysis of the natural phenomena and the physical world. In this study, I will particularly deploy ecocriticism along the following lines:

1. I read and analyze Genesis 24:1-21 and Genesis 29:1-14 as distinct literary units
2. I examine each phraseology that suggests any descriptive narrativization of the physical world
3. I consider each of those terms intensely by examining their significance and relation to the other characters within the narrative i.e., how they interact and influence each other.
4. I read these intertextually alongside relatable metaphors in the Bible. I give specific attention to how water symbolism and its interaction with other physical entities are narrativized.
5. I articulate interconnectedness—the core principle of ecocriticism—by challenging/subverting the dualisms and hierarchies that were reinscribed through dominant interpretive methods.

In this process, I read the texts against the grain, intending to catalogue the omissions, and lay down their significance within the narrative's larger motive. The purpose is to streamline the narrative rhetoric with the lens of water and gender's current politics. The narrativization of daughters and the physical world are the two focuses of the textual study. I intend to unmute water's symbolic features and the various agencies exhibited by water's interaction with the environment and humans.

By deploying gender criticism, this analysis will critique the conventionalization of female beauty, female virginity, and female labour. Thus, my investigation/analysis will seek to denounce the marginalization and omission of daughters' strenuous water-fetching task in the narrative. How these aspects were overlooked in the traditional historical-critical, theological, and ecological readings of these narratives will also be elucidated.

This method of inquiry raises questions of anachronism as it applies contemporary theories to an ancient text. Robin. B Hamon, while attempting an ecocritical reading of Genesis 2, invokes Christopher Schliephake's words:

⁵⁰⁸ Robin B. Hamon, "Garden and 'Wilderness': An Ecocritical Exploration of Gen. 2:4b–3:24," *Bible & Critical Theory* 14, no. 1 (2018): 64.

“There is the risk of approaching the distant worlds of antiquity anachronistically and to impose our standards and concepts all too freely on societies with different technological, religious, and social backgrounds.”⁵⁰⁹

It must be pointed out that this limitation also applies to the theory and methodology of ecocritical or gender reading methods being applied to ancient texts as both these reading methods are still in early stages, and are developing areas of scholarship.⁵¹⁰ On the other hand, Hans-Gadamer believes that the ancient texts of long ago have some truth, exercise claims over us, and contain relevant content.⁵¹¹

This is why I tread cautiously with the sentiment raised by Schliephake but align with Hans-Gadamer, who maintains that “the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.”⁵¹² For Gadamer, one’s encounter with the text is never totally abstract. He claims “one brings to the texts a set of prejudices, presuppositions, and preconceived notions that are (ideally) challenged and engaged in the process of reading.”⁵¹³ It is this possibility of dialectical engagement with the text that becomes the core rationale of this study.

Gender and ecocritical approaches challenge the notion of any hierarchy in the “natural order” that the text claims to have depicted. Because the texts depict different spaces, ecological themes and symbolism, I attempt to answer the fundamental question of ecocriticism i.e., how is the natural world depicted in a given text?⁵¹⁴ And the gender question, how are daughters narrativized in these texts?

The narratives consist of geographical information. This study's five texts include topography, geology, hydrology, climate, land use, and water. Innovative studies by George Adam Smith have given importance to geographical awareness when reading a text. John A. Beck takes the same perspective and affirms that geography shaped biblical historical events. “Attention to ‘narrative geography’ recognizes that the biblical writers used geography to provide the setting of events and achieve strategic, literary ends.”⁵¹⁵ In a similar vein, Shimon Bar-Efrat also observes

⁵⁰⁹ Christopher Schliephake, *Introduction to Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity* (London, UK: Lexington Books, 2016), 3.

⁵¹⁰ Schliephake, *Introduction*, 4.

⁵¹¹ Matthew K. Knotts, "Readers, Texts, and the Fusion of Horizons: Theology and Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *Theologica* 4, no. 2 (2014): 235.

⁵¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second, revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Mars (London: Continuum, 2003), 301.

⁵¹³ Knotts, "Readers, Texts," 235.

⁵¹⁴ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. (Athens, GA/USA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2009), xviii-xix.

⁵¹⁵ John A. Beck, "Geography and the Narrative Shape of Numbers 13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (July 2000): 271

that “places in the narrative are not merely geographical facts, but are to be regarded as literary elements in which fundamental significance is embodied.”⁵¹⁶ This approach is also used to study the narratives of "daughters at the well" in the present work.

It can be observed that in each story, the centrality of water becomes the geographical space at which mellifluent dialectics play out between the characters in the physical world of the narrative. Each natural phenomenon is considered a distinct entity making its presence felt in the narrative. The “ontological argument of ecology that everything is connected to everything else”⁵¹⁷ is an essential aspect of the ecocritical analysis of texts. Ecocriticism seeks to study the ‘multi-organismic concept’ symbolically.⁵¹⁸ It concentrates on how this narrative interacts and participates in the entire ecosphere, including the contemporary world, thereby acting as a bridge for the fusion of multiple cultures and scenarios. Accordingly, this study demonstrates how the discourse between biblical studies, ecocriticism, and gender can add to a more textured understanding of biblical texts.

Traditionally, these stories convey dualisms—animal/ human, nature/culture. I agree with Arthur Walker-Jones' theory that “the polarities and dualisms these narratives generate are oppressive and problematic.”⁵¹⁹ By decentering anthropocentric priority, the ecocritical readings enhance the roles and identities of other species found in these stories. Subverting the dualisms and blurring the boundaries become part of the ecocritical interpretation of the texts. Phyllis Trible claims that “distinctions between the animal world and the human world become oppositions. So, an original unity of male and female, and human and animal, gives way to oppositional dualisms and exploitation.”⁵²⁰

Water symbolism as wells or springs is the center around which the chosen biblical narratives pivots. This study's deductions will endeavor to challenge the water/human/animal/nature hegemonies and dualisms existing within the traditional biblical scholarly interpretations. Metaphor, in the most extensive sense, is portraying one thing in terms of another thing that is comparable yet not arbitrary. In the bible, analogy and symbolism are tremendously significant

⁵¹⁶ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 194.

⁵¹⁷ Serpil Oppermann, "Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder," *Journal of Faculty of Letters* 16, no. 2 (December 1999): 1.

⁵¹⁸ John W Bennet, (1996) *Human Ecology as Human Behaviour*, New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers.

⁵¹⁹ Arthur Walker-Jones, "Eden for Cyborgs: Ecocriticism and Genesis 2-3," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008): 265-267.

⁵²⁰ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 14th ed. (Philadelphia, USA: Fortress Pr., 2001), 124.

tools for viably imparting messages and ‘capturing the audience's imagination.’⁵²¹ Kirsten Nielson contends that “imagery can be reused in another context” and that the transmission of images may have played a role in redactional processes. According to this understanding of the use of imagery, the imagery was open and available for use and reuse, and one image or metaphor could be used in various situations and still have different meanings. Nielson argues that “central metaphors may act as markers for intertextual readings. A subsequent text then appropriates a metaphor from a prior text, thereby prompting the reader to think about the previous text while reading/listening to the next.”⁵²² Working together with this conceptualization of imagery, the water springs and wells around which the stories evolve can be seen as examples of intertextual reading.

Rebekah's well, Rachel's well, Zipporah's well, the well in Zuph, and Jacob's well can be understood in conjunction with each other from the perspective of intertextuality. Since humans, plants and animals on which they feed cannot live without water, and since immediate local water resources were not usually sufficient to sustain life in this region, settled populations have always had to interfere with the natural hydrology.⁵²³ Humans manipulated the flow of water for human benefit. The textual study of the five narratives that follow is interpreted from the different lenses mentioned above. The purpose of this approach is to facilitate an exploration of the physical world hitherto ignored and challenge the notion that these texts depict a dualistic world where hegemony places humans at the top and the rest of the physical world descending to the bottom.

4.3. Daughter Rebecca—The First Water fetcher

In Genesis 24, beginning with Abraham, the native species⁵²⁴—water spring (well), earth (soil), the flora, and the fauna, the camels that carry the goods (valuable mineral wealth), the woman who comes to fetch the water, her family, Abraham's servant, and his assistants who are thirsty—all of these entities are brought into the narrative in an orderly fashion to create the scene and bring out

⁵²¹ Lesley DiFransico, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusion through Metaphor: Washing Away Sin in Psalm 51," *Vetus Testamentum* 65, no. 4 (2015): 545.

⁵²² Kirsten Nielson, “From Oracles to Canon’- And the Role of Metaphor” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17 (2003), pp. 22-33; See also “There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah” (*JSOT Sup.* 65; Sheffield, 1989), 65-66. Lesley DiFransico, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusion through Metaphor: Washing Away Sin in Psalm 51," , *Vetus Testamentum* 65 (2015): 545, fn 10.

⁵²³ John Peter Oleson, "Water Works," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary. Vol. 6, Si-Z*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1992), 6:883.

⁵²⁴ Native species exist naturally at a given area or in a specific ecosystem—they are not placed there by people. Munyaradzi Makoni, "Non-native species 'threaten 73 percent' of African states," *SciDev.Net (Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International)*, June 17, 2020, 1.

the richness of meanings in the artist's story. These ecological and gender features form the criteria for the narrative analysis deploying gender and ecocriticism. The following paragraphs seek to analyze the two selected Genesis texts from a gender-ecocritical perspective.

4.3.1 Translation of Genesis 24:1-4 (New Revised Standard Version)

Genesis 24	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 1-4	<p>“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh ³and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.”⁵²⁵</p>

4.3.2. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

This story is about Abraham’s servant ‘fetching’ a wife for Isaac from Aram-naharaim. Biblical scholar Gerhard von Rad titles this chapter as “the matchmaking” and calls this Yahwist narrative as ‘the most charming of all the patriarchal stories, a novelette.’⁵²⁶ Jack Sasson observes that scholars situate Genesis 24 during Canaanite and Hellenistic periods. Contentions have relied upon such matters as the ‘supposed social affinities between tribal Israel and second-millennium Syro-Mesopotamia and the domestication of the camel.’⁵²⁷

When deploying a gender-ecocritical lens, the reader finds that these verses contain nuances of a dominant male activity. Abraham carefully plans about obtaining a wife for his son Isaac, primarily for her procreative capacities to produce a male heir from within his exclusive kinship group. He involves his male servant, confesses this faith affirmation about his monotheistic male ‘Lord God of the heaven and earth’⁵²⁸— a phrase that demonstrates a belief in a two-part division of the universe; and voices his disdain for the daughters of Canaan. These verses indicate an all-male contrived series of events that unfold in this narrative with help of the male angel who

⁵²⁵ Genesis 24: 1- 4 (NRSV)

⁵²⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 9th ed. (London, UK: SCM, 1991), 248.

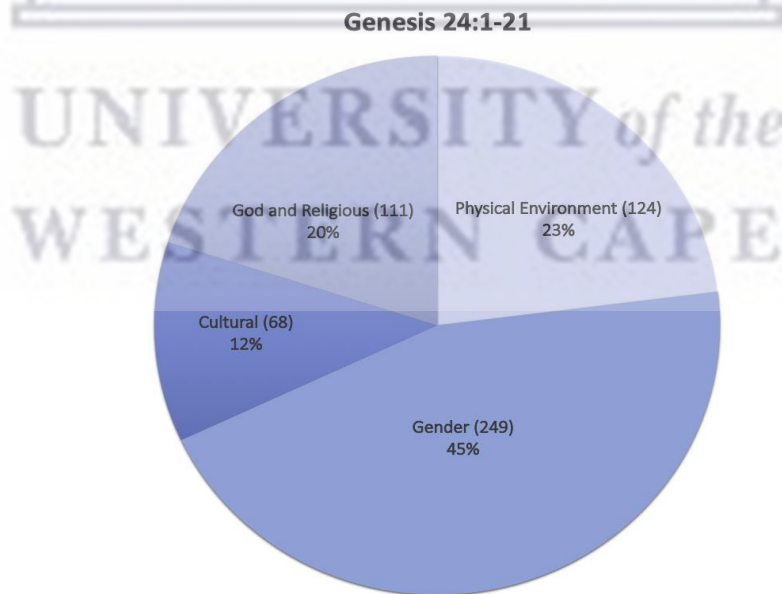
⁵²⁷ Jack M. Sasson, "The Servant's Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65, no. 4 (October 2006): 242, fn. 6

⁵²⁸ In contrast to the Queen Innana, the goddess of the heaven and the earth in Sumerian folklore

goes before the servant (Gen.25:7b). Although the text is reticent, it appears that Abraham is relatively certain that the angel will make his plan successful. The all-male monotheistic affirmation is in stark contrast to the polytheism of the Canaanite gods and goddesses. In Sumerian folklore, “Inanna was known as the Queen of heaven and earth and was responsible for the growth of plants and animals and fertility in humankind”⁵²⁹ However, to the Semites, ‘this goddess was known as Ishtar.’⁵³⁰

The following gender-ecocritical approach will demonstrate the new elements that can be drawn from this type of reading.

In the pie graph below— I have projected the total number of words in Genesis 24: 1-21, which is 552 words, and after that divided them according to the references made about God, Culture, Gender motif, and Ecological features in their content. The graph gives an approximate measure of space that each motif occupies in the narrative. While traditional exegetes have progressed on a priori preference for theological, political or national interests, this study demonstrates that those interests have marginalized the other elements entrenched in the narrative space. This study will focus primarily on the gender and ecological motifs that are referenced in this narrative. The purpose of this approach is the application of gender-ecocritical strategies to retrieve those omitted gender-ecocritical aspects.



⁵²⁹ Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth; Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York, USA: Harper & Row, 1983), xv, xvi.

⁵³⁰ Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna: Queen*, xv, xvi.

4.3.2.1. Abrahams Old Age and Wealth

The narrator begins by giving us a picture of the ageing and widowed patriarch Abraham. While approaching his demise, he makes his last “will and testament.”⁵³¹ The text describes Abraham's anxiety about intermarriage with the Canaanites, which is usually seen in Deuteronomy (7:3-4). Although this story underscores the ageing patriarch's last desire, interestingly in the next chapter (Genesis 25), the storyteller depicts Abraham's marriage with Keturah, consequently showing his virility in fathering six additional children—all sons. Richard Freedman points out that Keturah is the “most ignored significant person in the Torah.”⁵³² He also claims that ‘Abraham, an alien immigrant from Iraq, was involved with three women—Sarah, Hagar,⁵³³ and Keturah. Hence, from Abraham’s point of view, this episode could also be understood as a hurried manoeuvre to remove the obstacle of Isaac’s marriage so that he could continue his own fathering role and fulfill God’s expectation of being the ‘father of the nations.’ This is culturally similar to Laban giving away Leah the elder daughter to Jacob, before Rachel the younger one, whom Jacob loved.

Abraham’s societal stature can be described as a well-to-do estate-owning self-made man, who is setting his house in order. At this juncture in life, the narrator conveys that Abraham was concerned about the Lord’s covenantal promise to give his offspring the land of Canaan (Gen. 24:7b). This concern emphasizes Abraham’s mindfulness to keep the covenant promises God had given him. He takes the succession of his inheritance seriously. In hindsight it can be observed that a network of details about Abraham's dysfunctional⁵³⁴ family float behind the circumstances of this narrative.

Isaac’s delegate assumes control over the errand of identifying, negotiating for, and securing the bride essentially by bribing⁵³⁵ Rebekah to marry Isaac. Jack Sasson maintains that such a

⁵³¹ Meir Malul, "More on *paḥad yiṣḥāq* (Genesis XXXI 42, 53) and the Oath by the Thigh," *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 2 (April 1985): 196.

⁵³² Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation* (San Francisco, Calif./USA: Harper San Francisco, 2003), 85.

⁵³³ Richard Eliot refers to Hagar as the Egyptian-Arabian Alien Resident in Canaan

⁵³⁴ After the incident of the binding of Isaac incident *Akedah*, it seems that Abraham's life is in tatters. He and his wife live apart—he in Beer Sheba, and she in Hebron, and he has to make a special journey to attend her funeral. Abraham's relations with Isaac are severed. Isaac does not show up at his mother's funeral. Rebekah his bride will be brought to the area of *Beer Lahoi-ro'i* and not Beer Sheba. Neither will he introduce her to Abraham. Isaac will meet him after thirty five years to get his inheritance (Gn 25), finally, he will come with Ishmael to bury their father.

⁵³⁵ Roland Boer, "The Patriarch's Nuts: Concerning the Testicular Logic of Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 5, no. 2 (June 2011): 46.

pattern, of a pledge being negotiated by a substitute or an intermediary, was known to occur in the ancient world when rulers married themselves or their sons to daughters of other rulers because there was a political benefit.⁵³⁶ Robert Alter makes this prescient statement:

“the betrothal is expressed *ceremoniously*, as a formal treaty between two branches of the Nahor clan, and so the bestowal of gifts is specified here, and we are given the precise diplomatic language in which betrothal negotiations are carried out.”⁵³⁷

He observes that “in this story, unlike the other four stories Isaac is not the hero of the search; in fact, he fades into the background while his father sends the representative on behalf of him.”⁵³⁸

The LORD's blessing and Abraham's discussion with his servant about Isaac's marriage involves four males: Abraham, the LORD, Abraham's servant, and Isaac. Linguistically, these verses are fundamentally gendered-masculinist, sexist, elitist, and xenophobic.

4.3.2.2. Put Your Hand under My Thigh—Swearing

Putting the hand under the thigh is an old custom of promise taking which mirrored the view that regenerative organs were sacrosanct. Abraham implores his faithful servant to fetch a bride for his son Isaac from his homeland, Aram-Naharaim and commits him to make a vow while touching Abraham's thigh. The word *yarek* "thigh" here is used euphemistically for “genitals.”⁵³⁹ Meir Malul suggests that the language is straightforwardly emblematic of any kind of ‘posterity, family and blood-relationship.’⁵⁴⁰ Roland Boer considers this practice “the *yarekh* shake.”⁵⁴¹ He translates it as, “put your hand in the place of ‘*yarekhi*,’ and I will make you swear.”⁵⁴² It implies, as Edward Ullendorf puts it, “the sacredness attributed to this organ would lend special solemnity to an oath of this character.”⁵⁴³ Also, clearly the “most well-known Hebrew word for hand, *yd*, occasionally

⁵³⁶ Jack M. Sasson, "The Servant's Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65, no. 4 (October 2006): 243.

⁵³⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative, new and rev. ed.* (New York, NY/USA: Basic Books, 2011), 63.

⁵³⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 63.

⁵³⁹ Meir Malul, "More on *paḥad* *yiṣḥāq* (Genesis XXXI 42, 53) and the Oath by the Thigh," *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 2 (April 1985): 198.

⁵⁴⁰ Malul, "More on *paḥad*," 198. Malul explains that Touching the procreative organ while promising to keep up the union of the family probably involved including the tribal spirits to witness and assure the fulfilment of the promise. Inability to keep it or an endeavor to disregard the rule of family attachment would arouse the wrath of the ancestral spirits.

⁵⁴¹ Boer, "The Patriarch's," 46.

⁵⁴² Boer, "The Patriarch's," 46.

⁵⁴³ Edward Ullendorf, "The Bawdy Bible," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 42, no. 3 (1979), 425-56. Quoted in Boer, "The Patriarch's," 46.

serves as a euphemism for the penis.”⁵⁴⁴ As a sexually gendered custom, women are excluded from the act of covenant-making. Abraham's swearing on the God of heaven and earth is characteristic of his faith affirmation.

4.3.2.3. Daughters of the Canaanites

From a genetics and archaeology perspective, Aaron Brody clarifies that “in the Iron I period, Canaanites were found primarily in metropolitan communities amassed in the coastal plains, interior valleys, and Shephelah region of the southern Levant.”⁵⁴⁵ The negative characterization of the daughters of the Canaanites indicates an explicit racial prejudice. Ken Stone contends from a biblical hermeneutics perspective that while cultic prostitutes might have existed, the Hebrew Bible does not try to relate non-Israelite people to sexual practices viewed as inappropriate by its authors. This attempt illustrates a typical rhetorical move whereby “other” is characterized as comparable to ‘deviant sexual practice.’⁵⁴⁶ William Albright noticed various works on Israel's religion and history that endeavor to set apart Israel from its Canaanite neighbours by alluding to the ‘sexual abuses in the service of religion.’⁵⁴⁷ Stone proceeds to bring up that the “Canaanite religion has for quite a long time been conflated with a loosely defined ‘fertility religion,’ which thus has been related with ‘supposed sacred, cultic, or temple prostitution.’”⁵⁴⁸ These portrayals of what is some of the time called ‘Sex Cult’⁵⁴⁹ regularly focus on an ethical separation of Israelite religion from Canaanite religion. Consequently, there is ‘a legitimization of the sharp judgement of the Canaanites that one finds in the Hebrew Bible.’⁵⁵⁰

Rabbi David Freidenreich affirms that the desire to be in the land but not *of* it characterizes much of Jewish history. Biblical and postbiblical writers express concern that ‘intermarriage threatens the Jewish people's purity and that Gentiles will lead their Jewish partners into idolatry

⁵⁴⁴ M. Delcor, "Two Special Meanings for the Word 'yd,'" *JSS* 12 (1967): 234-40

⁵⁴⁵ Aaron J. Brody and Roy J. King, "Genetics and the Archaeology of Ancient Israel," *Human Biology* 85, no. 6 (December 2013): 928. (Killebrew 2005: 93–148; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011)

⁵⁴⁶ Ken Stone, "The Hermeneutics of Abomination: On Gay Men, Canaanites, and Biblical Interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 36.

⁵⁴⁷ William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London, UK: Athelton Press, 1968), 203.

⁵⁴⁸ Ken Stone, "The Hermeneutics of Abomination: On Gay Men, Canaanites, and Biblical Interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 36.

⁵⁴⁹ Wolff Walter, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia, PA/USA: Fortress Press, 1974), 4.

⁵⁵⁰ Ken Stone, "The Hermeneutics of Abomination: On Gay Men, Canaanites, and Biblical Interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 36.

or ‘immoral behaviour.’⁵⁵¹ It is worthwhile to read the prohibition against marrying a Canaanite daughter in Deuteronomy 7:3-4:

³“Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.”⁵⁵²

The text indicates the danger of a covenant with the Canaanites that would lead to mixed marriages and idolatry by the Israelites which is explicitly prohibited.⁵⁵³ There are some views that this prohibition is not expressly motivated. In this context, a connection with Yahweh's promise is evident, especially since Isaac is not allowed to go back to Mesopotamia either.⁵⁵⁴ According to Van Selms,⁵⁵⁵ the argument for this command is not so much abhorrence of the nations of Canaan but rather a preference to marry within the family. However, this view is contradicted by the explicit motivation in Gen. 24: 3, 37. One generation later, Esau's two Hittite wives make ‘life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.’⁵⁵⁶ The description of Isaac and Rebekah's reaction suggests a negative attitude toward marriage with someone from the nations of Canaan. Given the negative image of Esau in Genesis from a religious point of view, it may be understood that the motive of this attitude was religious.⁵⁵⁷ Louis Epstein recognized a few reasonings for what was first an abhorrence for, and later on an outright restriction of, intermarriage. As per Epstein, three reasonings in the sequential grouping are 1. “the custom of endogamy; 2. enmity with other groups, 3. religious differences with other groups, 4. racial contrasts (the desire to keep the blood pure or free from adulteration); and 5. self-preservation amid threatened assimilation. He, however, does not make any reference to any ritual impurities of the Gentiles.”⁵⁵⁸

Jane L. Kanarek argues that:

⁵⁵¹ David M. Freidenreich, "Intermarriage in Judaism," in *Sharing the Well: A Resource Guide for Jewish-Muslim Engagement*, ed. Kim Zeitman and Mohamed Elsanousi (New York, NY/USA: Jewish Theological Society/Islamic Society of North America, 2014), 75.

⁵⁵² Deuteronomy 7: 3-4 (NRSV)

⁵⁵³ Arie Versluis, *The Command to Exterminate the Canaanites: Deuteronomy 7* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 216.

⁵⁵⁴ Gen. 24: 6-8

⁵⁵⁵ “The Canaanites in the Book of Genesis,” 203

⁵⁵⁶ Gen. 26: 34-35 (NRSV)

⁵⁵⁷ Versluis, *The Command*, 264-265.

⁵⁵⁸ Christine Hayes, “Intermarriage and Impurity in Jewish Sources,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (1999): 4.

“Despite the fact that Genesis 24 is not a prescriptive legal text, it is still embedded within the larger legal world of scripture. The terminology used in Genesis 24 connects it to other passages that do legislate family law. The root *i.k.h* “take” along with the word ‘*ishah*’ “woman” or “wife” is used eight times in Genesis 24 (24: 3, 4, 7, 37, 38, 40, 51, and 67). For example, in verse 3, “you should not take a wife” (*lo' tikakh 'ishah*) for my son from the daughters of the Canaanite amongst whom I dwell. The same verb and noun combination is used in a number of different legal contexts: prohibited incestuous relationships.”⁵⁵⁹ (Leviticus 18: 18; 20: 24)

Alison Salvesen proposes that the biblical detail of portraying Rebekah as ‘a virgin, whom no man had known’ is taken from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. One strand of Genesis Rabbah implies that she was both a virgin in the conventional sense, and that no man has had any type of intercourse with her considering all others. She contends that this “should be read in the light of Resh Lakish's charge that the daughters of the Heathen (Aramean) enjoyed unnatural sexual acts while preserving their technical virginity, in contrast to Rebekah, who was pure in both respects.”⁵⁶⁰

Frymer-Kensky observes that a similar phenomenon occurs with the words ‘maiden’ *na'arah*, and ‘virgin’ *betulah*. While some scholars have translated the word ‘*betulah*’ as a virgin, within the bible, it usually means ‘a girl of marriageable age.’ It is frequently paired with ‘*bahur*,’ a young man (Deut. 32: 25; Isa. 23: 4; 62: 5; Jer. 52: 22). When the text wants to accentuate the virginal condition of the girl, it adds the expression ‘who has not known a man / a man has not known her.’⁵⁶¹ Gen 24: 16, Jud 21: 12-7. I argue that these are inessential details for contemporary cultures. From a feminist literary theory perspective, Naomi Schor asks for these texts to be rethought about the place they give to persons of one gender because they have been dismissed, marginalized or erased within the masculinist order. She argues for ‘a feminist critique of the representational strategies and processes through which those details are devalored.’⁵⁶² Objects within patriarchal order conceptualized as bad are precisely those objects to which feminist literary

⁵⁵⁹ Jane L. Kanarek, *Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 71-72.

⁵⁶⁰ Alison Salvesen, “Keeping it in The Family? Jacob And His Aramean Heritage According to Jewish And Christian Sources,” in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, by Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 209.

⁵⁶¹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, by Victor Harold Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), 79-80.

⁵⁶² Naomi Schor, *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction* (New York, USA: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), x.

critics turn their attention.⁵⁶³ As Luce Irigaray firmly remarks, “it becomes clear that female sexuality has always been conceptualized on masculine parameters.”⁵⁶⁴

4.3.2.4. “My Country and Kindred” – Get a Wife for My Son

Abraham's key command, “Go and take a wife for my son,” finally receives a reply in Laban and Bethuel's response to the servant in Gen. 24: 51: “Rebekah is before you, take her and go,” and fulfilled in Gen. 24: 61 “thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.” Gen. 24:67 says “He (Isaac) took Rebekah, and she became his wife and married her.”

The use of the word ‘take’ multiple times within this pericope indicates the understanding of Rebekah only as an object to be ‘taken’ as per the wishes of all the males – Abraham, his servant, Laban, and finally her husband Isaac. In the case of Isaac’s ‘taking’ of Rebekah physically, of course, lies the fulfillment of the promise by the male Lord to Abraham.

The weight of the oath by Abraham’s servant is to establish the nationality of the future bride. Nonetheless, beyond requiring that she cannot be a Canaanite, Abraham has only ambiguous directions where to seek her. The servant will likewise innovate his own understanding of what Abraham wished him to do.⁵⁶⁵

4.3.3. Translation of Genesis 24: 5-9

Genesis 24	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 5- 9	“The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” ⁶ Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.” ⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Marco Wan, “Feminist Literary Theory and the Law: Reading Cases with Naomi Schor,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 26 (2018): 167.

⁵⁶⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (New York, USA: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23.

⁵⁶⁵ Sasson, "The Servant's," 249-250.

⁵⁶⁶ Genesis 24: 5- 9 New Revised Standard Version.

4.3.4. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

4.3.4.1. Unwilling to Follow

The act of marriage transports the daughter into a world of new social relationships. This network of relationships can be either supportive or a source of stress. A sense of uprooting from her mother's house and the concern for re-rooting in her husband's house is the core dilemma of a woman in a male-dominant society. Indira Parikh evokes that “at the threshold of this uprooting, confrontations with both stranger (husband) and a strange world await the woman.”⁵⁶⁷ She is inextricably bound and bonded to them. She has to prove and win for herself trust, credibility, acceptance, and even her role status—“the journey of earning social membership, social status and social belonging starts at this point.”⁵⁶⁸ A common trope in Indian cinema features scenes where the daughter is in tears as she leaves her home and family. She then steps into her in-law's home.

4.3.4.2. You Must Not Take My Son Back There

Abraham insists that Isaac should neither marry a Canaanite daughter and be assimilated into a Canaanite family, nor should he be taken back to Aram-naharaim, the city of Nahor and risk losing his identity that God has bestowed upon them in the newly occupied land. Abraham's requirement is thus a gendered ethnic practice of endogamy that is divinely sanctioned where notions of spatial transference are upheld, and applied to daughters, but not to sons. The post-marital residence comprises of either patrilocal or matrilocal homes. In the Khasi culture, if the daughter is an heiress, the man who marries her should live in his mother-in-law's house (matrilocal).⁵⁶⁹ The Tlingit indigenous groups who live in the Yukon territories also practice a matrilineal kinship system, with descent and inheritance passed through the mother's line.⁵⁷⁰ The narrator, by mentioning this, reinstates the traditional practice of patrilocal post-marital residence for the daughter.

⁵⁶⁷ Indira J. Parikh and Pulin K. Garg, *Indian Women: An Inner Dialogue* (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 1989), 133-135.

⁵⁶⁸ Parikh and Garg, *Indian Women*, 135.

⁵⁶⁹ Philip Richard Gurdon, *The Khasis* (Frankfurt, Germany: Outlook Verlag, 2020), 2.

⁵⁷⁰ Barry Pritzker, *A Native American: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Peoples* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210.

4.3.5 Translation of Genesis 24:10-14

Genesis 24	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 10- 14	<p>“Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Please offer your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”⁵⁷¹</p>

4.3.6. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

4.3.6.1. Aram-naharaim, the City of Nahor

Aram-Naharaim⁵⁷² is the antiquated place where there is the land of Aramean – the biblical name for a locale in Upper Mesopotamia, along the “elbow of the Euphrates River.”⁵⁷³ It is referenced multiple times in the Hebrew Bible. Rabbi Isaac claims that “the people of Paddan-Aram were rogues, and Rebekah was like a lily among the thorns.”⁵⁷⁴ The notice made of the river Euphrates interfaces with the lush Garden of Eden. Gordon Wenham references that “Aram-Naharaim—Aram of the two rivers, was roughly by the Euphrates’ area on the west and river Habur on the east,⁵⁷⁵ and the ‘upper Euphrates region of northern Syria.’⁵⁷⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp says that “the servant's destination was Nahor, which could allude to Harran or Nahur on the Upper Balikh River in Aram-naharaim.”⁵⁷⁷

Also, of importance is to note how the narrator develops his story. An ecocritical reader can observe the coordinated sync between servant, the camel-herdsmen, the spring water and the vibrant activity of Rebekah that resonates the interconnectedness of the characters who relate with one another in the spatial context of the water spring—the unifying symbol— thus although the

⁵⁷¹ Genesis 24: 1- 14 New Revised Standard Version.

⁵⁷² Hebrew: אַרַם נַחַרַיִם 'Aram Naharayim; Aramaic: אַרַם נַחַרַיִם; Classical Syriac: ܐܪܡܢܢܗܪܝܝܡ

⁵⁷³ K. Lawson Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of Their Politics* (Williston, ND/USA: SBL Press, 2016), 96.

⁵⁷⁴ Genesis Rabbah 63: 4

⁵⁷⁵ Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 16-50, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2017), 143.

⁵⁷⁶ Michael David Coogan and Marc Brettler, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43.

⁵⁷⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The First Family: Terah and Sons.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41, no. 1 (2016): 3-13.

focus is on the humans present, when viewed through an ecocritical lens—the boundaries between humans, animals and the physical world are blurred.

Theodore Hiebert points out that God has just made the human a farmer, so the animals are created not to overcome loneliness but to help with agricultural labour.⁵⁷⁸ Cattle and donkeys helped with the most arduous tasks of plowing, threshing, and conveying loads, and “sheep and goats provided essential products for the subsistence economy.”⁵⁷⁹ Mark Brett notes that “by undermining the dualisms that legitimated anthropocentrism in the ancient world, the text “potentially subverts the ‘species superiority’ which lies behind the ecological crisis.”⁵⁸⁰

4.3.6.2. Camels (10 a; 11)

Abraham was a wealthy man having numerous servants or household slaves, with flocks and herds and a store of precious metals.⁵⁸¹ Ken Stone observes that vast sections of the Hebrew Bible make it a savannah full of extraordinary animals and that it is not simply a book of “God and Man.”⁵⁸² Stone points out that donkeys, mules, and horses performed more hard chores for the Israelites than most other household animals. In biblical texts, oxen are regularly seen doing such labour, but usually in the background. Humans seldom read about them straining under enormous weights or being battered or otherwise subjugated while working on their literary endeavors. Our picturization of them and their obedient labour is shaped by their submission to ancient masters as well as literary portrayal.⁵⁸³

Camels are domesticated and work in partnership with humans, helping them transport people, goods and jewelry. Although the camel was most likely domesticated for its milk, other uses were found later, including using its hair and dung and also utilizing it as a riding and pack animal.⁵⁸⁴ Camels were also given as royal presents, as when Ben-Hadad gave Elisha forty loaded camels (2 Kings 8:9). There is some debate among scholars if the camels were domesticated by

⁵⁷⁸ Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Minneapolis, MN/USA: Fortress Press, 2008), 60.

⁵⁷⁹ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's*, 60.

⁵⁸⁰ Mark G. Brett, “Earthing the Human,” in Habel and Wurst (eds.), *The Earth Story in Genesis*, 86.

⁵⁸¹ George W. M. Reynolds, “Horace Vernet's 'Rebekah at the Well,’” *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, November 16, 1867, 349.

⁵⁸² Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 106.

⁵⁸³ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 106-107.

⁵⁸⁴ Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, Calif./USA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 114.

the time of Abraham.⁵⁸⁵ Ken Thompson argues that the camels are an invasive species and explains that they migrated into Africa from Kansas, in North America, and that they simply walked. He also mentions that species of all kinds are capable of migrations that are not always easily explained.⁵⁸⁶ However, it is not the purpose here to continue the debate because, more importantly, the narrator uses this trope to sharpen the elements in the plot.

According to Sasson, the number of camels may appear to be normal, but it will enhance to the unambiguity of the test that the servant will shortly impose. Rebekah had to fill her 15- 20 liter jars half a dozen times because a camel may drink up to 100 litres every session. By submitting to the test, Rebekah will have done hundreds of hauls with ten camels to water. Traditional commentators have speculated that this duty may provide information about “the future bride's physical, mental, and social fitness.”⁵⁸⁷ The fact that commentators have failed to interpret such a ‘test’ as exploitative is to be pointed out. Not to see that the woman’s value being determined based on her physical ‘usefulness’ to repetitive tasks of household drudgery as demeaning and not understanding that no human being should be valued merely on their usefulness to another or to the micro-social unit one belongs to is a testament to the lack of a feminist critique of such a demand made by a stranger to a prospective ‘bride’ whom he had effectively planned to spirit away (with bribes of choice gifts to her family) to a foreign land to be wed to a stranger.⁵⁸⁸

Ken Stone argues that “Israel’s narrative emergence is inextricably intertwined with domesticated animals, ‘especially goats and sheep, cattle, donkeys, and camels.’”⁵⁸⁹ Animals, whether adversely or favorably represented, are subjugated to their use to humans and appear through that lens. Stone claims that one of Heather McKay's intriguing moves is that we should treat animal textual subordination with the same suspicion we do female textual subordination, understanding that such representation mirrors, in part, the subjects' actual social subordination. Furthermore, such representation distorts those people' interests and opinions by filtering them

⁵⁸⁵ Albright maintained that the camel's appearance in the Bible stories in Genesis 12: 14-16; 24: 10-67; 31: 17-35; 37: 25 is out of place. He concluded that the camel could not have been domesticated before the twelfth century BCE, and the references to camels in Genesis and Exodus are anachronistic.

⁵⁸⁶ Ken Thompson, *Where Do Camels Belong?: The Story and Science of Invasive Species* (London, UK: Profile Books, 2014), 25.

⁵⁸⁷ Sasson, “The Servant's,” 251.

⁵⁸⁸ Jessica Richard observes these facts considering the text’s vitality in some cultural settings where daughters are “tested” about their abilities in performing household chores. This is a common trope found in Indian cinema.

⁵⁸⁹ Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, California/USA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 28.

through the perspectives of a dominant class—male, Israelite/Judahite, and human—that gave us biblical literature.⁵⁹⁰

4.3.6.3. Choice Gifts

The idea of gifts with regard to marriage invokes the notion of an exchange between two families. Marcel Mauss first proposed a theory on the meaning of primitive societies' highlights and the extent to which 'giving, receiving, and exchanging presents' govern social interactions.⁵⁹¹ The 'gift' and the incest taboo—the double verbalization amounts to the concept of exchange of women in Levi-Strauss's argument. To the hypothesis of primitive reciprocity, Levi-Strauss adds the possibility that marriages constitute the most basic type of gift exchange, with women being the most valued gifts. He contends that the incest taboo should be best perceived as a component that guarantees such exchanges occur among families since the existence of incest taboos is universal. However, the content of such prohibitions cannot be explained as having the aim of preventing genetically close mating. Alternatively, maybe, “the incest taboo imposes exogamy's social aim and alliance upon the biological events of sex and procreation.”⁵⁹²

Gayle Rubin clarifies that there is a significant differentiation to be drawn between the gift and the giver: “it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social lineage.”⁵⁹³ Can a woman then make a gift of herself? Women must have something to give in order to enter into an exchange, and “women can only exchange (or gift) their bodies if they are viewed as owning them in the first place.”⁵⁹⁴ Obviously, this is not the case with patriarchy. The exchange of women, as Rubin cautions, does not always entail that women are objectified. Only when the woman is exchanged within a system that defines male descent is this the case.⁵⁹⁵ In this latter framework,

“Women’s bodies act as conduits linking men and preserving men's monopoly of property; the “gifted” woman does not in any way gain status or property to herself. Therefore, to

⁵⁹⁰ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 107.

⁵⁹¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), ii, 41-42.

⁵⁹² Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes of the 'Political Economy' of Sex,” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 42-43.

⁵⁹³ Rubin, “The Traffic,” 42-43.

⁵⁹⁴ Rubin, “The Traffic,” 42-43.

⁵⁹⁵ Rubin, “The Traffic,” 117.

gift herself within patriarchy is to forfeit her subjectivity - for if women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away.”⁵⁹⁶

Arranged marriages as in the case of this narrative therefore could safely be concluded to be a sheer business transaction between the girl’s father and the future husband’s family.

Similarly, the contemporary custom of *lobolo* among some indigenous peoples of South Africa is referred to a “bride-wealth”⁵⁹⁷ and means ‘the livestock or other property paid in respect of a customary union by the husband or his father, as the case may be to the wife's guardian.’⁵⁹⁸ Janet Hinson Shope observes that “patriarchal power is at the core of the debate over *lobolo*, specifically—whether *lobolo* confers power and control over women to men. Conversations about this practice center on women's household labor, reproductive potential and household decision making.”⁵⁹⁹ Daughters bemoan the fact that they must obey their husbands' regulations since he paid the *lobolo*. She also points out that, while some rural women see *lobolo* as a source of respect and a crucial relationship bond, the practice is frowned upon since it is related to a set of gender norms that restricts women's full and equal involvement in family and society.⁶⁰⁰ ‘When *lobolo* is linked to limiting gender norms that reinforce male privilege and power, it impedes women's quest for equality,’ she claims.⁶⁰¹

The Dalit playwright Gurazada Appa Rao's Telugu social play "Kanyasulkam" (virgin-price, or bride-price) is an excellent example of using art to further reform. Appa Rao's goal in this piece is to end the tradition of treating young daughters as commodities to be traded in.⁶⁰² Parents are enticed by the money and marry their young daughters off to old men who can afford to pay the bride price. The tragedy of child marriage was thus exacerbated by the awareness that the bride-to-be would be doomed to a life of suffering as a widow.⁶⁰³ According to Elizabeth Bumiller, the

⁵⁹⁶ Rubin, "The Traffic," 118.

⁵⁹⁷ Matthews, Z. K., "Marriage Customs among the Barolong," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. 13, no. 1(1940: 1–24)

⁵⁹⁸ JM Hlophe, "The Kwazulu Act on the Code of Zulu Law, 6 of 1981 - A Guide to Intending Spouses and some Comments on the Custom of Lobolo," *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 17, no. 2 (July 1984): 163.

⁵⁹⁹ Janet Hinson Shope, "'Lobola Is Here to Stay': Rural Black Women, and the Contradictory Meanings of Lobolo in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, o.s., no. 28 (2006): 69.

⁶⁰⁰ Shope, "'Lobola Is Here," 70.

⁶⁰¹ Shope, "'Lobola Is Here," 70.

⁶⁰² Ayyar, R.V. Vaidyanatha. "The Magic Kingdom." *Indian Literature* 43, nos. 2 (190) (1999): 156-67.

⁶⁰³ The Hindi Film “Water” by Deepa Mehta captures this aspect through the character Chuyia, an 8-year-old widow in the India of 1938. “She has barely met her husband but is banished by her parents to a decrepit widows' house on the edge of the Ganges.” (Elisabeth Bumiller, "Film Ignites the Wrath of Hindu Fundamentalists," *The New York Times* (New York, NY/USA), May 3, 2006, Movies.)

practice of "bride-price" coexisted with the custom of dowry. She says that the bride price was a small quantity of money provided by the boy's family to the girl's parents as recompense for the loss of their daughter, as well as payment for her labor in the house and fields.⁶⁰⁴ The monetization of young daughters is reinforced by such engrained cultural conventions, implying that the text's ideology is prejudiced in its attitude to gift-giving in the context of marriage.

4.3.6.4. Standing by the Well

This phrase gives a picture of the spatial⁶⁰⁵ setting of this narrative in a foreign land. The servant standing by the well in a foreign land here can be seen as "a bodily activity which is an inevitable component of human interaction and relation" as Shannon Jung understands spatiality. This could also be seen as the precursor to the relationship that the servant hopes to strike on behalf of his master. The fact that a male – even a foreigner at that – could easily enter into and occupy the spaces frequented by women is important to note from a gender analysis stand point.

Robert Alter specifies about the land being a geographical collective also relates to female otherness.⁶⁰⁶ He reasons that "the well at an oasis is a symbol of fertility, and in all likelihood, also a female symbol."⁶⁰⁷ The soil surrounding the well must be fertile—giving life to several microcosmic life-forms below. The poem in Proverbs 5 explicitly uses the well as a metaphor for female sexuality. Alter argues that "the drawing of water from the well is an act that emblematically establishes a bond—male-female, host-guest, benefactor-benefited—between the stranger and the girl, and its apt result is the exciting running to bring the news, the gesture of hospitality, the actual betrothal."⁶⁰⁸

In sketching the scene at the well, the narrator is very detailed— the appearance of the beautiful girl with a water jar on her shoulder, the descent to water, the filling of the jar, the ascent from the well. The reader must visualize this and everything that follows exactly. The well is a large deep hole in the earth with steps leading down to the water with the spring water, and the watering trough that is above. In order to water camels, the girl must, of course, carry up many

⁶⁰⁴ Elisabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey among the Women of India* (New York, USA: Fawcett Columbine, 1991), 48-49.

⁶⁰⁵ The concept of spatiality as defined by Shannon Jung "denotes *lived* space; it is that living space which we as human beings *are* rather than the space which we merely occupy, perceive, or transform. Since spatiality is present in any bodily activity, it is an inevitable component of human interaction and relation." L. Shannon Jung, "Spatiality, Relativism, and Authority," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no.2 (June 1982):216, accessed August 12, 2016, ATLA, Religion Database with ATLA Serials.

⁶⁰⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, new and rev. ed. (New York, NY/USA: Basic Books, 2011), 62.

⁶⁰⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, new and rev. ed. (New York, NY/USA: Basic Books, 2011), 62.

⁶⁰⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 62.

jars of water. However, she volunteered to do it without reflection, although the servant has asked water for him only.⁶⁰⁹ When viewed with the hermeneutics of suspicion, reading between the lines of what the narrator has said, it cannot be ruled out that the girl was intimidated into doing such an arduous task because the stranger was obviously able to invade the space frequented by women, and with his entire caravan of gifts and herdsmen around and such around him, it was probably not possible for Rebekah to refuse as she could have feared retaliation from this obviously rich foreigner and she was not within earshot of her own people to call upon for help.

4.3.6.5. Daughters of the Townspeople—Go Out to Draw Water (11b; 13b)

This phraseology resonates with several rural locales worldwide, where it is always the daughters of the townspeople who traverse the lands by foot in search of water. George Reynolds notes that in those days, the duty of drawing water devolved on the young women of each household and the daughters of the wealthiest and most princely families performed the task as well as those of the poorest. The well was a great rendezvous, where, in the cool of the evening ‘they can meet to enjoy that gossip and chit-chat,⁶¹⁰ without some portion of which their existence would be intolerable-hither they come, dressed in all their ornaments, the display of which forms another of the sources of female enjoyment.’⁶¹¹ I retort that such indifferent assumptions have permeated the mindsets of people who write about the task of water-fetching. It is a failure to consider the gender discriminative aspects of the task deeply, while young men are not part of the task equation.

⁶⁰⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 252.

⁶¹⁰ Responding to the negative characterization of “gossip” by women at the well, Jessica Richard notes that “In the Indian context, the ‘well’ has a significant place. It is a community-building and life-sustaining space. In many villages the well is near the village gate and in some villages the panchayat (governing body made up of village elders) meets near the well to settle matters of conflict and mete out justice for all. In India the wells are also the place for ‘gossip’ and it hardly needs to be said that universally ‘women and gossip’ are linked. But ‘gossip’ here needs to be divorced from its usual negative connotation of ‘useless chatter of women that does nothing other than talk ill of others.’ We need to remember that our Bible is itself a product of oral traditions passed on for many generations that probably at times was termed ‘gossip’ too. So ‘gossip’ here needs to be seen in that positive sense of being a ‘life sustaining dialogue.’ . . . We need to look at the linkages between wells and gossip as a ‘community building space wherein a life sustaining dialogue takes place.’ See Jessica Richard, “Water, Justice and Community Building” in *Waters of Life and Death*, ed. Sam P. Mathew and Chandran Paul Martin (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 215-240

⁶¹¹ George W. M. Reynolds, "Horace Vernet's 'Rebekah at the Well,'" *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, November 16, 1867, 349. Reynolds adds “nor do the young damsels feel the service a degradation” I concur that such assumptions have permeated the mindsets of people who write about the task of water-fetching. It is a failure to consider deeply the gender discriminative aspects of the task, while young boys are not part of the equation.

To a gender critic, the swift reaction is to ask, what about the sons? Why are only daughters going to the well to fetch water? In raising these questions, the notion that there is no gender-neutrality when it comes to their relationship with water becomes evident. There is a fundamental imbalance in how tasks related to water are designated culturally. While the one-time digging of wells is a task performed by men with sharp implements and power, the repetitive task of going back to the well to draw water has always been relegated to the daughters. Thus, the politics and practices connected to water and gender are dialectically ingrained in the social psyche.

4.3.6.6 Servant's Prayer for Success

Gerhard Von Rad says that the servant prayed for a sign. He subjects the girl to a very calculating test in which she has to show “a woman's readiness to help, the kindness of heart, and an understanding of animals.”⁶¹² These characteristics that Von Rad lists here are very much from a patriarchal point of view of ‘femininity’ as a gendered concept with expected stereo-typical behaviors. Later scholars believed that the role of the servant in the narrative should not be under-emphasized. Tuegels suggests that “he is cunning, even towards God” pointing to how the prayer in Gen. 24:27 is distorted in verse 48.⁶¹³ Frymer-Kensky notes that ‘the servant asks for a serendipitous ‘happenstance’ that the right girl would chance to come that very evening.’⁶¹⁴ He gifts the obviously ‘powerful’ characters in the household – like the brother and mother – fully understanding their role in making the decisions about Rebekah's departure with him. He also insensitively insists on a quick closure to the deal and denies the request of Rebekah's family that she tarry ten days more with her family. All of this point to the servant being a cunning, razor sharp negotiator who was ruthless when it came to getting his job done. The next section focuses on the characterization of Rebekah and the physical world of the narrative.

⁶¹² Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 251.

⁶¹³ Tuegels, "A Strong," 96.

⁶¹⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York, NY/USA: Schocken [Imprint], 2004), 8.

4.3.7 Translation of Genesis 24: 15-21

Genesis 24	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 15-21	“Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." ¹⁸ "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.” ⁶¹⁵

4.3.8. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

4.3.8.1 Rebekah – The Water Drawing Daughter

The servant’s prayer is answered immediately and, in a way, far more providential than he ever imagined. The servant prays to ask God to send a woman ‘with a jar’ and her water to be a sign, so he will know the right woman approaches. He is interrupted in his ‘speaking’ to God and sees Rebekah, the proper cousin, ‘come out,’ and she is carrying a jar, literally the answer to the prayer. He runs toward her, and she runs back and forth to the well. David Fass describes her role as ‘one who unbinds others’ which may even be referred to in her name. One possible etymology for *Rivkah* (the Hebrew form of Rebekah) derives from a root that means ‘to loop a cord over the head of a lamb or a kid.’⁶¹⁶ Fass suggests that “her life's work was to remove the ties that bound from around her own neck and from the necks of those related to her so that one of them, at least Jacob, might become free enough to found a people.”⁶¹⁷

In these verses, Rebekah is introduced into the narrative space. A typical patriarchal formula of how daughters are always defined in relation to their male associations—fathers, husbands and sons.⁶¹⁸ Rebekah, in addition, is connected to Milcah, her grandmother. Anya Topolski suggests

⁶¹⁵ Genesis 24: 15- 21 New Revised Standard Version.

⁶¹⁶ Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York, NY/USA: Schocken Books, 1995), 155.

⁶¹⁷ David E. Fass, "Unbinding Mother Rebekah," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 41, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 4.

⁶¹⁸ In *Manusmriti* 9.3 Manu declared that: “day and night woman must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to her father, in her youth to her husband, and in old age to her sons” cited by Serinity Young, *An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and about Women* (New York, NY/USA: Crossroad, 1999), 266-277.

that it indicates that Rebekah is no ordinary woman; “she has an important name—which means ‘queen’ in the story of the children of Israel.”⁶¹⁹

4.3.8.1.1 Hebrew *Bath*-Etymology

Rebekah enters the narrative space as the daughter of Bethuel⁶²⁰ with a water jar on her shoulder. As a young girl, she is un-betrothed. A comprehensive analysis of the biblical texts explains that a daughter’s primary function is her economic value, especially in her sexual and reproductive capacity. In this narrative, she is approached to be obtained for sexual use and for bearing children and general labour. In theory, and sadly here, the ‘daughter is valued in terms of her economic value and her sexuality.’⁶²¹ Also, daughters had several household tasks to perform and one among them was to draw water from the well. Remarkably the standard liquid measure in the Bible is the *bath*, which was approximately 24 litres. The name “*bath*” is similar to the Hebrew word for “daughter” and perhaps represents the capacity of the water jars daughters used when carrying water from wells. On the other hand, Israeli archaeologist Oded Lipschits et al. determine that “*bath* was not a fixed measurement for liquid volume but rather the name of a specific jar—the Judahite storage jar,”⁶²² well-known in archaeological research from the ‘late eighth to the early sixth century BCE.’⁶²³

Ironically, even etymologically, the inseparable link between both the *baths* and the daughter, and the water jar is intrinsically connected, and all are connected to the water well. During the making of the jar, the potter uses water as a lubricant to control the clay. Water should be used sparingly as it also weakens the clay as it gets thinner. However, the strenuous task and the distance she walks, and the weight of the water she carries on her shoulder are intricately unaccounted for both in the text and in the biblical interpretations that followed.

⁶¹⁹ Anya Topolski, "Reconsidering Rebekah: Struggles with Faith and Jewish Tradition," *Bridges* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 2010): 15.

⁶²⁰ Rebekah is also the grand-daughter of Nahor and Milcah, sister of Laban.

⁶²¹ Carolyn Pressler, "Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free: Views of Women in the Slave Laws of Exodus 21.2-11," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, by Victor Harold Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), 147.

⁶²² Oded Lipschits et al., "The Enigma of the Biblical Bath and the System of Liquid Volume Measurement during the First Temple Period," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 (January 1, 2012): 458

⁶²³ Oded Lipschits et al., "The Enigma of the Biblical Bath and the System of Liquid Volume Measurement during the First Temple Period," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 (January 1, 2012): 458. The *bath* is comparable to two other vessels that hold liquid, and which were used in daily life and the economy: the *nēbel* and the *kaḏ*.

4.3.8.2 Beauty, Virginity

The Wycliffe Bible translates this verse as

“a damsel full comely/full shapely, and fairest virgin, and unknown of man (a very shapely young woman, and the most beautiful virgin, yea, unknown by man”⁶²⁴

These translations reveal that beauty was always a desirable trait in a wife, and in the Bible, “the beauty of women is a mark of divine favour, as is the beauty of men.”⁶²⁵ She is also introduced as fair, arguably describing her beauty, and she is a virgin, which implies that the narrator is disclosing her sexual integrity plus the fact that no man had sexual relations with her.

The mention of fair, a reference to her skin colour, invokes colorism—a form of prejudice against those who are dark-skinned. Sociologist Robert Reese defines colorism as:

“the process by which people of color with phenotypic features more closely associated with whiteness—such as lighter eyes, thinner noses and lips, straighter hair, and particularly lighter skin tones—are offered social and economic advantages relative to their counterparts with more “ethnic” phenotypic features—darker eyes, thicker noses and lips, curly hair, and darker skin.”⁶²⁶

In this sense, the idea that prospective brides are to have fair skin conveys very negative connotations to readers. The perpetration of these discriminative values is to be critiqued.

Sherry Ortner points out that ‘systematic efforts aim to enhance a girl’s beauty and sexual desirability.’⁶²⁷ In most cases, the beautification practices are combined with the girl’s restraint and/or seclusion, thus showing rather conclusively the link between retaining her as a virgin and treating her as sexual “bait.”⁶²⁸ Such ludicrous practices are common in several cultures. Ortner gives another example from the Marquesas Islands, where ‘adolescent girls are kept at home for skin bleaching and for vaginal treatments aimed at beautifying their sexual organs.’⁶²⁹

⁶²⁴ Genesis 24 WYC - Bible Gateway; The World English Bible translates: “The young lady was very beautiful to look at, a virgin. No man had known her.”

⁶²⁵ Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York, NY/USA: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 140

⁶²⁶ Sociologist Robert L. Reese defines colorism thus in Reece, Robert. (2020). “The Gender of Colorism: Understanding the Intersection of Skin Tone and Gender Inequality.” *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy*. 10.1007/s41996-020-00054-1.

⁶²⁷ Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston, Mass./USA: Beacon Press, 2010), 80, 105.

⁶²⁸ Ortner, *Making Gender*, 80. In Tonga special care is taken of the complexion of the girl of rank. Her skin is lightened through the use of various preparations and she is kept sitting in the shade as much as possible.

⁶²⁹ Ortner, *Making Gender*, 81.

The narrator mentions that she is *betulah* — a girl of marriageable age. She is also a virgin. Frymer-Kensky notes that except if virgins wore recognizing garments, how might the servant know that detail? Besides, regardless of whether virgins wore distinguishing garments, so again, how might the servant know? She recommends that the narrator knows it all and unmistakably, to the narrator, that she is a virgin — matters. Frymer-Kensky states that “chastity is of significant worth in the Bible—the chastity of young girls does not just make them ‘pure,’ it likewise shows that they are very well disciplined and devoted to their family’s control.”⁶³⁰ She additionally sees that the shame for women’s defilement is pinned on the male individuals of the tribes to imply that they do not have the characteristics of being ‘real men’ since they could not shield their daughters from being assaulted. She says: “To protect their honour, men of a family may join together to safeguard their women.”⁶³¹ Susan Niditch interprets the sacrifice vowed by Jephthah as a model for and a symbolic mirror of a woman’s life passages. She argues, “it suggests that every young woman about to make the transition from her father to her husband, from virginity to a life of conjugal relations, from childhood to motherhood is on some level to confront ‘Beauty’s Beast.’”⁶³² She is to be sacrificed, leaving the safety of home and patrilineal relations to go into someone else’s patrilineage.⁶³³

The concept of virginity and the apparent male obsession for their wives to be virgins is best explained by American anthropologist Carol Delaney who has done extensive research in the context of a rural Turkish village. Though she researches on an Islamic group, she convincingly relates her arguments to the entire Judeo-Christian tradition and even globally. She has demonstrated the concept of seed and soil in gendered terms. She structures the society using the seed and soil metaphor. While the political and leadership structures function to enclose and protect, they are symbolically male.⁶³⁴ The root of this structure being the seed and soil theory of procreation. She explains that men supply the seed in their theory of procreation, which encapsulates the essential child. The woman provides only the nurturing context for the fetus.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York, NY/USA: Schocken Books, 2004), 9.

⁶³¹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, by Victor Harold Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), 85.

⁶³² Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115-116.

⁶³³ Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115-116.

⁶³⁴ Delaney, *The Seed*, 198-200.

⁶³⁵ Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 2001), 32.

The seed leaves an indelible imprint inside the woman. The primary issue is a woman's ability to guarantee a particular man's seed. It is this role that makes her valuable. Delaney points out that “the value of a woman depends on her virginity before the marriage and her fidelity after marriage.”⁶³⁶ Wenham argues that in Genesis 24: 16, a girl described as a virgin is further described as one whom ‘no man had known,’ or ‘who had not known men by lying with them.’ Wenham asserts that “the relative clauses would be redundant if the term virgin already denoted that the girl was a virgin.”⁶³⁷ Therefore, that the term can be read as “a girl of marriageable age,” has been widely accepted.

Mieke Bal critiques Sigmund Freud’s thesis that “his failure to account for virginity as a phenomenon displays the concept’s rootedness in the construction of femininity by male focalization.”⁶³⁸ She explains that “the daughter in a patriarchal setting exists between positions of transitions—from daughter, wife, nubile woman—she belongs to nobody.”⁶³⁹ She argues that the solution to the problem this state of transition produces for the daughter's owners is the act of the gift, and hence ‘virgins are to be given away in order to bring their disturbingly ambiguous state to an end as quickly as possible.’⁶⁴⁰ The notion indicates the impossibility of the father or brothers to protect their daughters and sisters from men to engage with them sexually.

On the contrary, from a gender perspective, there is no such precondition for men about virginity. It is a gendered patriarchal expectation that is flawed and discriminates against daughters. This narrative’s ideology of virginity is so dangerous and irrelevant in the present time because it demeans a daughter’s integrity based on sexuality. As agents of socialization, culture and religion are to cease from reinforcing these expectations on daughters. Therefore, I would point out that virginity as a concept is redundant because it lacks an equivalent bearing on the sons.

The Midrash explains the seeming redundancy of the two terms, “a virgin, no man had known her,” as referring to the Canaanite women's licentiousness. They refrained from vaginal intercourse to preserve their hymens and hence, their bride-price but allowed themselves almost

⁶³⁶ Delaney, *The Seed*, 40.

⁶³⁷ Gordon Wenham, "Betûlâh 'A Girl of Marriageable Age,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (July 1972): 326-348.

⁶³⁸ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, Ill./USA: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 42.

⁶³⁹ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, Ill./USA: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 42.

⁶⁴⁰ Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 42.

every other variety of sexual activity. Midrash contends that “Rebekah allowed no sexual advances of any kind until her marriage to Isaac.”⁶⁴¹

The portrayal of Rebekah is mainly accomplished through the description of her actions. She is a ‘doer,’ one who acts as opposed to ‘talks.’ Rhetorically, this quality is conveyed by many action-verbs utilized, especially the action words ‘to hurry’ (*ino*) and ‘to run’ (*γη*) and ‘descending,’ ‘drawing water,’ ‘giving to drink.’ The numerous activities signify an intent to represent Rebekah as an active person, “the prescription of the sign by the servant in Gen. 24: 14 underlines this thought, functioning as a sort of character test.”⁶⁴²

This was also perhaps to ensure that Rebekah has not transgressed any communal boundaries set by the townsmen. The underlying idea not mentioned in this text is the strong advocacy of sex only within the boundaries of contractual marriage between the bride's father and the groom. Like how the well water is uncontaminated and pure and therefore consumable by the servant, the camels and the other men, the daughter has to be ‘pure’ to ensure that another man has not had any sexual relations with her. Thereby Isaac is not deprived of his exclusive right to Rebekah's sexual and reproductive services. The narrator informs the reader that the daughter's background check is conducted when introduced in the narrative. This is a phenomenon found in most Indian families too. The prospective bride is screened and scrutinized to justify the efficacy of her suitability for the groom. This equalization thus confirms the water gender dialectic that is concealed within the text.

4.3.8.3 Drink My Lord

Rebekah’s response, ‘Drink, my lord’ are the first words from her mouth, an offering of water to the thirsty servant. Whereas the servant wanted to ask her just to ‘offer her jar’ that he may drink, he actually proceeded to ask her only “let me sip a little water from your jar,” “she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink.” Rebekah is quick to respond to the stranger’s request, and answers with politeness and gentility, and calls the stranger “my lord.” Rebekah is depicted as one who satiated not only the servant but also all the thirsty camels. Meir Sternberg calls attention to the fact that Rebekah is the water-drawing woman who outperforms even the most hopeful

⁶⁴¹ Fass, "Unbinding Mother," 4.

⁶⁴² Lieve M. Tugels, "A Strong Woman Who Can Find?: A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, With Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 63 (1994): 97.

human expectations.⁶⁴³ Rebekah's hospitable quality towards the stranger's thirst is a demonstration of water-sharing that is available within her bounds.

4.3.8.4 Rebekah Emptying and Filling her Jar

Robert Alter emphasizes that Rebekah is presented as “a continuous whirl of purposeful activity.”⁶⁴⁴ So she quickly emptied her jar—‘*ara*’ means “be naked, bare,” “lay bare.” The way to lay bare a water jug is by removing its contents.⁶⁴⁵ In four short verses,⁶⁴⁶ “she is the subject of eleven verbs and of one speech; going down to the well, drawing water, filling the pitcher, pouring, giving drink, rushing and hurrying. She is bustling with the activity of drawing water from the well and fetching the water to the troughs.”⁶⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that this is the only narrative in which the act of drawing water from the well is recorded—and it is Rebekah who is the first water-fetcher mentioned in the bible.

Rebekah is referred to as the “mother of the water fetchers” by Mercia B. Bachmann.⁶⁴⁸ She is the first daughter of whom the verb “fetching water” is used and the one who takes on most of its occurrences.⁶⁴⁹ For her beauty and unimpeachable virginity, she is quickly identified with unprecedented explicitness as the ideal bride.⁶⁵⁰

Karolein Vermeulen interprets the words “she went down to the *ayin*, and she filled her jar, and she went up” and argues that that from one perspective, the *ayin* (אֵין) appears after a description related to the ‘eye’ meaning she is a beautiful girl. On the other, the word precedes a fragment that draws on the ‘well’ meaning i.e., “filling the water jar, going up and going down, pointing to Rebekah's industry as well as to the often lower geographical location of wells.”⁶⁵¹ Vermeulen reads these lines using the Janus parallelism evoking the eye/well relation—where the Hebrew word אֵין can be interpreted as ‘well’ and as well as ‘eye.’⁶⁵² She hence reads— “and she went

⁶⁴³ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind./USA: Indiana University Press, 1999), 138.

⁶⁴⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 53-54

⁶⁴⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI/USA: Eerdmans, 1990), 143.

⁶⁴⁶ Genesis 24: 16, 18-20

⁶⁴⁷ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 64

⁶⁴⁸ Mercia B. Bachmann, *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 170.

⁶⁴⁹ Bachmann, *Women at Work*, 170.

⁶⁵⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 53-54

⁶⁵¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 165; Wenham, *Genesis*, 144; Skinner, *Genesis*, 344; B. Waltke and C. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 329. As cited by Vermeulen, “To See or Not to See,” 8.

⁶⁵² Janus parallelism, initially discovered by C. Gordon (1978), typically appears in poetic texts.

down to the well” as ‘her eye went down,’ ‘as a sign of politeness and shyness.’”⁶⁵³ Similarly, in Gen.24:64, “Rebekah dismounts from the camel on seeing Isaac, as a showing of respect.”⁶⁵⁴

The ‘test’ scene viewed through a gender lens seems somewhat jarring because the camel-herdsmen just stood there as spectators gazing at the single woman bailing out several jars of water from the well to water their animals thus quenching the thirst of the camels and the servant, and later perhaps also the servants. It is important to note that this is the only narrative detailing Rebekah, who is actively involved in fetching water for the camels and servants.

The men appear later in Gen. 24: 32-33, washing their feet and sitting down to eat. These acts/ inactions by men further corroborate the idea that the water fetching task is to be performed by women—a gendering of labor. This scene contrasts with Jacob and Moses’s performance, who manifest their manly ‘strength’ when they help the women who come to fetch water—Jacob removes the large stone, and Moses fights off the other male shepherds who were preventing the girls from drawing water from the well. These instances of Jacob and Moses illustrate the ambiguity of gender performance, which is stereotypically attributed to masculinity and femininity.

4.3.8.5. Drawing Water for the Camels

Immanuel Levinas insightfully argues that Rebekah not only offers the messenger water, but she also offers water to the camels of the caravan when he identifies the importance of her response to the camels. He writes, “she waters the camels who cannot ask to drink.”⁶⁵⁵ Old Testament law specifically required mercy towards animals. Citing Exod. 23:4-5, Ellen White states that “the merciful provisions of the law extended even to the lower animals, which cannot express their want and suffering in words.”⁶⁵⁶ Levinas goes on to say that just as God created the water that rose for the world, Rebekah lifts the water not merely for a human face but for a non-human face as well. He points out that: “According to the rabbis who wrote a commentary on this passage, as soon as Rebekah came out to meet him, the waters in the deep rose above their natural level.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵³ Korolein Vermeulen, "To See or Not to See: The Polysemy of the Word רָא in the Isaac Narratives (Gen. 17–35)," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9, no. 22 (2009): 3-4.

⁶⁵⁴ B. Waltke and C. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 332.

⁶⁵⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington, IN/USA: Indiana University Press, 1994), 134.

⁶⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 500 (Ellen G. White is the co-founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church along with her husband James White)

⁶⁵⁷ Emmanuel Lévinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington, IN/USA: Indiana University Press, 1994), 134.

From an ecocritical perspective, it can be argued that the camels are equally pivotal to the narrative in their role as transport vehicles of the caravans. Their characterization in the narrative is closely connected to other characters, wherein water becomes the connecting element that synchronizes the story. Water is equally required for them as it is for humans. Bernard White states that ‘the animals not only need fuel, but they gain pleasure from eating, and that pleasure is not to be denied the beast that labors for our benefit.’⁶⁵⁸ Peter Joshua Atkins points out that the “ancient Israelites did make significant distinctions between parts of nature, and animals are not merely grouped with the inanimate world; instead, there exists a greater degree of commonality between animals and humanity.”⁶⁵⁹ Since both are made of flesh, ‘in substance they share a common place under this rubric.’⁶⁶⁰

The application of the ecocritical method has elicited new insights into the physical world of this familiar text. One core principle of the strong ethical aspect in ecocriticism involves political activism. The way humans treat and make assumptions about animal characteristics should change to one of appreciation for their role and presence in the narrative. For instance, the ‘People for Ethical Treatment of Animals’ have called for people to stop using animal names as insults. Speciesist language is not just harmful, but it is also inaccurate. Anti-animal insults degrade animals by applying negative human characteristics to certain species. Perpetuating the idea that animals are tricky, filthy, or heartless, desensitizes the people and normalizes violence against different animals.⁶⁶¹

More importantly, water’s role in quenching the thirst is significant for the movement and progress of the narrative. Rebecca’s kind act of water-giving transposes the narrative from its traditional ‘betrothal type scene’ where only human transactions are interpreted, into an all-inclusive story where each physical element in that geographical location has meanings concealed and roles to play. Without Rebekah and her water at the well, the narrative functions within limited means. Aviva Zornberg emphasizes that “without kindness, creation is stunted. There is no

⁶⁵⁸ Bernard White, "The Sabbath: A Surprising Boon for Animals," *Academia Letters* Article 175 (January 2021): 2. According to Deuteronomy 5: 14 It is not enough that we ourselves enjoy the blessings of rest and release: we are to extend that privilege to all those who are under our care or control.

⁶⁵⁹ Peter Joshua Atkins, "Praise by Animals in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 3 (2020): 502.

⁶⁶⁰ N. P. Bratsiotis, 'שָׂרָב', TDOT 2:327., Cited in Atkins, "Praise by Animals," 503.

⁶⁶¹ Charlie Stone, "Comparing people to animals is offensive to animals – the latest load of bull to come down from PETA's high horse," *rt.com*, last modified January 29, 2021, accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/514077-peta-speciesist-language-offensive-animals/>.

creation without it. In Hebrew, kindness is *hesed* meaning it “is gratuitous, free of necessity.”⁶⁶² Also, Eva Keuls relates that “in several myths, women carrying water or pouring it into the ground are transformed into fertility and blessing figures, canonized, as it were, through their patient toil.”⁶⁶³ We understand that at this juncture, both water and the women are required by the servant. He was ordered to fetch a wife for Isaac, a digger of wells. Rebekah, as the water-fetcher, demonstrates her suitability in her water-centered actions. As a future couple, both Isaac and Rebekah are related to water – Isaac, as a well digger, and Rebekah, as the water-fetcher. Water is needed to quench his/camel's thirst, and Rebekah is needed as a bride for Isaac to produce heirs for the family—a distinct water-gender dialectic is displayed in this paradigm.

4.3.8.5.1. Invisibility and Under-calculation of Water-drawing

Daughters drawing water from the well is a task that is not of much concern to readers and exegetes of biblical texts. There has been neither a tabulation of their work hours nor has it been accounted for in readers' frame of mind. Since women's tasks such as these are ignored, sociologists have begun to study the phenomenon. In her analysis, Claudia Radel infers that researchers started acknowledging the roles women play in agricultural production after Ester Boserup's seminal work,⁶⁶⁴ where she highlights the significant under-calculation of women's labor in agricultural production.⁶⁶⁵ This work prompted various researchers' endeavors to 'make women's contribution to agricultural production more visible.'⁶⁶⁶ I draw my motivation from Boserup's notion of the 'invisibility' of women's water-fetching task in biblical narratives. The intersection of water-fetching tasks and gender becomes a critical field to explore in the water crisis' contemporary global contexts and water mismanagement. From an ecocritical standpoint, the invisibility of women's water-related tasks are retrieved and discussed. Readers can then reflect on the under-calculation and invisibility of such labors, hitherto shrouded by a sheer focus on male prerogatives within these water-fetching narratives.

⁶⁶² Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York, NY/USA: Image Books, 1996), 141.

⁶⁶³ Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), 233.

⁶⁶⁴ Ester Boserup, Su Fei Tan, and Camilla Toulmin, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (Hoboken, NJ/USA: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

⁶⁶⁵ Claudia Radel, "Becoming Farmers," *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 46, No. 2, 2011, 47.

⁶⁶⁶ Radel, "Becoming Farmers," 310

When tasks are divided along the lines of productive and reproductive, there is already a gendering of labor. These labors do not translate into income control and decision-making, which improves status. Men monopolize and ascribe reproductive and household tasks to women. Often this frustrates women who perform multiple tasks simultaneously, and sometimes, single tasks that serve multiple purposes. Carolyn Sachs argues that “the difficulty of dividing and categorizing labor tasks as either reproductive or productive contributed historically to the under-calculation of women’s productive labor contributions in agriculture.”⁶⁶⁷ Also, women’s tasks are represented as no more than supplementing men’s work.

Vandana Shiva reasons that “while men in power redefine religion in fundamentalist terms and in support of market fundamentalism, women in diverse cultures mobilize their faith and spirituality, their power to protect the earth and life on earth. Despite being subjected to the double burden of religious and capitalist patriarchy, women are emerging as leaders and guardians of life-centered cultures, economies, and policies.”⁶⁶⁸ Shiva further notes that women are leading movements to defend water.⁶⁶⁹ Movements to defend biodiversity are being led by women.⁶⁷⁰ Women are emerging as protectors of life and the future as they overcome their marginalization. Shiva notes that “women farmers have kept and bred seeds over millennia. Basmati is just one among the 10,000 varieties of rice evolved by Indian farmers. Diversity and perennality are principles that form the foundation of India’s culture of the seed.”⁶⁷¹ Women’s exclusion and dispensability are the result of patriarchal systems organized through religion, economic frameworks, or power structures. Gender equity, Shiva believes, necessitates perceiving women for who they are — as producers and creators, cultural stewards, political decision-makers, and spiritual beings.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ Carolyn E. Sachs, *Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, and Environment* (New York, USA: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 125-126.

⁶⁶⁸ Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2005), 139.

⁶⁶⁹ Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 139.

⁶⁷⁰ Water activists such as Wangari Maathai, through her Green Belt Movement to promote environmental conservation, and Medha Patkar continue the fight against the construction of dams over the river Narmada. Greta Thunberg is a young Swedish environmental activist. Autumn Peltier, is another 13-year-old water advocate from the Anishinaabe tribe of Canada.

⁶⁷¹ Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 139.

⁶⁷² Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 140.

4.3.8.6. Male Gaze: The Man Gazed at her in Silence

The meaning of ‘gaze’ is determined from the context, and could mean ‘observe well, examine closely.’⁶⁷³ The ‘male gaze’ “invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggests a sexualized way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women.”⁶⁷⁴ In the male gaze, “a woman is visually positioned as an ‘object’ of heterosexual male desire. Her feelings, thoughts, and own sexual drives are less important than her being ‘framed’ by male desire.”⁶⁷⁵ In this situation, “the servant seems to gaze” at Rebekah perhaps the way Isaac would have. Mulvey also notes that “male voyeurism tends to sexualize women for a male viewer.”⁶⁷⁶ The woman is ‘spectacle,’ and man is ‘the bearer of the look.’⁶⁷⁷ The gaze is built upon culturally defined notions of sexual differences.

Laura Mulvey identified three aspects of the male gaze, which I will adapt for explaining the servant's gaze. The first is the gaze of the recorder of the scene, the second the gaze of the servant within the narrative, and the third is the spectator—through a reader-response analysis. Gaze here is differentiated according to gender. Ann Kaplan argues that “men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action, and possession, which lacks the female gaze.”⁶⁷⁸ Women are able to receive and return gazes, but they are unable to act on them.⁶⁷⁹ It is evident that ‘the voyeuristic power of the male gaze in this narrative not only constitutes women as sites of shame and simultaneously creates them as sex objects for the male gaze, thereby ensuring their continued subjugation.’⁶⁸⁰ Therefore, according to the male gaze theory, I observe that the servant intends to obtain Rebekah so that Isaac can possess her as a wife through marriage. His silent gaze, which is on behalf of Isaac, thus decides his mission's success.

The point about the gaze has serious implications for the so-called arranged marriage in India where the bridegroom and his family visit the bride’s family to literally ‘see’ the bride— basically have a good gaze at her—to test her skills as a homemaker.

⁶⁷³ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2 vols.; (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 1:900

⁶⁷⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 14-30.

⁶⁷⁵ Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 14-30.

⁶⁷⁶ Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 19.

⁶⁷⁷ Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 19.

⁶⁷⁸ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), 31.

⁶⁷⁹ Kaplan, *Women and Film*, 31.

⁶⁸⁰ Aliza Atik, "Calibrating the Female Body: Shame, Disgust, and the Recuperative Gaze in Amos Gitai's *Kadosh*," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 27, 33.

4.4. Daughter Rachel—Shepherd for her Father’s Sheep

4.4.1. Translation of 29:1-3

Genesis 29	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 1-3	“Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well’s mouth was large, ³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.” ⁶⁸¹

4.4.2. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis 29: 1-3

The sociological context of Jacob’s journey from Beersheba to the east’s land is an important one, considering that he is essentially escaping from his brother, Esau’s conspiracy to kill him. After blessing Jacob, his father Isaac charged him:

“You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.”⁶⁸²

This duty is precisely ‘because he will inherit the land of Canaan, and Jacob should not marry a Canaanite woman.’⁶⁸³ Commentators of Genesis have frequently perceived Esau’s marriage as displaying his unacceptability to become Isaac’s heir or acquire Abraham’s blessing. As indicated by Gordon Wenham, commentators blame Esau for overlooking his family custom of not marrying the daughters of the Canaanites.⁶⁸⁴ With this occurrence of intermarriage, Rebecca decides to trick both Isaac and Esau. Esau, according to Nahum Sarna, commits a triple offence: breaking social convention by contracting the marriage himself rather than delegating it to his family; relinquishing the practice of endogamy by marrying outside his kinship group; and betraying his clan’s honor by intermarrying with the native women.⁶⁸⁵ John Skinner,⁶⁸⁶ Victor P. Hamilton,⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸¹ Genesis 29: 1- 3 New Revised Standard Version.

⁶⁸² Gen. 28: 1-2 (NRSV)

⁶⁸³ Jan P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 112. fn.38. (Genesis 28: 1-4)

⁶⁸⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Nashville, TN/USA: T. Nelson, 2000), 405.

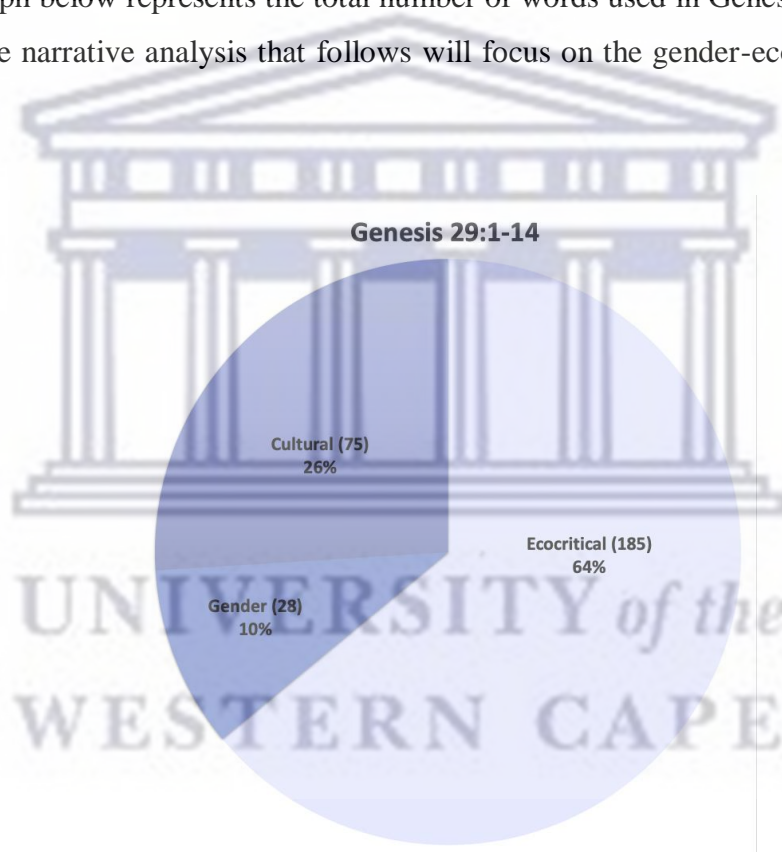
⁶⁸⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA/USA: Jewish Publ. Soc., 1989), 189.

⁶⁸⁶ Skinner argues that: by transgressing this unwritten law (the inadmissibility of intermarriage with the inhabitants of Canaan) Esau loses his title to the 'blessing of Abraham,' which is hence shifted to Jacob. (Skinner, *Genesis*, 374)

⁶⁸⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI/USA: Eerdmans, 1990), 235.

and David W. Cotter⁶⁸⁸ have observed that Esau's marriage to two Hittite women and a daughter of Ishmael as a sign of his unsuitability to be Isaac's heir or to be chosen by God. Scholars who have examined marriage patterns in the book of Genesis, like Seth D. Kunin, Devora Steinmetz, and Naomi Steinberg, who “have allocated a negative worth to Esau's marriage depended on their theoretical models of marriage patterns in Genesis.”⁶⁸⁹ Bert Dicou remarks, “by selling his birthright to his brother and his marriages with Canaanite women, Esau reveals his disinterest in being the chosen one. As the offspring of God's promise, he is prohibited from marrying women from the Promised Land, as Esau does.”⁶⁹⁰

The pie graph below represents the total number of words used in Genesis 29: 1-14, which is 288 words. The narrative analysis that follows will focus on the gender-ecocritical aspects of the narrative.



⁶⁸⁸ Cotter, *Genesis*, 199

⁶⁸⁹ Il-Seung Chung, “Liberating Esau: A Corrective Reading of the Esau-Jacob Narrative in Genesis 25-36” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2008), 96. Il-Seung Chung methodically points out the patterns in his study. He cites the following scholars in his analysis to read Esau’s story in a positive light: Seth D. Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (JSOT Sup 185; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 115; Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 100-1; Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 96.

⁶⁹⁰ Bert Dicou, Edom, *Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), 122.

It is fascinating to learn that verse 1 of the English translation of the Torah is read “Jacob resumed his journey and came to the land of the Easterners.” In the Torah Commentary, Gunther Plaut explains that the ‘resumed his journey’ is literally, ‘lifted up his feet.’⁶⁹¹ ‘Lifting his feet gives the impression of optimism, briskness or agility.’⁶⁹²

4.4.3. Jacob’s Journey to the Land of the East

The reason for Jacob's journey to Mesopotamia is Esau's threat to murder him. Esau needs retribution for his stolen blessing, and Rebekah advises Jacob to remain with Laban for the time being (Gen. 27: 41-45). Another explanation is that Rebekah reveals to her husband that she does not need Jacob to marry the ‘Hittite’⁶⁹³ women (Gen 27: 46). The text is reticent about the method of transport Jacob used. George Mackie points out an interesting feature in his comments about a traveler:

When a traveller sets out on his journey, he must "pay all debts, provide for dependents, give parting gifts, return all articles under trust, take the money and good temper for the journey, then bid farewell to all, and be merciful to the animal he rides upon."⁶⁹⁴

The mention of the animal as a transport vehicle indicates their importance in human journeys from one place to another—spatial distance. This detail is of importance to an ecocritical reader. It should be pointed out that “groups of merchants, pilgrims, or travelers joined together for protection as they travelled with their pack animals—either donkeys or camels—depending on the terrain.”⁶⁹⁵ Paul Simons informs that “the wild Bactrian camels of the Gobi desert are reputed to find water up to 50 miles away.”⁶⁹⁶

Another detail is the mention of land. The land is not to be viewed as a simple belonging but instead as having characteristic worth. Aldo Leopold proposed what he calls “land ethic” to value

⁶⁹¹ Wolf Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: Genesis, A Modern Commentary*, 1st printing edition ed. (New York, NY/USA: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 287.

⁶⁹² Plaut, *The Torah: Genesis*, 287.

⁶⁹³ In Genesis Hittites are regarded as Canaanite, Gen 36:1

⁶⁹⁴ George M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, authorized ed. (Old Tappan, N.J./USA: Power Books, 1984), 146.

⁶⁹⁵ Chelsey Parrott-Sheffer, "Caravan: Desert Transport," in *Britannica*, ed. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008), n.a., accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/caravan-desert-transport>.

⁶⁹⁶ Paul Simons, "Camels Act on a Hump," *The Gaurdian* (New York, NY/USA), March 6, 2003, Science, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2003/mar/06/science.research>.

soil, water and other natural features for their own intrinsic worth. He additionally remarks disparagingly about what he alludes to as the “Abrahamic concept of land” as a mere possession. He contends that “a land ethic expands the meaning of ‘community’ to not only incorporate people, but the entirety of parts of the earth, also: soils, waters, plants, and animals, or what Leopold called ‘the land.’”⁶⁹⁷ Using an ecocritical lens to analyze texts enables the reader to draw meanings that help us to think in terms of values that impart the crucial link between land, animals, plants, and humans. All are connected to each other in a dialectical manner.

4.4.3.1. Well in the Field

It can be observed that the scenes ‘in this narrative take place by a well in the fields, unlike the earlier story that occurs by a well in a town.’⁶⁹⁸ The narrator provides a vivid description of the natural scenario as Jacob nears the land of the east. The natural feature of the cultivable field, the three flocks of sheep or goats, and the well covered with a large stone, and the water in the well represent an ecological tapestry surrounding the water. Water draws all the other beings towards itself. The shepherds have to wait until the rest of the shepherds and sheep arrive before the water is made available to its recipients. The well perhaps was the chief reservoir from which little canals distributed the water; it was carefully covered with a large stone. French theologian Jean Gaume observes that the manners of the inhabitants of Haran had not changed during the hundred years since Rebekah left it to become Isaac's wife. The young maidens of the most respectable families in the place still guided the flocks. The condition of a shepherd or shepherdess presenting nothing but innocence to these people was regarded as exceedingly honorable.⁶⁹⁹

4.4.3.2. Field

The field can be defined as an enclosed space of ground devoted to tillage. The Hebrew term *Sadheh* occurs a significant number of times, and in almost all cases, it is translated ‘field’ and expresses, adequately, either a large or a small quantity of ground intended for tillage or pasture.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁷ Aldo Leopold, Charles Walsh Schwartz, and Barbara Kingsolver, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, new edition ed. (New York, NY/USA: Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press, 2020), 192.

⁶⁹⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 65.

⁶⁹⁹ Jean Gaume, *The Catechism Of Perseverance, or, An Historical, Dogmatical, Moral, Liturgical, Apologetical, Philosophical, and Social Exposition of Religion from the Beginning of the World down to our Own Days*, Internet Archive ed. (Dublin, Ireland: M. H. Gill & Son, 1882), 1:377.

⁷⁰⁰ *The Cassell's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (London, UK: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1887), 427.

For the narrator and the reader, the green field appears as a place of idyllic serenity. On the other hand, for an environmental scientist such as Daniel Hillel, this same scene represents not rest but unceasing turmoil as explained below:

“Unceasing turmoil, a seething foundry in which matter and energy are in constant flux. Radiant energy from the sun streams into the field, and as it cascades through the atmosphere-plant-soil continuum, it generates a complex sequence of processes: Heat is exchanged, water percolates through the intricate passages of the soil; plant roots suck up some of that water and transmit it through the stems to the leaves, which transpire it back to the atmosphere. The leaves also absorb carbon dioxide and synthesize it with soil-derived water to form the primary compounds of life. Oxygen emitted by those leaves makes the air breathable for animals, which consume and in turn fertilize the plants. Organisms in the soil recycle the residues of both plants and animals, thus releasing nutrients for the renewal of life. The crucible of this foundry is the soil, a rich mix of mineral particles, organic matter gases, and nutrients which, when infused with vital water, constitutes a fertile substrate for the initiation and maintenance of life.”⁷⁰¹

These essential particulars are of the physical world that is constantly activated by the atmospheric elements. As an ecocritical reader, the narrator’s detail about the well situated in a field matters, because of the intrinsic connectedness of both visible and invisible life-forms underneath the field that is unaccounted for. It must be highlighted here that they have not only been overlooked by traditional interpreters but can be restored when read with the aid of an ecocritical lens. The strategic role of the field’s unquestionable link with the rest of the characters in the narrative reveals the critical identity of its active part in the ecosystem.

Historically, some metaphors have dangerously distorted meanings for writers. Robert Mc Elvaine points out that “the metaphor that emerged after the invention of agriculture mangled us, especially women, and it mangled all of subsequent history.”⁷⁰² He argues that “only after humans themselves took the task of planting seeds and began to place them in ploughed furrows that the seed metaphor arose.”⁷⁰³ The plowing imagery signifies sexual intercourse. At this juncture, the field is equated with a woman’s body.

Consequently, he observes that “the planting procedure seemed to be exactly analogous to the man ‘planting’ semen in the ‘furrowed’ vulva of the woman. The Latin word *semen* means

⁷⁰¹ Daniel Hillel, *Out of the Earth: Civilization and the Life of the Soil* (Berkeley, CA/USA: University of California Press, 1992), 23-24.

⁷⁰² Robert S. Mc Elvaine, *Eve's Seed: Biology, the Sexes, and the Course of History* (New York, USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 125.

⁷⁰³ Mc Elvaine, *Eve's Seed*, 125.

seed and is a significant metaphor.”⁷⁰⁴ In an early second millennium Mesopotamian literary song composition entitled ‘Plow My Vulva,’ the goddess Inanna (Ishtar) sings: “my vulva is a well-watered field – who will plough it?” and the all too eager response of *Dumuzi*, the king of *Uruk*, is: “*Dumuzi* will plough it for you.” Inanna then pronounces blessings upon *Dumuzi*.⁷⁰⁵

Eve and Adam’s expulsion from the garden also means that they must work, that is, work at civilization. Geza Röheim further notes that “separation from the Garden of Pleasure must be followed by the aggregation to a new mother symbol—to the cultivated soil.”⁷⁰⁶

Agriculture was associated with rituals in the *Rigveda*. The *Rigveda* hymn IV. 57, was recited at the commencement of ploughing. It mentions many agrarian deities, including Sita—the “furrow goddess.”⁷⁰⁷ Remarkably, in the *Vedas*, “Sita is a furrow, or husbandry personified, and worshipped as a deity presiding over agriculture and fruits.”⁷⁰⁸ Valmiki, the author of the epic *Ramayana*, makes Sita’s appearance as the fertility goddess worshipped by farmers, literally ploughmen (*karsaka*). She is the mistress of the plants and animals and is intimately related to the earth’s fertility. She is born from a fresh furrow while her adoptive father Janaka is ploughing in the field. In the literal sense, “Sita means ‘furrow’—as a ploughed field or the parting of the hair on the head; it also implies the female vaginal furrow as the source of life.”⁷⁰⁹ Hence she is styled *Ayonija*, not born from the womb— “she is also known as *Bhumija*, *Dharnisutha*, and *Parthuni*, all meaning ‘daughter of the earth.’”⁷¹⁰

4.4.3.3. Flocks of Sheep

Jacob saw “in the open field (*sadheh*) three flocks of sheep” indicating that they stand out distinctly from the other.”⁷¹¹ The field (*sadheh*) was an open plain that denoted the opposite of the enclosed

⁷⁰⁴ Mc Elvaine, *Eve’s Seed*, 125.

⁷⁰⁵ Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York, NY/USA: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 53.

⁷⁰⁶ Geza Röheim, “The Garden of Eden” *Psychoanalytic Review* 27, no 2: 178 quoted in John A. Phillips, *Eve, the History of an Idea* (San Francisco: Calif., 1984), 14.

⁷⁰⁷ Srivastava C. V, “Agriculture in the Vedic Age: A Review,” in *History of Agriculture (up to c.1200 AD)*, ed. Lallanji Gopal and Srivastava C. V, vol. *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi, India: Center for Study in Civilizations, 2008), V Part 1:207.

⁷⁰⁸ John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 16th ed. (New Delhi, India: Rupa, 2007), 194.

⁷⁰⁹ Dimmitt Cornelia, “Sītā: Fertility Goddess and Śakti,” *Equinox* 7, no. 1 (August 1980): 20.

⁷¹⁰ Dowson, *A Classical*, 194.

⁷¹¹ Herbert Carl Leupold, “Exposition of Genesis Vol 1&2,” in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* (Grand Rapids, MI/USA: The Wartburg Press, 1950), 2.785, accessed January 24, 2021.

garden. It could be a place that was either cultivated or able to be cultivated. It is “tillable ground, arable fields, the ground ‘yielding plants and trees’ field shrubs and plants.”⁷¹²

Shepherding can be performed by men and women, but the animals have been linked symbolically in Mediterranean culture with specific genders: sheep with men (Isa. 53: 7) and goats with women (Cant. 1: 8), and typically the family’s milk goat (Prov. 27: 27) is kept as a pet within the house complex. The symbolism of these animals replicates the culture’s core values of honor (sheep: males) and shame (goats: females)⁷¹³

4.4.3.4 Large Stone on the Well

When viewed from an ecocritical angle, it ought to be recalled that ‘stone,’ as an integral component of the earth and a consistently present piece of the ecological system, has a close association with humans. The stone in this scene can be viewed as a clear image of suffering, paying little heed to withstand violent disturbances. Jan P. Fokkelman noticed that stones tag on to him in his challenging vocation in Jacob's life.⁷¹⁴ The stone set on the water-well as a cover has significant sexual and fertility undertones. Alter reasons that although the well of this scene is, on the whole, related with women and fertility, it is especially seemly that the access to the well-water ought to be hindered by a specific obstruction⁷¹⁵— the stone. When Jacob sleeps at Bethel, he places a stone by his head. He erected a dedicatory memorial of stones after the revelation. When he returns from Mesopotamia, he establishes a joint peace pact with his father-in-law by erecting a testimony stack of stones as a border between them. Fokkelman further contends that these are not actual symbols, yet “there is something incipiently metaphorical about them.”⁷¹⁶ Jacob uses a stone as a pillow, speaks with stones, and wrestles with stones —“he is depicted as one battling with the complex, uneven nature of things.”⁷¹⁷

⁷¹² Leupold, “Exposition of Genesis,” 2.785.

⁷¹³ John J. Pilch, “Anyone Unwilling to Work, Should Not Eat,” *The Bible Today Volume 32:1*, 1994, 44.

⁷¹⁴ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 50-51.

⁷¹⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 66.

⁷¹⁶ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 50-51.

⁷¹⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 50-51.

4.4.4 Translation on Genesis 29:4-8

Genesis 29	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 4-8	‘Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” ⁵ He said to them, “Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?” They said, “We do.” ⁶ He said to them, “Is it well with him?” “Yes,” they replied, “and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.” ⁷ He said, “Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.” ⁸ But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.” ⁷¹⁸

4.4.5. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

4.4.5.1. Conversing with the Shepherds

The encounter between Jacob and the local shepherds is a model of effective characterization. Jacob is excited and talkative after his long journey, whereas the herdsmen are composed, almost silent. They act as if each word were just too much trouble. Jacob also appears to be ‘more affectionate.’⁷¹⁹ He speaks to the shepherds at the well about the place’s name and then his uncle Laban. As a glaring difference to the impressive development of the narration in Genesis 24, with its proper address and sufficient synonymity, the discussion here is relatively fast and riddled with inquiries and answers that appear to be practically informal by correlation.⁷²⁰ This again is a fitting preface to Jacobs’s speedy-paced story of vivaciously sought-after activities, double-dealings, and encounters.⁷²¹

This scene is filled with natural and ecological features. In this narrative, the accessibility of water from the well depended on those who rolled the large stone away. When the water becomes available, the shepherds and shepherdesses water their animals and use it for themselves. It is believed that the well’s mouth was by and large encompassed by a divider and shut with a stone both to forestall mishaps and outsiders. Other biblical texts indicate that if the owner failed to cover the well and an animal fell into it, he is obligated to address the animal’s cost.⁷²² At times the stone put on the opening was heavy so that one person could not move it.

⁷¹⁸ Genesis 29: 4-8 New Revised Standard Version.

⁷¹⁹ Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1986), 223.

⁷²⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 65.

⁷²¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 65.

⁷²² Exodus.21:33-34; cf. Luke.14:5

4.4.5.2. Flocks of Sheep

When reading this verse with an ecocritical lens, the presence of flocks draws attention. Flocks referred to as ewe, lamb, or ram are mentioned over seven hundred times in the Scripture.⁷²³ They appear as gentle and social creatures that function well in a flock. Thus, shepherds and shepherdesses are crucial in keeping a synchronized relationship with their flocks and the safety of each lamb or goat from wandering off. The flocks are tended to with care for their economic use- milk, meat, wool and sacrifice. As companion species, sheep were also an important part of the possessions. Both adult sheep and lambs were used for sacrificial purposes (Exodus 20: 24; 29: 38)

4.4.5.3. Large Stone on Well's Mouth

While Rebecca in the earlier story was described as beautiful, the narrator uses a different strategy when introducing Rachel in the narrative space. Robert Alter notes that this little distinction in how the narrator describes Rebekah and Rachel is interesting. The narrator pleasantly delineates how generously similar literary materials can be redeployed to convey various focusses.⁷²⁴ Rebekah's beauty is essential to her identity in the scene that she overwhelms, so the narrator properly introduces her just when she enters the scene.

Then again, Rachel's beauty is introduced as an easygoing component in Jacob's unique connection to her which is ensnared also in Leah's relationship.⁷²⁵ Both Leah and Rachel contest for Jacob. The pivotal actuality of Rachel's beauty at that point is not disclosed to the reader. Only later do we realize how the narrator's description of Leah as having frail eyes and being potentially disfigured is juxtaposed to the youthful Rachel, whom Jacob loves.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Carol Stream, Ill./USA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 61.

⁷²⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 67.

⁷²⁵ "Jacob marries the two sisters—Leah and Rachel, a type of marriage which is known as 'sororal polygyny', which is a very widespread institution." (John H. Chamberlayne, "Kinship Relationships among the Early Hebrews" *Numen*, Aug., 1963, Vol. 10, 153-164. The discussion about this institution of beyond the scope of this study.

⁷²⁶ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 67.

4.4.6. Translation of Genesis 29: 9-11

Genesis 29	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 9- 11	⁹ “While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she kept them. ¹⁰ Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother’s brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud.” ⁷²⁷

4.4.7. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

4.4.7.1 Rachel Enters

Rachel enters the narrative space in a way interrupting the conversation between him and the shepherds “while he was still speaking with them when Rachel arrived” (Gen. 29:9). Alter points out that “not only does the future bridegroom take care of the drawing of water but he has an obstacle to overcome —the stone on the mouth of the well.”⁷²⁸ The mention of Laban's flock accompanying Rachel is repeated in Gen. 29: 6, 9 and 10. Sharon Pace Jeansonne argues that the reader may discern a foreshadowing of Jacob's future prosperity⁷²⁹ compared to Abraham's servant, who arrives at the well with accoutrements.⁷³⁰ Abraham’s servant came with an impressive arsenal of animals and riches (24:10, 22, 30, 53), whereas Jacob arrives destitute.⁷³¹

Wilda Gafney comments that Rachel is busy shepherding her father’s sheep when Jacob encounters her. This introduction is striking for many reasons. Shepherding in the Bible is a powerful and dominant metaphor for leading the people of Israel as civil (monarch) and religious (prophet) leaders and for God’s care of God’s people. The presence of female shepherds in the Scriptures seems to have failed to contribute to the dominant image of the clergyperson/shepherd as a male person.⁷³² Metaphorically, the shepherd and sheep are intimate to the people as a community. Ken Stone reasons that “goats and sheep are thus ‘co-constitutive’ partners in the creation of Israel’s religion, as well as Israelite identity.”⁷³³ Without goats and sheep, ‘Israel’s

⁷²⁷ Genesis 29: 9-11 New Revised Standard Version

⁷²⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 65, 66

⁷²⁹ Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 71.

⁷³⁰ Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings; 2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 126

⁷³¹ John E. Anderson, “Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2010), 111.

⁷³² Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction of the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 54-55.

⁷³³ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 33.

story as we have it and the religions grounded in that story would not exist.’⁷³⁴ Stone comments that when the Bible uses herding images to represent God or political leaders as shepherds, “the logic of its symbolism puts human beings in positions of sheep and goats— thus destabilizing the human-animal binary.”⁷³⁵

Earlier on, in Gen. 27: 9, Rebekah instructs her son Jacob to “Go to the flock, and get me from there two young goats.” Ken Stone succinctly points out that ‘from the goats, she makes food for Isaac and the skin coverings that she places on Jacob’s hands and neck to make him feel like his hairy brother,’⁷³⁶ Esau (Gen. 27: 16). The trick’s success depends on the bodies of goats but also relies upon some similarity between goatskins and the hairy skin of Esau. Stone further states that without the goat parts that his mother cooks for food, or the goatskins and hair attached to his body, Jacob would not receive Isaac’s blessing. Hence, he argues that the presence of animals structures Jacob’s story. It can be noticed that animals recur throughout his story.⁷³⁷

4.4.7.1.1 Jacob, Rachel and the Sheep and Goats

Another layer of how daughters are equated not only to a field is the connection to animals. Ken Stone builds on the argument that for Jacob, an association with domestic animals and women becomes apparent. Rachel, whose name means ‘ewe,’ first appears ‘coming with the flock.’⁷³⁸ A parallel is created between Jacob’s work for Leah and Rachel who bear his children together with their slave women Bilhah and Zilpa.⁷³⁹

Jacob also works for the goats and the sheep, who become his animals and give birth to animals for him. Jacob says to his father-in-law, “I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock,” (Gen. 31: 41) thereby signaling his control and power to procure both animals and women through his labor. The equalization of women and animals as objects that men can acquire is a gender-ecocritical motif that is intriguingly exemplified in biblical texts.

⁷³⁴ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 33.

⁷³⁵ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 33.

⁷³⁶ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 25-26.

⁷³⁷ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 25-26.

⁷³⁸ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 41.

⁷³⁹ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 41.

4.4.7.2 Jacob Sees, Rolls the Stone and Waters the Flock

Jacob is bursting with activity here. Alter points out that “not only does the future bridegroom take care of the drawing of water but he has an obstacle to overcome —the stone on the mouth of the well.”⁷⁴⁰ Jacob’s first encounter with Rachel involves flocks that she tends to for her father, Laban, who is Jacob’s maternal uncle. Jacob rolls the stone from off the well in order to allow Rachel’s animals to drink. From a gender perspective, Stone observes that Jacob is arguably the more ‘effeminate’ man, who masquerades as his manly brother by wearing animal skins and clothes that smell like the field.⁷⁴¹ If Esau is associated with masculinity and wild animals, Jacob is associated with women and domesticated animals.⁷⁴² The contrasts have gendered connotations, as Jacob initially represents a kind of ‘subordinated masculinity.’⁷⁴³ The incidence of rolling the large stone all by himself indicates how his masculinity is progressing towards the conventional prescription of masculinity. From a gender perspective, again, the energies of the shepherds are needed because they are the only ones who can cover it with stone and take the heavy stones off. They control the space around the well, and as Zoloth comments, proximity equals priority. Moreover, this is true even in societies where women are not without their own power.⁷⁴⁴

4.4.7.3 Jacob weeps and Kisses Rachel

When Jacob sees Rachel, he rolls the stone away on his own, and kisses Rachel and weeps.⁷⁴⁵ Stones are a recurring motif in Jacob's arduous career, according to Jan P. Fokkelman.⁷⁴⁶ Jacob, though he was a fugitive and a refugee in the land of the East, was insecure, yet in his powerlessness, he is still structurally possessive of the core resource, water. Jacob's impulsive kiss

⁷⁴⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 65, 66

⁷⁴¹ Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 41. Stone points out that animalization here appears to be linked to manhood. If Esau is associated with masculinity and wild animals, Jacob is associated with women and domesticated animals.

⁷⁴² Susan Niditch proposes “domesticated man” as a possible translation of for the description of Jacob (*ish tam*) that contrasts with that of Esau in Gen 25: 27.

⁷⁴³ Susan E. Haddox, “Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and beyond*, by Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield Eng.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 2-19. In Stone, *Reading the Hebrew*, 41.

⁷⁴⁴ Laurie Zoloth, “At the Last Well on Earth: Climate Change Is a Feminist Issue,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 145.

⁷⁴⁵ Esther Fuchs, “Structure, Ideology and Politics in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 274, 276.

⁷⁴⁶ Jacob puts a stone by his head when he sleeps at Bethel; after the epiphany there he sets up a commemorative marker of stones and when he returns from Mesopotamia, he concludes mutual non-aggression pact with his father-in-law by setting up on the border between them a testimonial heap of stones. These are not really symbols but there is something incipiently metaphorical about them. Jacob is a man who sleeps on stones, speaks in stones, and wrestles with stones, contending with the hard uneven nature of things. (Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR/USA: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 50-51.)

is a detail that Calvin attributed to a redactional slip on the part of Moses.⁷⁴⁷ Kissing need not be out of tune with the mores of the times. Ephraim Avigdor Speiser argues that in “Nuzi records which so often mirror conditions in the Haran area and hence also in the patriarchal circle, women were subject to fewer formal restraints than was to be the norm later on in the Near East as a whole.”

Jacob also weeps, thus reversing traditional gender roles swiftly. It is here that the act of exchanging water begins the more in-depth social exchanges that culminate in marriage.⁷⁴⁸ Zoloth comments on Jacob’s vulnerability on seeing Rachel’s control of her sheep. Claus Westermann recognizes that the gestures of weeping ‘are essential and indispensable elements of communication.’⁷⁴⁹ When viewed through the lens of attachment theory, weeping expresses a need for relationship and caregiving arising from pain or sorrow.⁷⁵⁰ From a psychological perspective, Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi note that “what seems typical of crying for joy is the existence of some worry and a consequent relief.”⁷⁵¹ In the Bible, the motif of weeping is found in several instances. This is a recognition scene when Rachel arrives at the well. Weeping may appear with other attachment behaviors such as physical affection - embraces and kisses. It is a recognition scene since they both learn that they are kin. While Jacob is fleeing from a murderous brother and is in emotional turmoil, Rachel does not have any such experience displaying an asymmetry in their relationship.⁷⁵²

The unblocking of the well and flowing of water accompany Jacob's sudden warmth to his cousin with tears. The well, a symbolism for fertility, does have sexual nuances occurring at that point. As mentioned above, removing the large stone suggests Jacob’s muscular strength and enthusiasm in contrast to the other shepherds—who require a concerted effort of other shepherds and shepherdesses, including Rachel, to move the stone. Another interesting detail to note is the intentional double entendre between the expression ‘watered the flock’ in Gen. 29: 10 and ‘kissed’ in verse 11.

⁷⁴⁷ Speiser, *The Anchor*, 223.

⁷⁴⁸ Laurie Zoloth, "At the Last Well on Earth: Climate Change Is a Feminist Issue," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 144.

⁷⁴⁹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion; 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 2:525.

⁷⁵⁰ David A. Bosworth, "Weeping in Recognition Scenes in Genesis and the 'Odyssey,'" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (October 2015): 619.

⁷⁵¹ Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, "Crying: Discussing Its Basic Reasons and Uses," *New Ideas in Psychology* 21 (2003) 247-63, here 257.

⁷⁵² Bosworth, "Weeping in Recognition," 623, 636.

4.4.8 Conclusion

The two stories in this chapter are rich with human-physical world relationships happening beautifully at the water well. It is at the juncture of the daughters' task of water-fetching that the unfolding of events occurs. The centrality of water to which humans, animals and the entire ecosystem are drawn is a natural phenomenon that is common in these stories. In traditional interpretations that focused more on the human characters within the stories, their ideological and theological agendas have taken priority. The idea of endogamy is an exclusive one that inadvertently marginalizes other ethnicities. It should be pointed out that in India, the evil practice of caste can be perceived as the rationale for the prevalence of arranged marriages. Like Abraham's motivation to prevent Isaac from marrying local Canaanite girls, most caste-conscious people prefer their daughters to be married to sons within their caste. Although historically, *Gandharva* marriage involved mutual consent of the couple involved, arranged marriages emerged more as a mechanism to prevent ethnic groups and castes' intermixing. This explains the innumerable cases of honor killings⁷⁵³ when couples do inter-marry without parental consent. Therefore, to a contemporary reader, the story of Rebekah and Rachel invokes diverse negative meanings.

Later in her story, in the Book of Jubilees, Rebekah tells Jacob not to marry a Canaanite girl because of their unclean deeds. She says, "take thee a wife of the house of thy father, and thy children shall be a righteous generation and a holy seed."⁷⁵⁴ After urging Jacob not to intermarry, Rebekah declares, "and thy children shall be a righteous generation and a holy seed." In Jubilees 35:13- 14, Isaac informs Rebekah that he now loves Jacob more than Esau because there is no righteousness in the latter. Christine Hays points out that the absence of moral nature is understood as forsaking Abraham's God "and going after his wives and their uncleanness and error (idolatry)."⁷⁵⁵ Also, 'Esau's unrighteousness is his idolatry which is affected through intermarriage.'⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵³ Human Rights Watch defines 'honor killings' thus— "Honor crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon the family. A woman can be targeted by her family for a variety of reasons including, refusing to enter into an arranged marriage." (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/09/08/jordan-tribunals-no-substitute-reforms-honor-killings>)

⁷⁵⁴ Book of Jubilees 25: 1 (<https://www.worldstudybible.com/Jubilees/Jubilees-Chapter-25.htm>)

⁷⁵⁵ Christine Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity in Jewish Sources," *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (1999): 19, fn. 54.

⁷⁵⁶ Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity," 54.

At any rate, it is Rebekah and Rachel here and the other daughters in each of the narratives, who are in charge of the herds of sheep, goats, and cattle. Consistently, the animals that the daughters care for are the essential economic capital—the main objects of worth in the herding societies both in biblical times and the present world. Nonetheless, without access to water, they would be lost. It is daughters who bring the flocks to the water and organize their care.⁷⁵⁷

Later on, we read about Jacob digging wells, the first human energy necessary to drill with instruments. Zoloth insightfully proposes that these acts mirror the productive relationships of ownership and power.

The theory of ecocriticism has facilitated a reading method that allowed a perspectival elicitation of the intrinsic relation between biblical texts and the physical environment. It was used in this chapter as a potential lens to explore and retrieve the physical world depicted in these two narratives. Each element of the physical world present in the narrative was explained. In doing so, I was able to point out the importance of each physical feature mentioned in the narratives. I have argued that water symbolism in the form of wells or springs are the centers around which the narrative pivots. By drawing toward water, humans and animals equally demonstrate their need of relating to water on a deeper level. Through ingesting the water from the well, the camels, sheep, goats, cattle and humans form a dialectical relationship with the water. The well water becomes the source wherein the rest of nature is connected. Therefore, the well becomes the space of commonality representing the unquestionable link between water and the rest of creation. They all need to keep coming to the water as the water is drawn, is used up, and more water is replenished each time the well gets visited by its dependents. I have also engaged in the contemporary issues of water fetching, thus bringing awareness about the difficulties women face during a water crisis—the importance of land and the value we as humans associate to it is brought to focus. However, water-wells are also spaces of conflict⁷⁵⁸ and danger. Conflicts centering on water arise

⁷⁵⁷ Laurie Zoloth, "At the Last Well on Earth: Climate Change Is a Feminist Issue," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 146.

⁷⁵⁸ Philip Vinod Peacock, "Water Conflict" in *Waters of Life and Death*, ed. Sam P. Mathew and Chandran Paul Martin (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 47-65; Peacock says, "In several places in India riots against Dalits can be traced to water usage – a good example of this is the Karamchedu incident in Andhra," (that will be referred to again in Chapter 6), 55; He further states that "The separation of Dalits from water resources is an age-old problem and we have several incidents of Ambedkar forcibly taking over water sources. The point here is not only that water is denied to the so-called 'lower' castes but also that Dalits can pollute the water sources of the 'upper' castes and therefore must be kept away from them. Though Dalits have a separate and unique oppression, when it comes to the politics of water, other marginalized groups in our country also face difficulties with regard to water politics. ... the issues of women and tribals and rural areas with regard to water conflict."

both in the spaces surrounding water and due to issues of access to water. The next chapter will, therefore, further expand on the themes of gender and spatiality – as access to space and water-spaces are intrinsically connected to gender dimensions.



CHAPTER 5: Daughters of Jethro: Dangers near Water Sources

5.1 Introduction

This chapter's primary objective is to increase the specificity of water as symbolizing spaces of potential danger. I provide a background for the current instances of gender violence near the water-wells. Sporadic episodes where young girls and women become targets of the male-gaze, and perversion leading to sexual violence are common near water sources. Such incidents are becoming widespread, especially in countries like India and South Africa. Global estimates show that “seventy percent of women will face gender-based violence at some point in their lifetime, depending on their location and country.”⁷⁵⁹ This study will reveal that daughters spend much time near water bodies—wells, rivers, lakes or ponds or water tankers.

The chapter is a gender-ecocritical analysis of Exodus 2: 15b- 21 and 1 Samuel 9: 1-15. Both the stories document the group of daughters arriving at a well— the daughters of the Midian priest and the daughters of the townspeople.

5.2 Translation of Exodus 2: 15b-16

Exodus 2	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 15b- 16	^{15b} “But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian and sat down by a well. ¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. ¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock.” ⁷⁶⁰

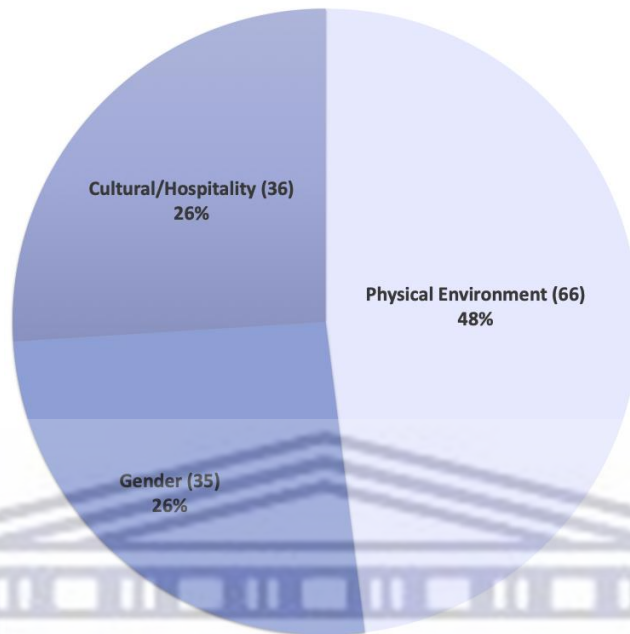
5.2.1 Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

In this pie graph, a projection of the total number of words is given, which is 137. The reference made to gender and ecocritical motifs will be discussed in the analysis of this narrative.

⁷⁵⁹ Sarah House makes this claim based on her study for the Institute of Development Studies on “Gender Based Violence, Sanitation, Hygiene and Water.”
(<https://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/blog/gender-based-violence-and-sanitation-hygiene-and-water>)

⁷⁶⁰ Exodus 2: 15b- 16 (N5RSV)

Exodus 2:15b-21



This narrative does not indicate any reference to Moses' intention to find a wife for himself. Instead he finds himself in a position to agree to marry one of the daughters of Reuel—the priest of Midian.

5.2.2 Moses Fled—Settled in the Land of Midian

The name Moses appears to be the familiar form of a theophoric name. Brevard Childs observes that the narrative lacks any synonymic or word-lay echo of the etymological elements 'draw' 'water.'⁷⁶¹ Josephus suggested an Egyptian etymology—where he claims that Thermuthis, the daughter of the Pharaoh, imposed the name *Moiïses* on him from what had happened when he was put into the river Nile. He reasons that the Egyptians call *water* by the name of *Mo*; and such as are 'saved out of it' by the name of *Uses*, and hence *Moiïses*.

From a gender critical perspective, the mention of the maidservant of Pharaoh's daughter is significant here. She is the person who really goes into the Nile and saves Moses. Additionally, Peter Sabo calls attention to the fact that Pharaoh's daughter is referenced as going out to the Nile to bathe. Water is decisively connected to symbols of washing both physically and spiritually,

⁷⁶¹ Brevard Childs, "The Birth of Moses," quoted in Herbert Marks, "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 1 (1995): 30.

alluding to the intersection of the Suph-Sea, 'where the Israelites wash away their slavery metaphorically to become a ritually pure people.'⁷⁶²

Moses escapes towards the east to one of Asia's sparsely populated deserts, past Egypt's jurisdiction. He camps at an oasis. A solitary refugee, he requires both water and allies. The use of the word 'settled' *ysb* can mean both 'sit' and 'dwell' (Exod. 2: 21); "it is somewhat unclear whether Moses becomes a literal or a figurative 'squatter' by the well. Most likely, he simply sits down, waiting for a greeting home."⁷⁶³ Albrecht Nyce suggests that "Midian, the eponymous founder of the Midianite tribe and territory, was a son of patriarch Abraham's son with his wife, Keturah."⁷⁶⁴ He also suggests that Moses chose that place because it was 'safe and not within the grasp of the Egyptian authorities.'⁷⁶⁵

Lawrence Stager remarks that Exodus is apparently about migration, and some geographical perspective is essential to consider. He observes that 'except archaeological evidence, much information about Midian comes from the Bible.'⁷⁶⁶ Midian is situated in the south of Canaan, the current 'northwest corner of Saudi Arabia and the southwest corner of Jordan, to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba.'⁷⁶⁷ The regional borders were quite fluid as the Midianites were an itinerant clan of shepherds and traders.⁷⁶⁸



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⁷⁶² Peter Sabo, "Drawing Out Moses: Water as a Personal Motif of the Biblical Character," in *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. by Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2014), 413, fn.15.

⁷⁶³ William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1999), 171.

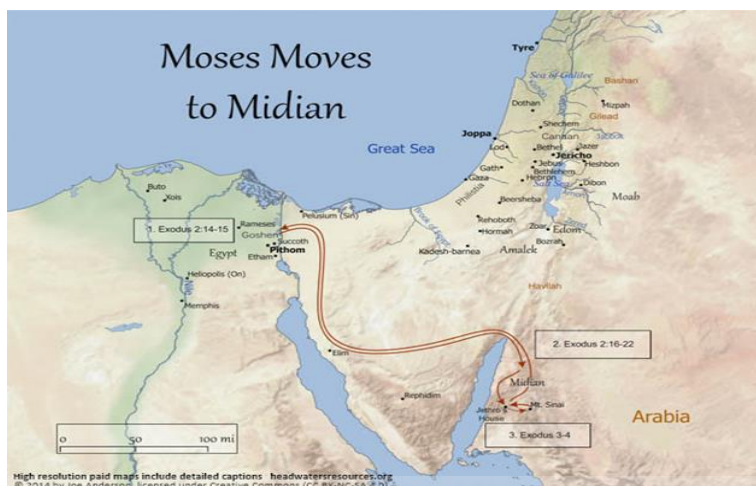
⁷⁶⁴ Albrecht Nyce, OSB, "The Midianite Connection: An Exploration of Suggestive Hints," *Obsculta* 10, no. 1 (May 17, 2017): 120.

⁷⁶⁵ Nyce, "The Midianite," 120.

⁷⁶⁶ Lawrence E. Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael David Coogan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90-131.

⁷⁶⁷ Stager, "Forging an Identity," 90-131.

⁷⁶⁸ Wayne T. Pitard, "Midian," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 518-519.



*Moses Moves to Midian*⁷⁶⁹

Robert Alter notes that “Moses, perhaps more than any other biblical character, is intimately associated with water.”⁷⁷⁰ Water plays an important role in his birth story and in his premature death oddly and uniquely. In between, water features at important stages in his life— “his chance meeting with the seven Midianite daughters at the well, at his encounter with Pharaoh on the river Nile, the parting of the Suph-Sea,”⁷⁷¹ and his search for water for the Israelites in the desert.⁷⁷² Peter Sabo observes that ‘a web of thematic and linguistic ties links these episodes together.’⁷⁷³

5.2.2.1 Sat Down by a Well

The well was “a certain well,” according to commentator Sforno Obadiah Ben Jacob, however Propp notes that the Hebrew often uses the definite article when an object is definite for the speaker but indefinite for the audience.⁷⁷⁴ Moses’ story has some similarities with Jacob in that he too is fleeing a calamity.

⁷⁶⁹ Joe Anderson, *Moses Moves to Midian*, map (Headwater Christian Resources, Englewood, CO/USA)

⁷⁷⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 57-58.

⁷⁷¹ Which is referred to as the red sea—

⁷⁷² Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 57-58.

⁷⁷³ Peter Sabo, "Drawing Out Moses: Water as a Personal Motif of the Biblical Character," in *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. by ehud ben zvi and christoph levin. ed., ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2014), 409.

⁷⁷⁴ William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1999), 171.

5.2.2.2 The Priest of Midian

By opening with a parenthesis mentioning Midian's priest, Henry Propp suggests that 'the narrator signals the priest's importance, not his daughters.'⁷⁷⁵ In the Bible, seven is a stereotypical number. Depicting groups of seven women are a common feature in Canaanite literature. Likewise, in Exodus too, the seven young women may symbolize matrimony and procreation.

5.2.2.3 Seven Daughters of the Priest Draw water

As stated above, water-drawing is an essential task for the daughters rather than sons in the family. To this particular family of seven daughters, the responsibility of water-drawing was a shared task. Once more, the motif of the well here at this location signifies fertility, quickly inciting a scenario of an encounter between the men at the well and the unmarried daughters of Jethro, who come to draw water. The Septuagint adds that the daughters were tending the flock of their father, Jethro. James Ackerman argues that the narrative is far more detailed in describing how the daughters watered the flock. He offers two possible explanations: to convey the bustling, energetic activity of the young women—establishing their attractiveness for the listeners. Alternatively, more likely, 'to convey the back-breaking effort involved in watering the flock—establishing even greater outrage among the listeners when the rowdy shepherds come along and drive them away from their hard-earned water.'⁷⁷⁶

5.2.2.4 Dangers near the water— Shepherds Drove the Daughters Away

Certain shepherds expelled the girls. Zoloth remarks that the infrastructure—the well—is more profoundly in the control of the men of the society. "They guard it, they are hostile, and they drive away the women."⁷⁷⁷ The daughters presumably have to wait until the men leave, but in their case, "Moses intervenes, actively aiding them, and in addition, helping them with the actual work of watering the flocks in their control. As in the other scenes, he marries one of the sisters, Zipporah and begins life and family."⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1999), 171

⁷⁷⁶ James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2)," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, by Kenneth R. R Gros Louis, James Stokes Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville, Tenn./USA: Abingdon, ©1974-1982.), 103.

⁷⁷⁷ Zoloth, "At the Last," 145.

⁷⁷⁸ Zoloth, "At the Last," 144.

Moses 'arose' - '*qam*,' connotes the inception of an action, literally meaning stood up, which indicates that he was previously seated. When the local people show up, Moses encounters a situation where he observes a gender imbalance in the strength over procuring the water. The daughters fought, but the men surpassed their power and chased them away. Both during biblical times and in today's Middle East context, water rights are often intensely contested.⁷⁷⁹ Moses endeavors halfway to join on the daughters' side to fight the men off and in this way, this narrative reminisces the reader's imagination about how Moses himself was defended, protected and saved by women in the earlier episode of Exodus 1: 22-2: 10.

The location of the quarrel is significant. The spring is a popular female symbol in the Bible.⁷⁸⁰ This narrative is similar to the previous well-scenes that romanticize the portrayal of local hospitality. The term '*rahat*' - 'trough' (watering place) is also mentioned in this story and Gen. 30: 38-41. The well seemingly symbolizes Zipporah, from whom Moses drives off other men and performs an act of kindness.⁷⁸¹ Moses' physical act of drawing up water for the flock of Reuel's daughters likewise reminds the reader of how Moses was drawn out of water. His name meaning "drawn from the water" signifies the creation of water for Israel in the wilderness.

Moses flees from the Pharaoh escaping punishment for a moral violation of murder, yet now he acts morally when confronted with the situation of water sharing. He acts in kindness to draw water for the daughters of Jethro and uses the risk of force to mitigate water control. His act of helping the daughters with a personal need of water now progresses into a political problem where force comes into play and becomes necessary. He acts justly against the local men who perhaps control the water, especially when water is scarce. It should be pointed out that Aristotelian Virtue ethics would support violence as necessary to take the water by force for the group which has none.⁷⁸² The idea that moderation is essential in ethics involves a middle between excess and lack. The people with an abundance of water must share with others who lack—in this sense, people with power must demand water from those who have it in abundance. If confrontation arises, force

⁷⁷⁹ Several biblical wells bear names associated with enmity: Ein Mishpat 'Well of Judgment' (Gen 14:7); Beersheba "Well of Oath" (Gen 21, 26); Esek 'Enmity' and Sitnah 'Hostility' (Gen 26); Massah 'Testing' and Meribah 'Strife' (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:2-13). (2:11-12) and civil strife (2:13-14)

⁷⁸⁰ Representing a wife (Prov 1:15-16), a prostitute (Prov 23:27) or, if sealed, a virgin (Gen 29:2-10; Song of Solomon 4:12). (SOS 1:2 even develops a good pun between *sqy* 'drink,' *nsq* 'kiss' and *swq/sqq* 'lust.')

⁷⁸¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical*, 68-69.

⁷⁸² Blake M. Salemink, "Virtue Ethics: Water Rights" (working paper, Philosophy, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, British Columbia/Canada, December 11, 2013), 2.

becomes inevitable. Current global geopolitical trends in water sharing projects are rife with conflicts—as can be observed in the renaissance dam construction in Ethiopia.

This story shows that the daughters of the Midianite priest risked being molested at the well. It can be noted that in most cases, the scenes at the well contain sexual overtones in which the viewer or the reader attaches moral meanings about the women at the well.⁷⁸³ Hence, the wells located in public zones had both social and sexual consequences for daughters. These spaces carry with them a perception from the male gaze on the vulnerabilities of female bodies.

Recurrently, there are several instances of “eve-teasing” that occur near the wells. Heidi Pauwels notes that “the term ‘eve-teasing’ is an Indian-English term that refers to a form of sexual harassment of women, omnipresent in public spaces in South Asia.”⁷⁸⁴ As a local euphemism, it includes “staring, whistling, and passing comments, to scary physical actions like groping, molesting, lewd comments, and stalking.”⁷⁸⁵ Pauwels contends that men have set assumptions about women's subjectivity: that women enjoy when teased by men, sometimes even ‘asking for it,’ just by showing up in specific public spaces. So, when women say “no,” they signify “yes,” demonstrated by how they do not fight back so they actually like it. She further emphasizes that women who feel very harassed somewhat have internalized such interpretations and understand that nobody helps them when they are in real danger. Then again, society pardons this sort of conduct for men. A woman has to safeguard her sexuality and is solely responsible if she is a victim of eve-teasing. If she fails, “it is because she is of loose morals—her apparent absence of shame, or *lajja*, is viewed as a blemish not only on her honor or *izzat*— but also on her family and indeed her entire community.”⁷⁸⁶

5.2.2.4.1 Indian Folk Cinema and Songs

The motif of the woman at the well is one that has been around for a long time. It appears in Sanskrit poetry in connection with *prapāpālikā*, the guardian of the well—the woman who provides water to thirsty travelers. Pauwels notes that the water quenches the thirst of the traveler, while her beauty quenches the thirst of the eye-gaze.⁷⁸⁷ The equalization of water and woman is

⁷⁸³ Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn./USA: Glazier, 1998), 107.

⁷⁸⁴ Heidi Pauwels, “The Woman Waylaid at the Well’ or Paṇaghaṭa-līlā An Indian Folk Theme Appropriated in Myth and Movies,” *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010): 2.

⁷⁸⁵ Pauwels, “The Woman Waylaid,” 2.

⁷⁸⁶ Pauwels, “The Woman Waylaid,” 2.

⁷⁸⁷ Pauwels, “The Woman Waylaid,” 2.

apparent in how men perceive water and women through a gender lens. Women singing by the well are mentioned in vernacular epics, such as the ancient Rajasthani *Ḍholā-Mārū*— where, in some versions, the lovers also meet at a well.⁷⁸⁸ Apparently, seeing women on their way to the well is regarded to be an auspicious omen. It seems likely that folk songs on the topic have a long pedigree, and in particular, women have been singing such songs for a long time. The songs of women on their walk to and from the well, or *panihārin*, "water-fetcher," are an intriguing component of women's folk repertoire. These songs are popular in the drought-stricken states of Gujarat and Rajasthan in western India.⁷⁸⁹ They are dialogue songs sung in chorus by women who must frequently travel long distances and do so in groups to make the labor less boring. The songs cover a wide range of topics, including water scarcity, the difficulty of obtaining it, and complaints against unsympathetic relatives who send the young women out to the well.⁷⁹⁰

5.2.2.5 Moses Comes to the Defense and Protects the Daughters

The narrator depicts Moses as noticing shepherds as abhorring the young girls' vulnerability and attempting to drive them and their herds away. While the text simply expresses that Moses rose and saves the girls, Philo⁷⁹¹ notes that Moses uses his powers to protect the girls— he ran and explicitly scolded the shepherds, who were referred to as 'comrades of envy, and malice, 'malignity,' and 'jealous' in some texts. Specifically, he denounced their injustice. The young girls evade none of their obligations while young men shirk their duties.⁷⁹²

5.2.3 Translation of Exodus 2: 18-21

Exodus 2	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 18 -22	¹⁸ "When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" ¹⁹ They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰ He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." ²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage." ⁷⁹³

⁷⁸⁸ Vaudeville Charlotte, *Leaves from the desert: The Ḍholā-Mārū-rā-Dūhā*—an ancient ballad of Rajasthan. In *Myths, Saints and Legends in Medieval India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia, 273–334. Delhi: Oxford University Press.1996, 324 n. 87 and also v. 664. Cited in Pauwels, "The Woman Waylaid," 4.

⁷⁸⁹ In the documentary, daughters and women who fetch water during the time of drought serves as the background for the movie shot in the Indian state of Rajasthan. *Panihari: The Water Women of India* (dir. Abhi Devan and Sudhi Rajagopalan, 2006).

⁷⁹⁰ Heidi Pauwels, "The Woman Waylaid,"4-5.

⁷⁹¹ In *De Vita Mosis* 1: 54-56

⁷⁹² Louis H. Feldman, "Moses in Midian, According to Philo," *SHOFAR* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 7.

⁷⁹³ Exodus 2: 18- 22 New Revised Standard Version

5.2.4. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

5.2.4.1. Reuel (Jethro) Invites Moses

In the earlier two well-stories, Rebekah and Rachel swiftly head home to prepare for the stranger's visit—a narrative cliché. James Ackerman derives from the word 'today' that the contention with the shepherds or 'conflict with the shepherds is a sporadic one.'⁷⁹⁴ This time, the girls return earlier because they did not need to wait. Exod. 2:16b indicates that the girls drew the water already 'and filled the troughs to water their father's flock,' so Ackerman proposes that 'aside from narratorial blunder, there are two potential clarifications for the inconsistency.'⁷⁹⁵ Probably at this point, we are to derive that after the violent shepherds have used up the water drawn by women, Moses had to draw more water for the girls again. The narrator is also likely to depict the energized daughters as inflating Moses, the virtuous stranger's demeanor.⁷⁹⁶ William Propp observes that "since drawing water was a task for women of slaves, Moses' conduct is a demonstration of self-devaluation"⁷⁹⁷ again reiterating the gendering of the water-fetching task.

Ronald Veenker explains that the metaphor of "eating" indicates a possible sexual congress.⁷⁹⁸ When Jethro tells his daughters to invite Moses for a meal, more than baking bread is implied: "Perhaps we can make a marriage."⁷⁹⁹

5.2.4.2. Moses Agrees to Stay and Takes Zipporah, the Daughter of Reuel

Philo describes Zipporah as the most beautiful of Reuel's daughters and hence a match for Moses' beauty.⁸⁰⁰ Louis Ginsberg cites numerous rabbinic passages in which Zipporah is identified with the Cushite woman whom Moses married (Num. 21:1). Zipporah is recognized for her beauty and piety. Jethro describes her nature as winged, probably alluding to the Hebrew word, 'little bird,' from which her name is derived.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁴ James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2)," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, by Kenneth R. R Gros Louis, James Stokes Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville, Tenn./USA: Abingdon, ©1974-1982.), 104.

⁷⁹⁵ Ackerman, "The Literary," 104.

⁷⁹⁶ Ehrlich, A. B. 1908 *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* 1. Leipzig: Hinrichs, as quoted by Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 171.

⁷⁹⁷ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 173.

⁷⁹⁸ Ronald A. Veenker, "Forbidden Fruit: Ancient Near Eastern Sexual Metaphors," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 70/71 (1999-2000): 65, fn. 34.

⁷⁹⁹ Veenker, "Forbidden Fruit," 65, fn. 34.

⁸⁰⁰ In *De Vita Mosis* 1,15

⁸⁰¹ Louis H. Feldman, "Moses in Midian, According to Philo," *SHOFAR* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 7.

Zipporah signifies ‘bird.’ The marriage of Zipporah and Moses reunites two divided branches of the house of Abraham— Midian descended from Keturah (Gen 25: 1-3) and Israel from Sarah. There are a few similarities between Jacob and Moses. In comparison, Jacob was tricked into indentured labour for fourteen years as payment to take Rachel to be his wife. Zipporah was unconditionally given to Moses so quickly by Jethro. It can be noted that both Jacob and Moses tended the flocks of their fathers-in-law. They had children who became part of Laban and Jethro's respective households. Both, in the end, were requested by the Lord to get back to their homeland. Jacob left his father-in-law surreptitiously (Gen. 31:20). However, Moses wished to leave, and Jethro said, “go in peace” (Exod. 4:18). A common feature in Jacob and Moses is the social and religious interactions.⁸⁰²

5.3. Water Drawing Girls: Gender and Spatiality

In the Hebrew bible, gender plays a significant part in how the body and space interact. A few spaces are permitted for males while others are for females, thus “creating a cartography of gender and a set of thirdspace practices that can create and resist the construction of space while simultaneously they create and resist the social construction of gender.”⁸⁰³ The two concepts of gender and space are to be seen as relational—as a construction based on relation and demarcation i.e., the daughters of the townspeople in this narrative venture into the outdoor spaces—near wells. Bruce Malina states that “normally women went to draw water in the cool of the morning or the evening. They also did so in the company of other women, effectively making the well women's ‘private’ space when they were there.”⁸⁰⁴

Utilizing gender-ecocritical approaches, this chapter attempts to understand how space is gendered. The gendering of spaces is affected through the organization of perceptions, particularly of gazes and the body techniques that go along with them. There is a mutual interdependence between spaces and bodies. These girls relate to the water and the well in a special way because of this task's gender assignment, their potential knowledge of the water source, and the space around them.

⁸⁰² Karen Strand Winslow, “Ethnicity, Exogamy, and Zipporah,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 3.

⁸⁰³ Jon L. Berquist, “Part I- Spatial Constructs,” *Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World* in *Imagining Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 28.

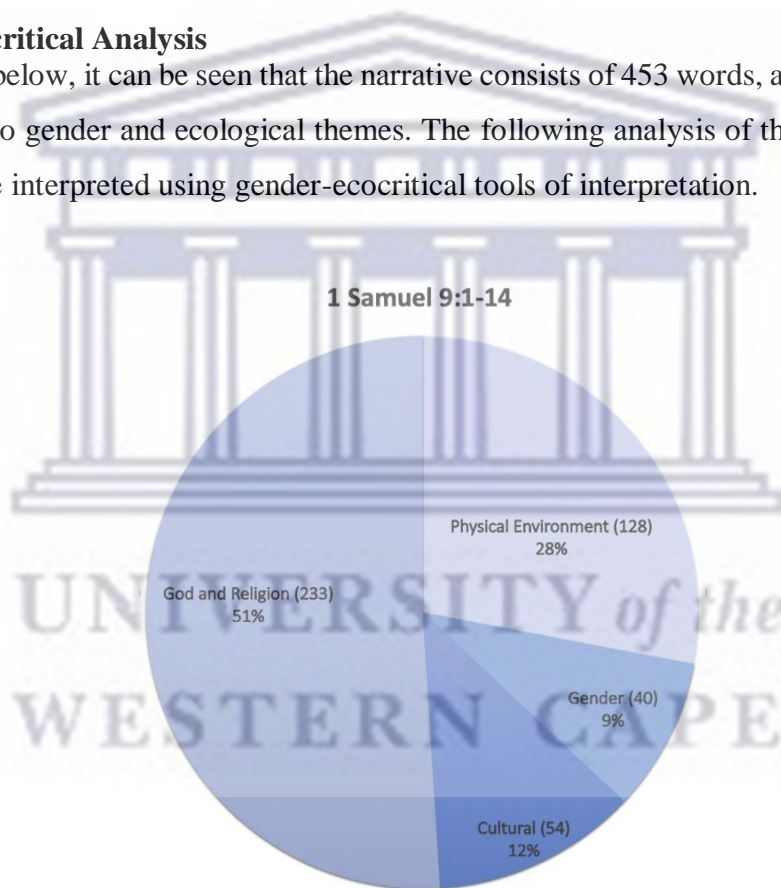
⁸⁰⁴ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, USA: Fortress Press, 1998), 98.

5.4 Translation of 1 Samuel 9:1-4

1 Samuel 9	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 1- 4	“There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. ² He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else. ³ Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father, had strayed. So Kish said to his son Saul, “Take one of the boys with you; go and look for the donkeys.” ⁴ He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then he passed through the land of Benjamin, but they did not find them.” ⁸⁰⁵

5.5 Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

In this pie-graph below, it can be seen that the narrative consists of 453 words, and space attributed to any reference to gender and ecological themes. The following analysis of the text reflects how the themes can be interpreted using gender-ecocritical tools of interpretation.



Each character in this narrative has equally significant roles—the lost donkeys, Saul, and his servant, the towns they cross, the girls on their way to the well, and the water well. From a gender perspective, it will be demonstrated how Saul’s brief interaction with the girls brings out their

⁸⁰⁵ 1 Samuel 9: 1- 4 New Revised Standard Version

multiple facets/potentials as they pass through at that geographical location. Saul and the boy journey through Ephraim's hill country, land of Shalishah, land of Shalim, land of Benjamin, land of Zuph. A gender-ecocritical reading of this narrative invokes various spaces, lands and the characters that occupy and move along the natural space setting. In this narrative, the identities of the water drawing girls are withheld— they are the daughters of the townspeople.

5.5.1 Saul—the Handsome and Tall

Saul is introduced here as a handsome and tall young man in his tireless search for his father's lost donkeys. The traditional genealogical account of his father and grandfather is given, plus a description of his wealth. According to Peter Ackroyd, 'better' may signify Saul's moral quality in comparison to everyone else, but the phrases that follow suggest superiority of physical beauty. The focus of Saul's physical attractiveness and great physique, according to McKane⁸⁰⁶ should be noted by readers. Modern masculinity, according to David Cline, suppresses male beauty in general in biblical commentary.⁸⁰⁷ Since the work of Hugo Gressmann, most scholars have agreed that this material is marked by folkloristic elements— indefinite time, an unnamed city, the motif of journeying and searching, and the ideal youth as a hero.⁸⁰⁸ Saul and the boy search for the lost animals.

5.5.2 The Lost Donkeys

The donkey is one of history's most often used and abused animals. Donkeys have lived with and worked for humans for thousands of years, since they were first domesticated in Africa.⁸⁰⁹ As a companion species they have the extraordinary ability to carry heavy loads of cargo and humans over long distances or in dry or rocky terrain. Therefore, they are especially prized, which explains their frequent presence in the biblical narratives and the loss of value to Saul's father, who is introduced as a wealthy man. Kish probably lost all of them.

⁸⁰⁶ William McKane, *I and II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentaries; London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 69

⁸⁰⁷ Peter Runham Ackroyd, *The Book of Samuel: The First Book* (Cambridge, UK: Univ. Press, 1971), 75

⁸⁰⁸ Bruce C. Birch, "The Development of the Tradition on the Anointing of Saul in I Sam 9:1-10:16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90, no. 01 (March 1971): 57-58.

⁸⁰⁹ Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, California/USA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 96-97.

5.5.3 The Lands Journeyed

Ephraim's hill country, which is of crucial importance to early Hebrew history, is a mystery. Some scholars identify it to be the modern village of et-Tayibeh on a hilltop north of Jerusalem. Others like W.F. Albright suggests that the location is Khirbet Marjameh near Kafr Malik. Moreover, Albright's localization of Rachel's tomb—one of the holiest sites in Judaism, within the necropolis of Wadi Samiyeh seems plausible.⁸¹⁰

Claud Conder notes that “the wanderings of Saul, who seeking asses found a kingdom form one of the most curious puzzles in scriptural topography, for the starting point is unknown, and the point to which he returned doubtful.”⁸¹¹ The city's location where Saul met the young girls and Samuel is undoubtedly the most perplexing inquiry in biblical geography. It could be Ramah, where Samuel normally lived and was buried. Ramah is located near Rachel's tomb, further in the “place where there is Zuph.” It is interesting to note that Elkanah or one of Samuel's ancestors is named Zuph coincidentally. It is also the place where Rachel is referenced as weeping for her children. There was an ascent to the city from Saul's path, down which the young girls would draw water meaning that on this side should be a water supply. There is a cistern on the northern side called Bir Auna and spring and trough named Hand Kibryan in the southwest of the hill. From one on these sides, Saul may have moved toward the city in this hill, and in the two cases, there is an ascent.⁸¹²

5.6 Translation of 1 Samuel 9: 5-10

1 Samuel 9	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 5-10	<p>⁵ “When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to the boy who was with him, “Let us turn back, or my father will stop worrying about the donkeys and worry about us.” ⁶ But he said to him, “There is a man of God in this town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he says always comes true. Let us go there now; perhaps he will tell us about the journey on which we have set out.” ⁷ Then Saul replied to the boy, “But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What have we?” ⁸ The boy answered Saul again, “Here, I have with me a quarter shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God, to tell us our way.” ⁹ (Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, “Come, let us go to the seer”; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.) ¹⁰ Saul said to the boy, “Good; come, let us go.” So they went to the town where the man of God was.”⁸¹³</p>

⁸¹⁰ Ehud Keinan, Andrew Abado & Robert West, “Where was the City of Ephraim?”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 147:3,2015, 220-229.

⁸¹¹ Claud R. Conder, “Saul’s Journey to Zuph,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 9:1, 1877, 37-40,

⁸¹² W. F. Birch, *The Nameless City*, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 15:1, 48-52.

⁸¹³ 1 Samuel 9: 5- 10 New Revised Standard Version

5.7. Ecocritical Analysis

5.7.1 The boy, and Saul

Their search is futile, and they resolve to consult a man of God in a nearby city. They run out of bread and discuss how they will pay for his advice—a practical concern, but literally a far-reaching statement.⁸¹⁴ The boy who joins Saul is an interesting companion. In the Bible, attendants are often obedient servants who carry out their master's wishes without question or argument. This boy, on the other hand, is obstinate and argumentative. When Saul expresses his desire to return home, the boy advises that he seek directions from the man of God. When Saul mentions his lack of funds, the boy offers him a quarter shekel of silver to give to him. Surprisingly, Saul accepts the secondary character's opinion, and they both travel to meet the man of God.⁸¹⁵

5.8 Translation of 1 Samuel 9: 11- 14

1 Samuel 9	English Translation (NRSV)
Verses 11- 14	¹¹ “As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and said to them, “Is the seer here?” ¹² They answered, “Yes, there he is just ahead of you. Hurry; he has come just now to the town, because the people have a sacrifice today at the shrine. ¹³ As soon as you enter the town, you will find him, before he goes up to the shrine to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.” ¹⁴ So they went up to the town. As they were entering the town, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the shrine.” ⁸¹⁶

5.9. Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

5.9.1. Girls Coming Out

As Saul and the servant boy approach the city, they meet young girls coming out from the hill to draw water.⁸¹⁷ The expression ‘coming out’ when associated with a daughter signifies danger.

⁸¹⁴ Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington, IN/USA: Indiana University Press, 1986), 53.

⁸¹⁵ Jonathan Jacobs, "The Role of the Secondary Characters in the Story of the Anointing of Saul (I Samuel IX-X)," *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 4/5 (2008): 496.

⁸¹⁶ 1 Samuel 9: 11- 14 (NRSV)

⁸¹⁷ Bruce C. Birch, *The First and Second Books of Samuel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, vol. 2, *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN/USA: Abingdon Press, ©1994-2004), 1038.

Mieke Bal comments that “if, for daughters, going outside implies danger, then staying inside should provide safety.”⁸¹⁸ Considering contemporary stories where there is much violence against women at water sources, her statement seems spot-on. Yet, the daughter’s water-fetching task’s inevitability does not find a respite even when there are negative consequences for the girls. The girls were busy drawing water and fetching it to their homes. It can be noted that until this moment, the narrative tempo is slow, but will quickly speed up as they are interrupted by Saul and the boy. The phrase, “As they went up the hill to the town,” indicates that the city was located at the top of the hill, perhaps for reasons of self-defense against enemies.

The water supply was at the foot of the ascent. The girls were descending the path to the well or spring outside of the city to draw water. Observing the girls going in and out of the city with their water jars on their shoulders is a picturesque sight. However, when we realize that they make about five to six trips carrying heavy pots of water uphill, we know that they are tired and weary. However, Saul does not offer to help the girls with drawing water as Moses and Jacob did. Being a man of wealth, he seems to just stand and ask them the way. John Oleson stated that the drawing of water was a proverbially tedious task, and as such, it was actually delegated to women.⁸¹⁹

William Thomson notes that “Syrian women carry the jar of water on their shoulders, although sometimes it is carried on the hip. Most Arabs of Palestine carry it upon their head.”⁸²⁰ As is still the custom, in Italy, Greece, and Turkey, women carried such loads on their heads, supported by a twisted kerchief, known as the potter’s knot.⁸²¹ In the region of Andhra Pradesh, in India, women carry water-pots on their heads and use a piece of cloth or the end of a saree to roll it into a knot to serve as a cushion on the head—it is called the *chutta kudhuru*. On the contrary, Eva Keuls notes that “men are only rarely shown carrying water pots, and when they do, they carry them not on their heads but on their shoulders.”⁸²² Fred Wight observed that “it was exceedingly uncommon to see a man carrying a pitcher of water, which is a woman’s task.”⁸²³

⁸¹⁸ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, Ill./USA: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 173.

⁸¹⁹ John Peter Oleson, “Water Works: Wells,” 1992, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, USA: Double Day, 1992), 6:885-886.

⁸²⁰ William McClure Thomson, *The Land of the Book* (New York, USA: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1860), 1:108.

⁸²¹ Thomson, *The Land*, 1:108.

⁸²² Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, 233.

⁸²³ Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago, USA: Moody Press, 1983), 90. (When Jesus instructed two of his disciples, “Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him” (Mark 14:13), They could easily identify the man—because men usually do not carry a pitcher of water.

Remarkably, Mercia Bachmann observes a distinction between the mistress, free women at risk, and the slave women tasked with water fetching. She comments that “the text does not indicate whether the girls coming out to fetch water are free women at risk or dependents working at someone else’s household.”⁸²⁴ She argues that “when other narratives of encounters at a well involve a woman, they will become essential characters and free.”⁸²⁵ This does not mean just significant characters fetched water; only significant ones were recorded in the biblical text. One may assume that both the free and the slave women would gather at the well, contingent upon the household's needs and the mistresses' preference to go herself or send a water-fetcher to the well if she had servants. Thus, she contends that ‘no decision can be made about the status of the girl-water-fetchers of the land of Zuph.’⁸²⁶ However, Carolyn Leeb observes that “the women mentioned here are free women at risk—Hagar was a runaway but later freed.”⁸²⁷

Eva Keuls contends “why the practice of carrying burdens on the head was regularly regarded as appropriate for women but not for men is one of the minor mysteries of the history of civilization.”⁸²⁸ The narrative evokes elements that have cultural connotations. These girls typically would have made about three to four trips ascending with heavy water pots on their heads or shoulders. Carol Meyers argues that their labor fits perfectly into the positive picture,⁸²⁹ while David Jobling supports her argument and mentions that they are free of exploitation, not alienated from their work, and secure in their group identity and happily at home in their natural setting.⁸³⁰ However, their toil and tediousness cannot be undermined. The girls have internalized their pain, which is promoted by patriarchal injunctions, and happily accept that role out of no other choice.

5.9.2. Girl’s Knowledge of their Space and Time

In common with all the people of Ramah, the girls knew all about Samuel and his comings and goings. Rabbinic interpretations view 1 Sam 9:13 as “the most extended verse in the chapter and

⁸²⁴ Mercia B. Bachmann, *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 136.

⁸²⁵ Bachmann, *Women at Work*, 136.

⁸²⁶ Bachmann, *Women at Work*, 136.

⁸²⁷ Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: The Social Location of Na'ar and Na'arah in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield academic Press, 2000), 135-136.

⁸²⁸ Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, 233.

⁸²⁹ Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50-52.

⁸³⁰ David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 180

one of the longest in Samuel. The narrator puts forty-four words in the mouths of the girls, all in response to a three-word question. The reader's impression is that the narrator is trying to highlight the girls' gabbling and garrulousness."⁸³¹ Rabbi Natan says, 'because women are talkative.' Rabbi Shemuel says, "they held forth in order to behold Saul's beauty." Modern scholars have proposed other literary explanations for the length of the girls' answer. S. Bar-Efrat maintains that "the verbosity detains the progress of the narrative just before the decisive encounter, thereby increasing the tension."⁸³² Gary Rendaburg comments that — "in their excitement over seeing the tall, handsome Saul, the girls prattle all at once, creating a cacophony of voices represented by the language of the text."⁸³³

The young girls' presence, and their overly long answers to Saul's questions, are intriguing. They may be understood as forming part of a betrothal type-scene, in which the young and handsome Saul approaches as a potential husband. Alter explains "that the girls note Saul's expression of bewilderment and confusion and therefore provide their detailed directions about where to find the prophet."⁸³⁴ The pieces of the type-scene all seem to fit, as Alter described: the foreign male visitor who meets women drawing water at the well. The scene is undermined as the women tell him to hurry to meet the seer, about whom he originally enquired. "The type-scene has been aborted. The hero swings away from the girls at the well to hurry after the man of God who will launch him on his destiny of disaster."⁸³⁵

It can be noted that women are the ones who are principally responsible for maintaining networks of neighbourhoods and kinship, and this they do by reciprocal exchanges of favors and goods. The girls know the seer. Though they do not name the seer as Samuel, it is clear that the seer-come-prophet is part of their lives, to the extent that they know where he can be found and his schedule of sacrifices.⁸³⁶ The young maidens may indeed have been interested in the good-

⁸³¹ Jonathan Jacobs, "The Role of Secondary Characters in the Anointing of Saul (1 Samuel ix-x)," *Vestus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 497.

⁸³² Bar-Efrat Shimon, *I Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), 139. As Quoted by Jonathan Jacobs, "The Role of Secondary Characters in the Anointing of Saul (1 Samuel ix-x)," *Vestus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 497.

⁸³³ Gary A. Rendaburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1999): 3.

⁸³⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 49.

⁸³⁵ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 61.

⁸³⁶ Neil Janes, "Today's Students- On King Saul: 1 Samuel 9: 1-14 Saul's Destiny Fulfilled; A Meeting of two Worlds," *European Judaism* 39, no. 1 (September 2006): 98, accessed August 11, 2016, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

looking Saul who stood before them.⁸³⁷ Terry Fenton argues that, while the maidens have an ‘unstoppable gush’ of excitement over the man standing before them who is to be anointed king, this should not be immediately understood as a type-scene.⁸³⁸

The girls are not just incidental to the narrative. Indeed, verses twelve and thirteen contain the most extended uninterrupted piece of speech by one character. The girls’ extended speech makes the reader’s anticipation almost unbearable. Furthermore, the girls’ description emphasizes Samuel’s role: the people wait to eat until he arrives with his guests to bless the offering. The girls talk the men around with a certain urgency, and this ought to make us sensitive to the aspect of time.

Also, important to note is their knowledge of the *cultus* and the community. The girls devote clauses to the sacrificial meal, which takes place at fixed times (annually). The girls focus in on their point of argument. They do not object to Saul and the boy meeting the seer, but they force them to intercept the seer while he is on his way, in his function as conductor of the ritual.⁸³⁹ What is fascinating about this is that it has both spatial and time aspects, they possess both spatial, social and time knowledge.

5.9.3. Wealthy Handsome and Tall Saul— Leaves the Girls

Saul’s character in this narrative is rather unexciting and passive despite the “wealthy, tall, and handsome” cliché he receives as an introduction. Walter Brueggemann does not mention anything about the water-girls but comments on Saul’s innocence in the text.⁸⁴⁰ The narrator—after the girls gave so many details about the Seer so succinctly to Saul, avoids narrating any further dialogue between them. This raises a few questions from a gender perspective on Saul’s gender performance in that particular space. Assumptions about masculinity are embedded in the text—prowess, strength, and capacity for violence and dominance over men. Male-female bonding and the ability to use relationships for personal advantage is another trait of a king. By subverting these assumptions, ‘the ambiguity regarding Saul’s portrayal as a leader and as a man becomes

⁸³⁷ Janes, “Today’s Students.”

⁸³⁸ Terry L. Fenton, “Deuteronomistic Advocacy of the Nabi: I Samuel IX 9 and Questions of Israelite Prophecy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 47, no. 1 (1997): 24. As Quoted by Neil Janes, “Today’s Students- On King Saul: 1 Samuel 9: 1-14 Saul’s Destiny Fulfilled; A Meeting of two Worlds,” *European Judaism* 39, no. 1 (September 2006): 98.

⁸³⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1981), 387.

⁸⁴⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1990), 72.

apparent at the beginning of his story itself.’⁸⁴¹Saul’s failure to locate the donkeys and the places he crossed in that process divulges his characterization as a failed king in the future.

To receive the girls' information and the immediate need to meet the seer about the lost donkeys is more vital than reciprocating with gratitude or extending the conversation. Therefore, Saul's gender role's anti-climax can be seen as reflected in his performance as the Hebrew King, as some scholars claim.⁸⁴² Typically, any “encounter at the well” can be viewed as a natural prelude to romance and marriage, and in Saul's failure to fulfill the paradigm, the reader is at liberty to estimate his future success as a king, which apparently ended adversely for him. However, as is evident, future Israelite kings like David or Solomon display a human side of themselves, especially in reciprocating or initiating conversations with stranger women. It could progress from being casual, romantic, sexual or marital.

In his novel, ‘Saul,’ Terry Morgan reinterprets and retells the founding of the kingdom of Israel. He gives a new twist to Saul's encounter of the water-drawing girls at the exit of the city gates and instead weaves it as a story of love. He fills in this missing piece in his novel on Saul. He takes the line that the winners write history, and so investigates the idea that Israel's first king was not as vile and cruel as the Bible portrays him, and so describes the same incidents as the Book of Samuel, but with different interpretations. He artistically uses his imagination to extend Saul’s dialogue with one particular water-drawing girl, Talitha, which progresses into a romantic one, but even here, it does not end on a positive note, because again, she is promised to some other man by her father. The space in that geographical region was familiar to the girls moving with their water pots in groups. Perhaps it was the narrator's reflection whose sole intent was Saul, leaving out the possible hidden meanings contained in each of the information provided by the water-drawing girls.

5.10. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the dangers near water sources. The story of Zipporah and her sisters, and the water drawing girls are filled with vivid images that draws attention to the conflicts and dangers near the wells and water sources. The realities of sexual violence, daughters encounter at the wells and have their counterpart stories in today's world. The male monopoly of

⁸⁴¹ Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 57.

⁸⁴² Fenton, "Deuteronomistic Advocacy," 25, n.4. Fenton thinks that this is over-imaginative.

water sources and how women struggle at water wells was also discussed. The gender dynamics that play a significant role in understanding how water continues to be a center of conflict. The use of gender-ecocritical strategies facilitated reading of these stories to elicit new meanings that recognize those dangers and issues. The knowledge the water-drawing girls possess and demonstrate is an important detail in this story. Such elements become crucial to an ecocritical reader. In the following chapter, the theme of water symbolism will be further expanded by exploring the Johannine understanding of water and water innuendo in the story of the Samaritan woman.



CHAPTER 6: Woman of Samaria and Jesus - Water Innuendo

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the Johannine story in John 4 of the Samaritan woman who comes to draw water from Jacob's well where Jesus is sitting, tired out by his journey. The New Testament synoptic gospels, and particularly the gospel of John, use water as a literary symbol to enhance the reader's memory of similar happenings in early Jewish history. It can be observed that the gospel writers found it vital to use water metaphors to tell a story. Calum Carmichael notes that "water symbolism and the true nature of worship constitute two central motifs that are woven into its narration."⁸⁴³ He argues that "the meeting at the well begins as a dialogue about water but slowly culminates into one of worship."⁸⁴⁴

6.2 Methodology

This chapter attempts to highlight the New Testament metaphorical usage of water and its significance in conveying spiritual truths about the person of Jesus. The statement "I am the living water" made by Jesus indicates Jesus as water — which symbolizes the life-giving properties and the quenching aspects of his personality. As envisaged in the previous chapters, traditional readings of the Samaritan woman at the well are brought forth first to demonstrate how those readings have focused on religious symbolism. Traditional scholarship has not given proper attention to how the narrator depicts the natural environment. So, gender and ecocritical reading strategies are deployed to draw new meanings from this narrative. The last section will point towards the politics of water scarcity and thirst in the global scenario.

6.3 A Relatable Observation— Narrativization of Mary in Luke's Gospel

It is worth noting that several details regarding the characterization of Mary are omitted in the New Testament Synoptic tradition. It is important to recognize Mary's marginalization in the Synoptic gospels as it is pertinent to the analysis of the Samaritan woman narrative in this chapter. The Protoevangelium of James,⁸⁴⁵ a second-century apocryphal text, states that "She took her jar and

⁸⁴³ Calum M. Carmichael, "Marriage and the Samaritan Woman," *New Testament Studies* 26: 3 (1980): 332

⁸⁴⁴ Carmichael, "Marriage and the Samaritan," 332.

⁸⁴⁵ The text of *Prot. Jas.* is about the illegitimacy of Jesus and Mary's sexual virtue by underscoring her purity and virginity—both before and after the conception and birth of Jesus. It also builds on this theme by invoking Anna and Joachim, her friends, who are also concerned about Mary's honest conduct. Joseph is depicted as a guardian and caretaker before he is Mary's spouse and is sexually related to her. (Chalsi Eastman, "Mary's Honour in The

went out to fetch water.”⁸⁴⁶ In Nazareth, the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation is situated just above the water spring. It is believed that Mary previously heard the holy messenger Gabriel's voice there. This spring is referenced in the compositions of travelers to Nazareth throughout the hundreds of years. It is considered to be the location where Jesus' mother sent him to collect water when he was six years old, as described in Thomas' infancy Gospel.⁸⁴⁷

The Greek Orthodox believe that Mary, the water-fetcher meets the angel as she returns from the spring water—well. In some of the pseudo-gospels that were popular in the Middle Ages, Mary receives Annunciation when she goes with her pitcher to draw water from a fountain and another while she was weaving⁸⁴⁸. She gets frightened and runs home.⁸⁴⁹

6.4 The Samaritan woman and Jesus (John 4: 4-15)

The scene recalls the earlier meetings at wells of Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, and also Saul and the water-drawing girls. Lyle Eslinger outlines three features of this narrative. First, the story is structured on a common Old Testament motif of a man and a woman meeting at a well. Second, there are double meanings in the conversation between Jesus and the woman; and third, there is a gap in rationale and subject discussion from John 4:16 onwards, where the discussion changes from water and drinking to the Messiah and the Jewish religion.⁸⁵⁰ Eslinger contends that by structuring the story on a recurrent pattern, the narrator hints to the reader about a similar outcome at the ending of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman.⁸⁵¹ Insinuations to marriage texts have additionally been recognized in this episode at the well. Jerome H. Neyrey and Calum M. Carmichael agree that this scene insinuates the Jacob and Rachel story. François-Marie Braun and Marie-Emile Boismard call attention to a few verbal similitudes between this scene and the Abraham's servant and Rebekah scene. E. C. Hoskyns and Gerhard Friedrich perceive an inference to Moses and Zipporah's experience, as referenced by Josephus in his *Antiques* 2.257.

Protoevangelium of James" (Master's thesis, University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University College, 2016), iii.)

⁸⁴⁶ Protevangelium of James 11:4 as cited by Veselin Kesich and Lydia W. Kesich, *Treasures of the Holy Land: A Visit to the Places of Christian Origins* (Crestwood, NY/USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Pr., 1985), 32-33.

⁸⁴⁷ Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: L-Z* (excluding Tyre) (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140-143.

⁸⁴⁸ Charles Bertram Lewis, "The Origin of the Weaving Songs and the Theme of the Girl at the Fountain," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 37, no. 2 (June 1922): 150-151.

⁸⁴⁹ Rip Cohen, "Girl in the Dawn: Textual Criticism and Poetics," *Portuguese Studies* 22, no. 2 (2006): 180.

⁸⁵⁰ Lyle M. Eslinger, "The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader and Reader-Response Criticism," *Literature and Theology* 1, no. 2 (September 1987): 168.

⁸⁵¹ Eslinger, "The Wooing," 168.

Aileen Guilding, however, suggests that John alludes to Exod. 2:15–22 alongside one of the Genesis stories. Annie Jaubert suggests that they allude to the Zipporah and Rachel stories. Among the numerous scholars who read John 4:4–42 as a “betrothal type-scene” are P. Joseph Cahill, R. Alan Culpepper, Paul D. Duke, and Jeffrey Lloyd Staley.⁸⁵²

In the interpretations of all the scholars mentioned above, the feature of water-fetching as a task is not discussed.

6.4.1 Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

In this pie graph, I have projected the total number of words found in John 4: 6- 15. There is a vast scope that represents the gender and ecological features.



⁸⁵² P. Joseph Cahill, “Narrative Art in John IV,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 2 (1982): 41– 48; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 136; Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 101–3; Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The Print’s First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 98–102.

6.4.2 Translation of John 4: 6-8

John 4	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 6- 8	⁶ “Jacob’s Well was there, Jesus tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)” ⁸⁵³

6.4.3 Gender-Ecocritical Analysis

Jesus’ meeting and the dialogue with the woman of Samaria transpose into multiple intensities of meanings—starting from a normal request for water to drink to eventually ending in innuendo of religious connotations. The dialogue between Jesus and the woman is rich in water symbolism and progresses into multiple meanings. Jacob's well is a historically significant space locale for both the Samaritans and the Jewish people. The mention of noon indicates the weather situation around that geographical region, which was perhaps warm and sunny. This well scene, according to Winsome Munroe, alludes to Hagar's well because of the time of day, noontime, when Hagar placed her child behind a bush for shade from the sun.⁸⁵⁴ Similarly, the Samaritan woman's revelatory dialogue with Jesus takes place at noon, the height of the day, in contrast to Jesus' time of dialogue with Nicodemus, which took place in the darkness of night.⁸⁵⁵

6.4.3.1 The Well of Sychar (Jacob’s well)

Here, the location of the well, the land of Sychar holds the water, and the land is dependent on the water’s life-giving qualities for its survival and the animal and botanic world that dwells in it.⁸⁵⁶ Sychar is modern Askar, marked by conflicts since ancient days. The mention of Jacob’s well by the Samaritan woman invokes the historical detail found in Genesis 34:10, 21, 23 - The deal Jacob’s clan had with the men of Shechem to trade livestock, property and animals. Likewise, they also decide to exchange daughters in marriage: “let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters.”⁸⁵⁷ In hindsight, these episodes bring to mind the location where Jesus

⁸⁵³ John 4: 6- 8 *New Revised Standard Version*.

⁸⁵⁴ Winsome Munroe, "The Pharisee and the Samaritan in John: Polar or Parallel?," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (October 1995): 719.

⁸⁵⁵ Munroe, "The Pharisee" 719.

⁸⁵⁶ Alan Cadwallader, "Give the Girl a Drink: Reading John 4 from a Dry Parched Land," in *Water: A Matter of Life and Death*, ed. Norman C. 1932- Habel and Peter L. Trudinger (Hindmarsh, S. Aust.: ATF Press, 2011), 101.

⁸⁵⁷ Gen. 34: 21b (NRSV)

converses with the Samaritan woman. It also reminds us that water is essential for such trade to transpire.

6.4.3.2 A Samaritan Woman Came to Draw Water

Because she lived under the Mosaic Law and possessed the farm Jacob gave to his son Joseph, she refers to Jacob as their father in verse 12.⁸⁵⁸ At midday, the woman at the well was exhausted, she desired rest at a shade, and the woman finds herself again at the well. St. Augustine interprets the woman's feeling:

“She is delighted with the thought of thirsting no more, and fancies that this was promised to her by her Lord after a carnal sense; which it will be indeed, but in the resurrection of the dead. She desired it now. She sighed for it, desiring to have no want, no toil. To be always coming to the fountain, to be burdened with a weight with which to supply her want, and, when that which she had drawn is spent, to be obliged to return again: this was a daily toil to her; because that want of hers was to be relieved, not extinguished. Such a gift as Jesus promised delighted her; she asks him to give her living water.”⁸⁵⁹

St. Augustine recognizes her thirst, her strenuous task of water-fetching, the weight of the burden of water, and the fact that she desired not to come back to the well to draw water again. Rudolph Bultmann comments that the Samaritan woman defies cultural expectations by being at the well at an unconventional hour and, more importantly, alone.⁸⁶⁰ Stuart Dean observes that “she appears at an odd time of day with no one else around and manifests an inquisitive, independent mind.”⁸⁶¹ Christina Peppard points out that “to the Samaritan woman, what water is, is the same for women throughout the world today— it is the life-defining work.”⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁸ St. Bede, Quoted in Thomas Aquinas, John Henry Newman, and Aidan Nichols, *Catena Aurea: A Commentary on the Four Gospels*, repr. ed. (London, UK: Saint Austin Press, 1999), na.

⁸⁵⁹ St. Augustine Aurelius, “Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John.,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, comp. Philip Schaff, St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom 1 (Grand Rapids, MI/USA: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1819-1893), 7:164. Christiana Peppard paraphrases it thus: “She heaved a great sigh, longing to be done with the need, longing to be done with the toil. Time and again she was constrained to come to that well, and to carry the load on which met her need, to come back again when what she had drawn was finished. This was her daily toil, because the water assuaged that need, but did not extinguish it”

⁸⁶⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, ed. Rupert William Noel Hoare and John Kenneth Riches (Philadelphia, USA: Westminster Press, 1976), 178 fn. 2, 179 fn. 4. Bultmann correlates this episode to a Buddhist counterpart set in the second or third century CE, focusing on the water-drawing girl from the untouchable *Chandala* Hindu caste who is approached by Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple, for a drink of water. Because she is aware of her caste's role in dealing with the disposal of corpses, the girl cautions him that if he drinks the water she gives, he may become contaminated. Despite this, he drinks the water, ignoring her caste.

⁸⁶¹ Stuart Dean to Feminism & Religion web forum, “Jesus, the Woman at the Well, and the Meaning of 'Man,’” November 30, 2013, accessed February 4, 2021.

⁸⁶² Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water - Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY/USA: Orbis Books (usa), 2014), 179.

John Donahue notes that “while a woman coming to draw water at noontime is not surprising, the request of Jesus, a lone male addressing a woman in public, is shocking.”⁸⁶³ We can only grasp the sense of the narrative by following through on the sexual symbolism of the conversation about water.⁸⁶⁴ Early on, Carmichael pointed out that “the term ‘water’ in Jesus’ request to the Samaritan woman, ‘Give me to drink,’ is understood and is consequently one clue that a figurative sense is intended.”⁸⁶⁵ The narrator, by ignoring the detail about the Samaritan woman indeed giving the water, and Jesus accepting the water to drink and quenching his thirst, converts the trajectory of the story into Jesus’ talk about the living water, and also creates a living-water-vacuum that necessitates the Samaritan woman to ask for the living water. The shift from Jesus’ need for water to the Samaritan woman’s need for the living water is thus an innuendo. Surekha Nelvala emphatically explains that “the author [sic], however, succeeded for centuries in diverting the reader’s attention away from seeing Jesus as the one in desperate need and actually indulging in drinking water that is drawn from the vessel of the Samaritan woman.”⁸⁶⁶

6.4.4 Translation of John 4: 9-11

John 4	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 9- 10	⁹ “The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ⁸⁶⁷

6.4.4.1 Racial Differences and Water Conflicts

The Samaritan woman’s description of Jesus as a Jew initially polarizes both their identities. She distances Jesus from the water and herself, thereby creating tension. Here water and the woman are inaccessible to Jesus. It must be noted that the Judean’s rejection of the Samaritans is rooted in the event narrated in 2 Kings 17. This story reports the conquest of Samaria by Assyria and the subsequent deportation of its inhabitants (2 Kings 17: 5-6). The Assyrians conquered and exiled

⁸⁶³ John R. Donahue, “High Noon,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, February 25, 2002, 39.

⁸⁶⁴ Calum M. Carmichael, *The Story of Creation: Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* (Ithaca, NY/USA: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 106.

⁸⁶⁵ Calum M. Carmichael, “Marriage and the Samaritan Woman,” *New Testament Studies* 26, no. 3 (April 1980): 336, fn. 16.

⁸⁶⁶ Surekha Nelvala, “Jesus Asks the Samaritan Woman for a Drink: A Dalit Feminist Reading of John 4,” *Lectio Difficilior* 1 (2007): 12.

⁸⁶⁷ John 4: 9- 10 New Revised Standard Version.

the northern kingdom's elite in 722 BCE and repopulated the Samaritan region with people from throughout the empire. According to Gary Burge, the remnant of the defeated Jews of the northern kingdom intermarried with other conquered people such as Persians and Arabians.⁸⁶⁸

Raymond Brown argues that “this hypothesis makes Samaritans a mixed-race descending from two groups—the remnant of the native Israelites who were not deported at the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the foreign colonists brought in from Babylonia and Media by Assyrian conquerors of Samaria.”⁸⁶⁹ Viewed as a mixture of different tribes, “the Samaritans were no longer considered pure Israelites by the Judeans.”⁸⁷⁰ Moreover, John Burge argues that “this mixture rendered the land religiously impure,”⁸⁷¹ so that the Samaritans were considered by the Judean authorities to be outside the covenant people of Israel,⁸⁷² indeed as more defiled than Gentiles, and “their cultic worship was regarded as invalid and defiled.”⁸⁷³ L. Jayachitra in her postcolonial reading of this narrative interprets the colonial elements inherent in this deep antipathy between the Jews and Samaritans and opines that Jesus himself seemed to lean towards a colonial viewpoint. She says:

“While the Jews faced opposition under the Roman colonialism, their attitude to Samaritans represents another dimension of colonial trends in John’s gospel. The antipathy between Jews and Samaritans was deeply rooted, going back to the origins of the Samaritans as a mixed race, settled in the northern kingdom by the king of Assyria (see 2 Kings 17:24-41). The Samaritans nevertheless viewed themselves as true Israel, and heirs of the promises of God to Israel, and their version of the Pentateuch as the original one, direct from Moses! However, the Jews looked down upon the Samaritans as impure and uncivilized! Jesus’ request for drinking water may sound as per the first impression, a denial of his imperial status, but this impression does not last long. In the following verse (v.10), Jesus seems to project a pro-colonial attitude by presenting a better commodity in his custody – the living water! This demand clearly downgrades the Samaritan woman as she is left with the menial well water in contrast to the “living water.” The Samaritan woman’s logical question in v.11 reveals Jesus’ incapability of providing her water without a bucket to draw water. Furthermore, she questions the superiority of this alien Jew in

⁸⁶⁸ Gary M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary: from Biblical Text ... to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich./USA: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 140-141.

⁸⁶⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, pbk. ed. (New Haven, Conn./USA: Doubleday, 2006), 170.

⁸⁷⁰ Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1987), 3.

⁸⁷¹ Burge, *John: The NIV Application*, 140-141.

⁸⁷² James D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect* (Cambridge, MA/USA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 88-89, Pummer, *The Samaritans*, 3.

⁸⁷³ Rose Mukansengimana-Nyirimana and Jonathan A. Draper, "The Peacekeeping Role of the Samaritan Woman in John 4: 1-42: A Mirror and Challenge to Rwandan Women," *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012): 300.

Samaria over against her ancestor Jacob. Here we witness an anti-colonial struggle for liberation from the colonizing powers, which try to dominate over the native heritage.”⁸⁷⁴

In this part of the scene, the woman who is alone with Jesus quickly realizes her marginalized predicament; and reasons out the normative behavior between the Jews and the Samaritans. The narrator qualifies this by noting things shared in common—water being the common resource. To the woman, it appears as if Jesus is violating an ethnic rule by asking for the water he is not entitled to. Clearly, it is apparent that geographic, ethnic, and religious conflicts are categories that divide their proximity. The Jews would stay away from the women of Samaria, who, they pronounced, were unclean from birth. In some records, even requesting water from a woman could be decoded as philandering with her. This might be particularly the situation if she had come alone at an odd time. Jesus violates his conventions and facilitates a situation of risk. The ill will among Jews and the Samaritans was notable. On rare events, it even prompted fights and bloodshed requiring Roman mediations. (Just as in India caste conflicts in the proximity to and access for water causes bloodshed). The woman initially challenges Jesus on realistic grounds in ethnic/social terms. It was known that under Jewish law, even her water vessel was viewed as impure for Jewish drinking.⁸⁷⁵ Philip Peacock points out that this is “indicative of a practice of untouchability relating to the purity/pollution codes of that time.”⁸⁷⁶ He further draws the parallel from this to India’s caste system that “has historically played a major role in the politics of water.”⁸⁷⁷ This cultural antipathy between Jews and Samaritans not sharing vessels is reminiscent of the caste purity and pollution practices that views the vessels used by Dalits as polluting and therefore not to be touched by upper castes.

In her dialogue with Jesus, she recounts the power of Jacob to whom the well originally belonged. It also recalls his daughter whose virginity her brothers and father failed to safeguard—and the subsequent killing of all his men, including Shechem.⁸⁷⁸ Their failure to protect their sister is a mark on their masculinity.⁸⁷⁹ Hence the expression “our daughter” in verse 12 indicates that

⁸⁷⁴ L. Jayachitra, “A Postcolonial Exploration of ‘Water’ in John’s Gospel”, in *Waters of Life and Death*, ed. Sam P. Mathew and Chandran Paul Martin (Delhi, India: UELCI/ISPCK, 2005), 249.

⁸⁷⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Westmont, IL/USA: IntersVarsity Press, 2014), 259

⁸⁷⁶ Peacock, “Water Conflict” 55.

⁸⁷⁷ Peacock, “Water Conflict” 55.

⁸⁷⁸ These deep animosities also bring to mind the episode of Dinah and Shechem in Genesis 34. The consequence of Shechem’s defilement of Dinah was avenged by her brothers (Gen. 34: 5).

⁸⁷⁹ According to Tikva Frmyer-Kensky, it is the male family members’ prerogative and responsibility to protect the girl’s virginity. Girls are strictly guarded, and infractions are severely punished. Female chastity becomes a gauge of

Dinah was their possession, and she was violated, and so their killing of the men of the city of Shechem is justified. Alan Cadwallader remarks that “Dinah, the water and the land are narratively and socioeconomically regarded as one.”⁸⁸⁰ In this paradigm—the water, daughters, and the land—are protected and safeguarded, by men. Setting aside all these animosities in the context of Jesus’s thirst—she lets go of the water from these holding-back ideologies by pouring him a drink. She shares the water. She willingly surrenders these grudges that hold back the water from Jesus being satiated. Water is not to be withheld using power to control but to be released to the thirsty one.

Similar patterns of animosity due to purity and pollution codes are prevalent in many rural areas of India. Indian cinema captures these incidences of caste rivalries at the wells and portrays them in social message movies and mainstream media. Katti Padma Rao recalls the Karamchedu Massacre, which erupted due to a trivial fight between two castes over the abuse of water from a drinking water source belonging to the Dalits. They washed unclean buffaloes and rice in their buckets. A Dalit boy objected to that, and it angered the upper caste youths. It erupted into a fight. A woman named Munnangi Suvatha came to collect drinking water from the pond. When she noticed the young Dalit boy being assaulted, she protected him by raising the water pot in self-defense. Her raising the water pot became a symbol of resistance to the upper caste domination. What followed was the most heinous massacre, the rape of Dalit women.



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the social worth of the family and its men. Because "real men" have the courage and cunning to protect their women, males whose female relationships have been defiled are thought to lack these qualities. See Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York, NY/USA: Schocken Books, 2004), 185.

⁸⁸⁰ Cadwallader, "Give the Girl," 105.

Liquid Tragedy: Karamchedu 1985

Buffalo Baths. Urine. Bullshit
Drinking Water for the Dalits
The very same Pond.
Practice for eons.
A bold Dalit lady
dares to question injustice.
Hits forth with her pot. Her indignation
is avenged. Fury let loose. Violence. Rapes.
Killings. Self-seeking politicians shamelessly
consult History—'If there was a way out then,
there shall be a way out now.' Succor arrives with
Esteemed Father of our Nation. His *Samaadhi* speaks:
If Harijans don't get water in this village, let them
set on a sojourn elsewhere. The rotten example
is obeyed. Casting behind cruel memories
Dalits exit—weary of the persecution
And wander all over the nation.
Again, a Dalit Exodus.
Total Surrender.

In this poignant poem by Ilaveni Meena Kandasamy, we find a symbol of the oppressed groups of women and girls who are water fetchers. As Professor Anoop Varrier observes:

The women who dare to protest against this crime with a vessel are the key of this poem. It is highly symbolic in the sense that the vessel used to hold the drinking water for the Dalits, which the women used to hit; this poem is like the same vessel that sharply smashes the society for its discriminations. Thus this vessel shape of the poem clearly explaining what the poet basically intends to express.⁸⁸¹

Another scholarly piece by Vinodhini, *Daaham* translated “Thirst,” is a 2005 Telugu play that has occupied an essential spot in Indian art history, written by a woman from the Dalit community. This is a story about people's thirst. The plot unfolds when upper-caste women beat up a mother for fetching water at the well. It signifies the role of “water” that is constantly controlled and manipulated as an instrument of oppression of vulnerable peoples. It also alludes to the future intrigues of the geopolitics of water. The narrative references the dialectical relationship between women and water—a bonding that obtains a gendered subalternity. Even though subalternity is related to the lowest socioeconomic classes and castes, all women are depicted as subalterns. Quarrels and fights over well-water are very common in India. The upper caste people

⁸⁸¹ Anoop S. Varrier, “A Raging Voice against Marginalization in Meena Kandaswami's Poems Liquid Tragedy and Another Paradise Lost,” *Global English-Oriented Research Journal* 1, no. 4 (March 2016): 52.

monopolize the space and the water and restrict it from Dalit women who bear a lot of exclusive discriminative practices in water sharing due to no fault of theirs.⁸⁸²

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha note that the treatment of gender often transcends “class/caste, especially regarding common concerns such as water, food, shelter, security, and experience of violence.”⁸⁸³ Women have been at the forefront of initiating activism for environmental issues and water conservation in particular—the *Chipko* Movement is one example.⁸⁸⁴ The Silent Valley and Save the Forest Movements, Navadanya and Aranyani Movements in India—all, for what Vandana Shiva calls, “reclaiming Terra Mater” toward the prosperity of all.⁸⁸⁵ On March 26, 1986, Medha Patkar, who was instrumental in mobilizing the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save River Narmada Movement), was detained for protesting the Narmada Control Authority's plan to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam without rehabilitating the villagers who had been displaced. The two dams, Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar, would evict 300,000 people, the most of whom would be hapless peasants and tribals. The entire absorption of woods, including good habitats for endangered species, could inflict immense ecological devastation.⁸⁸⁶

Vandana Shiva echoes these ideas, emphasizing the important role women can and should play in water management. While discussing this in “Women and Vanishing Waters,” she argues that:

“Water management has been transformed from the management of an integrated water cycle by those who participate in it, particularly women, into the exploitation of water with dams, reservoirs and canals by experts and technocrats in remote places, with masculinist minds . . . the masculinist mind, by wanting to tame and control every river in ignorance of nature’s ways, is, in fact, sowing the seeds of large scale desertification and famine.”⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸² See Elyse Wanshel to *The Huffington Post* newsgroup, “After His Wife Was Denied Water, Man Spent 40 Days Digging a Well during Drought,” May 11, 2016, accessed August 16, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dalit-man-bapurao-tajne-digs-well-40-days-wife-denied-water-drought_us_573223bce4b096e9f092e1d8.

⁸⁸³ Tutun Mukherjee, “How Fares the Well? A Study of the Interstices of the Welfare State: Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People* (1943), Mahasweta Devi's *Jal/Water* (1976), and Vinodini's *Daaham/Thirst* (2005),” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, July 2017, 3.

⁸⁸⁴ Women of the *Chipko* Movement gathered in Tehri with empty water-pots on World Environment Day, 1979. The women protested against water scarcity and the men involved in making decisions for water management. They questioned the use of concrete and metal pipes that were used to construct tanks and pipes.

⁸⁸⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: South End Press, 2010), 218.

⁸⁸⁶ Mukherjee, “How Fares,” 3.

⁸⁸⁷ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: South End Press, 2010), 176, 184.

The water-gender relations are complex, multifaceted, and diverse, epitomized in the struggles of the poor women who live at the mercy of the welfare state.

6.4.4.2 Cross-Gender Conversation

The text is unequivocal about the gender boundaries between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Jesus' disciples were already 'surprised' that Jesus violated that boundary by conversing with her. A few scholars observe that 'such cross-gender conversations did occur despite the moral regulations of some conservative pietists.'⁸⁸⁸ The sages wrote about this probably because the dangers of these sexually ambiguous circumstances could prompt further sin.⁸⁸⁹ They were also 'concerned about spectators' misinterpretations, even if those conversations were between one's wife or sister.'⁸⁹⁰ Likewise, traditional Greek culture normally viewed it as 'shameful' for a wife to be seen talking to a young man.⁸⁹¹ Carol Delaney observes that—"even today, in traditional Middle Eastern societies, social intercourse between unrelated men and women is almost equivalent to sexual intercourse."⁸⁹²

Using a social-scientific lens, Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh provide some insights into this specific conversation's politics in a public space— Jacob's well. They state that:

"In the world of the eastern Mediterranean antiquity, at least among the elite, space was carefully divided according to gender. Males belonged in public space, females in private spaces. Males performed tasks appropriate to males, either out of doors or in public spaces beyond the home. Females performed tasks appropriate to females, usually indoors and inside the circle of the family. Interactions between men and women outside the family circle were carefully controlled and subject to a variety of norms. In some cases, there was even an elected official called *gynaikinomos* charged with regulating this interaction. In some regions during the first century, women were still veiled in public places (1 Cor. 11: 5-6), thus maintaining their "private" space while out of the house. Women did not talk to males outside the family when in public. The disciples therefore were astonished when they discover Jesus talking with a woman in a public place."⁸⁹³

⁸⁸⁸ Robert Gordon Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John*, JSNTS 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 132.

⁸⁸⁹ Wisdom of Sirach 9:9—"Sit not at all with another man's wife, nor sit down with her in your arms, and spend not your money with her at the wine; lest your heart incline to her, and so through your desire you fall into destruction." ; 42: 12—"Behold not every body's beauty, and sit not in the midst of women."

⁸⁹⁰ Craig S. Keener, "Some New Testament Invitations to Ethnic Reconciliation," *Evangelical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2003): 197.

⁸⁹¹ Craig S. Keener, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, vol. 2A, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 73. Quoted from Euripides, *Electra*, ed. Edward P. Coleridge (n.p.: Perseus Digital Library, 1891), 343-344.

⁸⁹² Carol Delaney, 'Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame', 35-48 in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David D. Gilmore, AAA 22 (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 43.

⁸⁹³ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, USA: Fortress Press, 1998), 104-105.

Malina and Rohrbaugh further suggest that “while there could be much variety in particulars, gender seclusion was prevalent throughout the eastern Mediterranean world of ancient times—at any rate among the elites. The others copied their cultural patterns.”⁸⁹⁴ The distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ space is also connected to gender—in that both as a female and as a native, the unnamed Samaritan woman is to be separated from a male who is of another geographical location despised by the Samaritans. Jerome Neyrey notes that females are seen as belonging to the private space, which includes the home and spaces associated with household tasks, such as ovens and wells.⁸⁹⁵ Such attention to sexual and geographical orientation was a typical knowledge included in the social interaction in the Johannine context.⁸⁹⁶

6.4.4.3 Water Euphemism

The euphemistic usage of words is a dominant style pertaining to the Gospel of John. E. Richard observes that “John uses various literary devices in his Gospel to communicate his theology to his readers. One literary device which has not been as broadly noted is John's use of a technique in which Jesus is misunderstood by his hearers, frequently through the use of words or phrases which can be understood in more than one way or on more than one level.”⁸⁹⁷ John presents Jesus as speaking at a spiritual level, while his hearers hear him in a literal or natural level.⁸⁹⁸ Jesus is portrayed as saying one thing, and yet it appears that the narrator has no clue as to what meaning the reader’s imagination might decipher. The criticality of this rhetoric has given rise to many interpretations of the Samaritan woman’s perception of water. The meanings have sexual connotations considering the cross-sexual nature of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. For instance, Carmichael has interpreted “living water” that Jesus offers to the Samaritan women as just this type of a deliberate conjugal reference. He argues that ‘such an interpretation is based on the euphemistic use of words such as “cistern,” “well,” “fountain,” in the Hebrew Bible and the application of such euphemistic terms for God's relationship with Israel. Both Carmichael

⁸⁹⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-science Commentary*, 104-105.

⁸⁹⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, "What's Wrong with this Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (May 1, 1994): 79. Jorunn Økland draws on Neyrey's concept that "the ancient worlds were divided into 'male' and 'female' space according to cultural perceptions of gender." She applies his logic to her discussion of the 'veil as boundary,' in which even objects are also defined as male or female. The woman who wears a veil is spatially confined to an enclosed space wherein the veil creates a barrier between the private and public. See Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 2005), 191.

⁸⁹⁶ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-science Commentary*, 98.

⁸⁹⁷ E. Richard, “Expressions of Double Meaning and their Function in Gospel of John,” *New Testament Studies* 31, no. 96 (1985), 96.

⁸⁹⁸ E. Richard, “Expressions of Double.” 96.

and Lyle Eslinger point to a euphemistic use of these terms in the relationship between God and the people of Israel.⁸⁹⁹ The author counsels in Proverbs 5: 15–18, which has a larger context dealing with the “looseness” of “strange” woman—

“Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.”⁹⁰⁰

Likewise, Song of Solomon 4: 15 refers to the woman and “the well of living water.” This sexual imagery is raised to a divine level when used to depict God’s relationship with Israel. In the book of Jeremiah, for instance in Jer. 2:13, after a passage that portrays Jerusalem as the bride of God, it says:

“They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water and dug for themselves cracked reservoirs which can hold no water.”⁹⁰¹

In Carmichael’s perception “the story of Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well,” he refers to it as “a sexual encounter because of the sexual symbolism of the water.”⁹⁰² Water, according to Carmichael, ‘is biblically associated with female sexuality.’⁹⁰³ Therefore, he argues that when Jesus invites the woman to partake of living water, he is in effect seducing her.⁹⁰⁴ However, rather than pursuing a sexual relationship with her once he seduces her, he recreates her as a well of living water. As a newly recreated being herself, the woman then reproduces by creating other disciples. Lyle Eslinger maintains that the ‘words “well” or “fountain” of Prov. 5:15, 18 refers to the physical features of the female but acknowledges that the phrase “the water from your fountain” in Prov. 5: 6 seems to refer to male semen.’⁹⁰⁵ Carmichael consistently connects “water” with women’s fertility and God as the water provider for the woman. For him, a woman’s bodily responsibility in such passages is that of watering the seed.

The discourse between Jesus and the woman at the well concerning water brings up the sexual implications associated with water. Water is associated with female sexuality in folklore.

⁸⁹⁹ Carmichael, “Marriage and the Samaritan,” 336 (in Prov.5:15-18, SOS 4:12, and Jer. 2:1-5)

⁹⁰⁰ Proverbs 5: 15- 18 New Revised Standard Version.

⁹⁰¹ Jeremiah 2: 13 New Revised Standard Version.

⁹⁰² Calum Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven, CT/USA: Yale University Press, 2010), 25.

⁹⁰³ Cf. Prov. 5:15, 5:18, 9: 17

⁹⁰⁴ Carmichael, *Sex and Religion*, 25.

⁹⁰⁵ Lyle M. Eslinger, “The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader and Reader-Response Criticism,” *Literature and Theology* 1, no. 2 (September 1987): 170.

The counsel given to married men is related to water euphemisms: “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well” (Prov. 5:15); and “let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Prov. 5:18). He is to resist the temptation that “stolen waters are sweet” (Prov. 9: 17). The advice is to the end that a husband should steer clear of “strange women.”⁹⁰⁶ These are gendered injunctions addressed to men.

Harold W. Attridge argues that the eroticism explicit in the story's genre “is transformed in this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The woman, who already had had more than her share of marital experiences,”⁹⁰⁷ is no longer the object of desire but one who conceives of a desire for more profound acquaintance with Jesus. In learning to ask about the “living water” (John 4: 15), She exemplifies the kind of seeking discipleship that Nicodemus exhibited. Harold Attridge suggests that “an erotic tale may have become a vehicle for moral example, an act of genre-bending worthy of a reader of the Song of Songs.”⁹⁰⁸ When Jesus asks the female stranger at the well to “give me to drink,” he is using the language of sexual love. When he invites her to partake of “living water” so that she will become the “well of living water,” at one level, he is speaking of her sexuality along the lines of the bride in Song of Songs, who is similarly described.⁹⁰⁹

Hugo Odeberg draws attention to the richness of “water” as a procreative symbol in the rabbinic and Hellenistic literature pertinent to the mystical concepts that show up in the Gospel of John. For example, the upper waters in 1 Enoch 54: 8, Genesis Rabba 13: 13, 14, are the celestial, male water, while the waters beneath the earth, well water, for example, are the feminine.⁹¹⁰

This is a unique story compared to the earlier ones. There are no sheep or other men, only water and the woman, as well as the water jar, which is a symbol of generosity and hospitality. The jar is left at the conclusion of the narrative because the exchange of words is about metaphorical water rather than actual water.⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁶ Prov. 2: 16; 5: 3, 20, 7: 5

⁹⁰⁷ This study marginalizes those speculative readings but focusses more on the water-drawing aspect

⁹⁰⁸ Harold W. Attridge, “Genre-Bending in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 13.

⁹⁰⁹ Calum M. Carmichael, *The Story of Creation: Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* (Ithaca, NY/USA: Cornell University Press, 1996), 106-107.

⁹¹⁰ Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel: Interpreted in Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-oriental World* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Grüner, 1974), 51-68.

⁹¹¹ Laurie Zoloth, “At the Last Well on Earth: Climate Change Is a Feminist Issue,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 146.

6.4.5 Translation on John 4: 11-12

John 4	Translation (NRSV)
Verses 11- 12	“The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ⁹¹²

6.4.5.1 The well is Deep

The detail about the depth of the well indicates the essentiality of water. It appears that Jacob insisted on digging deeper to bring up the underground flowing springs in the wells, in contrast to shallow digging necessary for cisterns, which could stagnate the stored water. Murphy-O Conner informs us that the area is strewn with sufficient springs and subterranean water holdings, which are sufficient for the needs of Jacob’s clans-people.⁹¹³ John 3: 23 indicates that “water was abundant” at Aenon near Salim, where John’s baptisms took place.

In view of the fact that the well given to Samaria long ago by Jacob is deep now—it is worth noting that its counterparts in India are wells that are deep. When the water is deep, even the task of water drawing becomes a dangerous and hazardous task. The Chand Baori⁹¹⁴ (stepwell) of Abhaneri in Rajasthan, India, is the deepest stepwell known for its ingenuity. The well is designed by the construction of numerous steps descending into the earth, making it possible for women to reach the water at the center. Deep wells are preferred even if the digging involves unsurmountable energy and financial cost—in contrast to digging temporary cisterns that hold collected water that can become stale and stagnant.

In as much as the well is deep, so is the story of the Samaritan woman’s life—with so many entrenched personal stories, her story is also deep and not shallow, Jesus does not have the bucket to draw water for himself. However, it appears that Jesus has the bucket to draw out the waters of her sadness from her apparent absence of husbands in her life. Jesus thus puts her on par with the

⁹¹² John 4: 11- 12 New Revised Standard Version.

⁹¹³ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 5th ed. (Jerusalem, Israel: Steimatzky, 1985), 323-37. The background story of Jacobs purchase of land in that area is recorded in Genesis 33 and 34. Jacob trades with those people—and the need for water for his sons and cattle are mentioned by the Samaritan woman in John 4: 12.

⁹¹⁴ The well was constructed around 800 CE and was designed for making it easier on many people to reach the water.

rest of the women by his offer of living water. She is now a spiritually transformed woman, but her daily walk to the well to draw water does not seem to end.

6.4.5.2 Water and Bucket Innuendo

It becomes clear that the woman knows the value of the bucket and the enormity of drawing water from a deep well. Then, she assesses Jesus' lack of the means (bucket for drawing water) and so poses the question about how he is going to accomplish the task of giving her the living water. Peter Oleson explains:

“Since water naturally flows downhill, it is necessary either to intercept the flow above the level where it is needed, or lift it artificially to a higher point after which it is channeled to the target area. Because of the relative convenience of tapping into flowing water and the relative difficulty of lifting it in sufficient quantities, all cultures have tried to intercept water as close to its source as possible: on the slope of a hill, at a spring, or near the headwaters of a river. Nevertheless, in many situations, water must be lifted to the point of use. Wells and most cisterns are good examples: although they were positioned to be filled by free-flowing water, their contents had to be removed by dipping, a circumstance crucial to the meaning of the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jars, skin bags, and buckets were the typical containers used (Gen 21: 19. 24: 20), which were either hand-held or lowered on a rope.”⁹¹⁵

Alan Watson points out that the dialogue involved a sexual invitation by the woman. He contends that the use of the expression ‘bucket’ is a euphemism for the penis, and the ‘well’ similarly a euphemism for the ‘vagina,’ and ‘living water’ is for ‘semen.’⁹¹⁶ In his argument, he says that ‘women coming to draw water already know that the rope needed to draw water would be in place, and they do not carry that heavy rope on each visit.’⁹¹⁷ He suggests that Jesus did not have either the rope or the bucket to draw the water from the deep well. Hence, he maintains that this incident has sexual overtones. The possible sexual advances evident in this story are masked and are not part of the narrator's purpose.⁹¹⁸ Thus, the terms are restrained in translation to mean bucket to draw with, eliminating its sexual overtones.⁹¹⁹ However, he reasons whether maybe it was the result of “an English reader's prudery that an accurate translation was not possible.”⁹²⁰ He

⁹¹⁵ John Peter Oleson, “Water Works,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary. Vol. 6, Si-Z*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY/USA: Doubleday, 1992), 6:892.

⁹¹⁶ Alan Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Coda,” *Journal of Comparative Law* 1, no. 1 (2006): 200.

⁹¹⁷ Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan,” 200.

⁹¹⁸ Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan,” 200.

⁹¹⁹ Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan,” 201.

⁹²⁰ Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan,” 201.

likewise noticed that the Gideons Bible in South Africa has a similar English interpretation. However, in Afrikaans, the critical word is ‘*skepding*’ which is undeniably “bucket.”⁹²¹ Also, a sexual subtext is observed by Matthew Scott Miller, who argues that “at the surface level, the long conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is about water and religion—but there is a great deal about sex and marriage.”⁹²² Since this encounter comes in the context of John the Baptizer’s reference to Jesus as the bridegroom, he observes the hint that the Samaritan woman is the bride”

On top of that, she points out that he does not even have a bucket—a logical reason. She also mentions that the well is deep, signifying her knowledge of the geographic detail. Is Jesus allowed to touch and use her bucket? From an ecocritical perspective, it can be argued that this statement warrants a serious review of the current fights over water-sharing on a global scale.

6.4.5.3 Water for Humans and flocks

As a daughter, she remembers Jacob, her father, a wealthy man, who dug this well for his children and animals to drink from. She then contrasts him to Jesus, enquiring if he was greater than his father, Jacob. This woman is contrasting the wealthy Jacob, who gave the well she imagines the sons and the flocks that drank from, and asks Jesus if he is greater.

6.4.6 Translation of John 4: 13b-15

John 4	Translation (NRSV)
John 13b-15	“Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ⁹²³

6.4.6.1 Thirst

Firstly, the Samaritan woman activates the metaphor of water to flow—by drawing up the water and offering it to Jesus, thereby quenching his thirst. Further, she pours Jesus the living water to drink, symbolically obscuring the dichotomous line between the physical and the living water in this dialectical relationship she has with both Jesus and the water.

⁹²¹ Watson, “Jesus and the Samaritan,” 201.

⁹²² Matthew Scott Miller, “The Sexual Subtext in Jesus’ Encounter with the Samaritan Woman,” *Logos Made Flesh* (blog), entry posted June 25, 2012, accessed September 18, 2020, <http://logosmadeflesh.com/2012/06/25/warning-you-will-never-read-john-4-the-same-way-again/>

⁹²³ John 4: 3b- 15 New Revised Standard Version.

It should be pointed out that ever since the Neolithic, the world has had an unquenchable thirst for water. Meeting the water need was the crucial factor that drives the social, economic, and political change within the ancient world. Access to water played a fundamental role in both the rise and fall of ancient civilizations.

Robert Lightfoot asserts that ‘thirst is one of humanity’s most compelling needs.’⁹²⁴ Globally in many regions of the world, the passionate and painful craving that a person can undergo is the agonized protest of the human body against being deprived of the most vital needs which ‘if unslaked, it is the prelude to the most dreadful of deaths.’⁹²⁵ That unquenchable thirst continues today. Constant hydration is crucial. “Human bodies cannot store much water, losing two to three liters a day—about half through excretion and the other half by breathing and sweating. Deprived of water, people and animals die within a few days, though some will hang on—in increasing misery for several weeks. Hence maintaining water balance is equally important for all organic species.”⁹²⁶

In the Samaritan woman’s perception, water is understood in physical terms, whereas Jesus speaks in spiritual terms. This understanding creates a spiritual—physical dualism and heaven—earth dualism. By setting in opposition to the woman’s lack of perception against Jesus’ “higher knowledge,” the narrator intentionally places her knowledge only in tangible terms—she knows only about available water near springs found in that geographical area. C. K Barret notes that “material water is appropriate only to the ‘animal life’ of the human being.” However, I would argue that without the ‘animal life’ of the human, the need for spiritual water does not arise. In the words of Alan Cadwallader, “just as without artifact, there is no literature, so also metaphors; for their creative power must retain the link with their material seedbed.”⁹²⁷ Barret further notes that the metaphor of “water” is perhaps less common in the West because it is in the water-less spaces of the East that the value of water is most clearly apparent.”⁹²⁸

The dichotomization of water into physical and spiritual also needs a reconfiguration. The so-called “living water” that Jesus was trying to offer should not be merely a mirage to people

⁹²⁴ Robert Lightfoot, quoted in Cadwallader, “Give the Girl,” 100.

⁹²⁵ Cadwallader, “Give the Girl,” 101.

⁹²⁶ Veronica Strang, *Water: Nature and Culture* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2015), 33.

⁹²⁷ Alan Cadwallader, “Give the Girl a Drink: Reading John 4 from a Dry Parched Land,” in *Water: A Matter of Life and Death*, ed. Norman C. 1932- Habel and Peter L. Trudinger (Hindmarsh, S. Aust.: ATF Press, 2011), 98.

⁹²⁸ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, USA: Westminster Press, 1978), 233.

undergoing water crises daily. Water should quench the physical thirst of the water-marginalized people. We thus translate the ‘living water’ as pure, clean, cold running water, water tangible to those who struggle to find water. Water that gives life to the people.

6.4.6.2 Masculinization of Water

This study has maintained that humans consider the importance of water and how we pay attention to water matters. With the intention of bringing water out of the silent, passive background in the well to which it is too often relegated, a gender-ecocritical textual analysis draws attention to the dualistic perception of how water is understood. The right type of attention to water becomes paramount considering the fact that water issues have become the most ecologically fraught problem of the twenty-first century. Therefore, thinking with water becomes an important aspect in our attempt to theorize our dialectical relationship with water.

This study is guided by a deep sense of ecological and gender critique in how water and gender are represented in this story. Astrida Neimanis calls attention to the fact that “thinking with water is also about thinking about power and subordination, master models, binary oppositions, nature and culture. It is about who or what gets listened to and who or what is relegated to this passive backdrop, and these are deeply feminist questions.”⁹²⁹

In the Jewish tradition, a profusion of wine was an eschatological symbol, a sign of God's reign and the fertility and abundance of the age to come. The common wine that Jesus receives on the cross in response to his thirst on the cross is a poor substitute for the superior wine that Jesus made available to others.⁹³⁰ Similarly, it appears that Jesus' offer of ‘living water’ is also of a superior quality, a recurrent theme in John's Gospel.⁹³¹ Now, Jesus' offer of “living water” so that she might never thirst again is another irony that is in total contrast to the actual physical thirst that Jesus suffers on the cross and its connection to the people in the water-scarce regions in the world, who still lack the water.

However, Rose Mukansengimana-Nyirimana and Jonathan Draper argue here that Jesus' mention of living water discloses a new reality to the woman. She falsely perceives that if she

⁹²⁹ Astrida Neimanis, “Thinking with Water: An Aqueous Imaginary and an Epistemology of Unknowability” (speech, Entanglements of New Materialisms, Linköping, Sweden, May 25, 2012).

⁹³⁰ Arthur M. Wright and Frances Taylor Gench, *The Governor and the King: Irony, Hidden Transcripts, and Negotiating Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 212.

⁹³¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, Mich./USA: Baker Books, 1994), 151.

accepts that water, she would no longer have to deal with the conflicts surrounding her life. They argue that Jesus thus shifts the conversation to the critical subject—the water of life.⁹³² I would, however, argue that the shift does not eliminate her need for physical water that is essential for sustaining her real life that is required to accept the water of life, which relates to her metaphysical need. Such a dichotomization of her humanity somewhat nullifies the existential questions that are dominant in her life.

Not many scholars have focused on the fact that the Samaritan woman would eventually come back to the same well to draw water for her daily needs. Jonathan Draper et al. point to the idea that the “gift” of God is the well from which Jesus draws and gives living water.⁹³³ It is called that to distinguish it from the well that Jacob had once “given” and from which the woman was accustomed to draw water. By invoking Jacob's name, she stresses the kinship difference between Judah and Israel. Jesus dispels the myth of any superiority—neither Judean nor Samaritans are superior. Again, the false notion that “living water” is coveted because it is highly fresh as opposed to stagnant water, Jesus points out that all those who drank from that well, including Jacob, were continually thirsty. The well water symbolized as female is contrasted with living water symbolized as male. In this narration, John portrays Jesus as one who masculinizes water from its feminized passive static location of the well.

6.4.6.3 Weight of Water—Burden of Water and Gender

In reality, water is burdensome. Water weighs more than 8 pounds a gallon. Each person's daily needs⁹³⁴ in a household necessitate the women to make several trips to the well. Christiana Peppard points out that since water is bulky and heavy, it shapes the musculature and skeletal structure of women and girls who walk miles each day to procure it.⁹³⁵ It requires caloric energy as well as mental effort to undertake this work.

Christiana Peppard calls attention to the idea that “the global water scarcity crisis is an ongoing burden considering how it affects and limits economic and educational opportunities for girls and women.”⁹³⁶ It is well evidenced that daughters are deprived of education in many families

⁹³² Rose Mukansengimana-Nyirimana and Jonathan A. Draper, “The Peacekeeping Role of the Samaritan Woman in John 4: 1-42: A Mirror and Challenge to Rwandan Women,” *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012): 306.

⁹³³ Mukansengimana-Nyirimana and Draper, “The Peacekeeping Role,” 306.

⁹³⁴ It is documented that Canadians use an average of 329 litres of water per person, per day (Jewel 88.5 Toronto News Mar 14, 2018)

⁹³⁵ Peppard, *Just Water*, 180.

⁹³⁶ Peppard, *Just Water*, 180.

in the developing nations as their valuable energies are devoted to obtaining water for domestic household use. The time they spend and the space they have to venture into to fetch the water home makes the task of water-fetching a political matter. The 2012 UNESCO's world Atlas on Gender Equity in Education stipulated that "gender equality is essential for protecting universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is also a powerful development accelerator."⁹³⁷ Peppard hence argues that 'water scarcity shapes the future potential of girls and women and the entire societies.'⁹³⁸

Kuntala Lahari-Dutt argues that the close relationship between women and water resources is particularly valid for rural women, who for generations have been burdened with the responsibility of organizing food, water, fuel and fodder and incomes from the surrounding natural resource base.⁹³⁹

6.4.6.4 Transporting Water

Over generations, human energy continues to transport water from the source to the domicile. Julye Bidmead notes that "the women would lower the vessel into the well to collect the water and then carry the filled vessel on either her head, hip, or, more likely, her shoulder."⁹⁴⁰ When Rebekah enters the scene, she comes out with her jar on her shoulder. Women transport water by carrying water jars, water pots, cans, and other containers on their bodies—hips, heads, shoulders, and backs. Daughters become vehicles on which water is transported. Studies have shown that "due to compression by the heavy burden of water carrying, bodily harm and pain are commonplace."⁹⁴¹ A few studies conducted in the Limpopo Province, South Africa, have attempted to quantify water fetching labor and the health risks. They have brought up the possibility of a link between spinal pain and carrying water. The research argues that "this association is complex with water carrying

⁹³⁷ UNESCO, World Atlas of Gender Equity in Education (Paris: UNECSO, 2012), 1.

⁹³⁸ Peppard, *Just Water*, 180.

⁹³⁹ Kuntala Lahhri-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water from North and South*, second proof copy received from the author by email on 28, July, 2016 ed. (Kolkata, West Bengal/India: Stree, 2006), xii.

⁹⁴⁰ Julye Bidmead, "Women and Wells in the Hebrew Bible," *Bible Odyssey*, 0, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/women-and-wells-in-the-hebrew-bible>.

⁹⁴¹ Jo-Anne L. Geere, Paul R. Hunter, and Paul Jagals, "Domestic Water Carrying and its Implications for Health: A Review and Mixed Methods Pilot Study in Limpopo Province, South Africa," *Environmental Health* 9, no. 52 (2010): 11.

probably contributing to the etiology of spinal pain and spinal pain interfering with people's ability to carry water with a potential impact on household water availability.”⁹⁴²

In most of the societies worldwide, unlike the Samaritan woman, it is not only because of the stigma attached to her marital ambiguity that women come to draw water from the well at an unusual time but mainly because of their gender—because of the sheer fact that she is born female that she is destined to fetch water. Analogically, her gender, like water, is burdensome for daughters. In the town, the family taps into their daughter’s water-gathering energies. This is systemic, social marginalization in which the work of one’s gender is linked to water— daughters in families internalize this by accepting to fetch water, a household task that is thrust upon them. Peppard argues that water-gathering is a task that the Samaritan woman did not choose—it was her lot. Water’s burden is a factor of gender—as an unrelenting necessity, the labor is borne disproportionately by women. As a gender-bound task, the performance elicits risk from the males through eve-teasing, sexual assault and social stigma when such occurs. Hence, equally burdensome is a woman’s gender. A daughter has to walk to the well because she is born female. As noted above, “women and girls are disadvantaged by this role that is often foisted upon them.”⁹⁴³

6.5 Conclusion

The narrator perhaps achieved his goal in leading the readers to comprehend the true nature of worship and that the living water offered by Jesus would never cause them to thirst again. However, these offerings are limited only to the spiritual level— and not to the Samaritan woman's physical level. The fact that the Samaritan woman still has to return to the well to get her water jar, and draw water from the deep well, and fetch it back home several times is a matter that is not the narrator’s interest. So, too since the historical time when the Samaritan woman came to the well, until today, the same reality is visited on the innumerable daughters who return to the well. The pain of this repetitive task is a reality that needs to be acknowledged. Their labor is to be acknowledged. Their marginalization needs to be questioned. The Samaritan woman’s water drawing scene is not a prop or a literary device to convey a spiritual truth about the living water.

⁹⁴² Jo-Anne L. Geere, Paul R. Hunter, and Paul Jagals, “Domestic Water Carrying and its Implications for Health: A Review and Mixed Methods Pilot Study in Limpopo Province, South Africa,” *Environmental Health* 9, no. 52 (2010): 11.

⁹⁴³ Peppard, *Just Water*, 180.

She is a real person who epitomizes the water-fetchers of the marginalized rural regions of the world.



Epilogue

The research concludes with clarity the cruciality of water in Jewish and Christian symbolism. The stories of water emerged from the lands experiencing water scarcity. This matter is of significance to the current context regarding how water continues to be an issue of contention. The stories of the water-drawing daughters extend the symbolism to the actual water needs of people, animals and plants, and sharing of water. The daughters' act of pouring a drink of water to the servant and in the trough for the camels and sheep indicates their exceptional values and ethics of water sharing. These stories demonstrate that water is more than a symbol. The contemporary stories of water shortage and the abundance of water in some parts of the world direct our attention to the urgency for the need to reconfigure water in our religious and theological imaginations.

Water is defined by how we as humans relate to it and how we value its entity and identity. Water's symbolisms in religion are what inspires our imaginations and our continuum in this world. The idea of understanding the water needs of humans has been the focus of many studies. In this study, the findings show that animals, plants, birds and the entire ecosystem are equally involved in this dialectical process where each entity is connected to and dependent on the other for their fair share of water. The water needed to grow our food, the water needed to manufacture the things we use, the water needed to keep the ecosystems healthy—all these needs intersect in the presence of water. As humans, the need to think and value water as a part of the essence of who we are is more fundamental than treating water as a "resource." The world is facing unprecedented ecological crises, precisely due to inadequate water supply and the mismanagement in the equal distribution of earth's freshwaters. There is a need to understand that the water demand is not constant but increases over time, and that this is a crucial reality that religious teachings and interpretations have to grapple with. Water's symbolic meanings are pertinent to our stories as religious people—but the shift towards social interaction and social action is important in our engagement with water, in our dialectical relationship to it.

The abundance of water is closely associated with the fear of the abundance of water. It is the fear of drowning in the abundance of water. Alternatively, during a glacial break or a dam collapse, natural/unnatural events cause those gushing waters to subdue the rest of nature. Water can bring down the nemesis of a nation. Water's abundance instills a permanent struggle, a

physical struggle to stay content with the water you have and avoid the temptation to keep storing excess water from sharing. Sharing water with the thirsty world is the starting point of redemption. By contrast, the water-less states like parts of Africa and Arabia and India face not abundance water but the inadequacy of water. It is the absence of water that defines people's perception of water. Their 'water stories are shaded with their experiences of drought, famine, thirst and visualizing uncultivable parched lands. For people in such regions of the world, their water beliefs are shrouded with cynicism and gloom.

The question of water is not just an economic question. The conclusive arguments of this study draw attention to the politicization of water. Water needs to be released from its politics, genderization, and economics. I concur with the words of Francesca de Châtel's finding that water was deployed as a "political weapon to be wielded against, withheld from or sold to even adjoining countries."⁹⁴⁴ I compliment her statement by adding that water is to be shared amicably with thirsty life-forms. The issue of water becoming a cause for war is a travesty of justice. Water scarcity should yield people to share water with good collaboration and peace between nations.

This study has attempted to problematize the human/environment dichotomy in the five biblical narratives. The core principle of ecocriticism—interconnectedness, was used in this study as an interpretive process in conjunction with gender criticism. The use and abuse of water for profit-making, the systemic marginalization of 'other' physical life forms and the landscapes and waterscapes were discussed. This study demonstrated that—both water abundance and water absence instills fear. There is a discrepancy in how humans behave with water. Although religious symbolism teaches us that water is sacred and should be treasured as a precious liquid, human wastefulness is a complacent false notion that water supplies are endless. The same applies to the daughters who arrive at their community well to draw water. The gender ascription of water drawing and the marginalization of that strenuous task was brought to focus.

The ecocritical notion of activism is deepened so that the interpretation is a motivating factor in preserving the earth's natural features. Stories are not created in a vacuum but situated beautifully in natural space scenarios—in our case, around the backdrop of a water-body—wells and water springs. The community wells in the open fields or outside the city wall are the central geographical location. It is near these waters that the "at the well" stories take shape. Water

⁹⁴⁴ Francesca de Châtel, *Water Sheikhs and Dam Builders: Stories of People and Water in the Middle East* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), 4.

becomes an intrinsic feature in the reader's mind when read from an ecocritical angle. How the physical world is represented by the narrators of the five biblical stories of water-fetching daughters indicates the immense potential for reading the story with so much richness of ethos when read from ecocriticism and gender perspectives. Being appreciative of each physical element in the vast expanse of the ecosystem allows a reader's imagination to reflect on the global negative impact on the distortion of those valuable connections we as humans have with the rest of the physical world.

As methods of inquiry and lenses, gender and ecocriticism are more prismatic because they include a host of cognate perceptions that unquestionably enhance the reading experience. The fact that there are multiple "centers" within each water-fetching narrative becomes evident. Although traditional commentators interpreted deliberately on an assumed theological ideology, or a sociological phenomenon, as a plain text, the scope of meanings that can be decoded are numerous. Ecocriticism insists on the literary reaction to the current ecological crisis. In all the stories read, especially the story of the woman of Samaria—the current plight of young girl children and their mothers and grandmothers walking to the water sources can be visualized. They long for a shade under a tree, near a well, they long for unburdening their heavy water pots. They long not to return to the well to have to continue to fetch water for their needs.

The actual recurrence of thirst at the dry wells in countries and near our communities impels one's proclivities to move towards the well stories of the Bible. In all the water stories, the conversation was possible between powerful men and relatively powerless women. Much of the climate change will be experienced as water scarcity of the most precious liquid, freshwater. Narratives around water are the most precious in the stories of the Bible, even as they are now, especially in the water-scarce regions of the world. It is also imperative to learn that people are days away from dying of thirst.

It is important to practice different reading habits when we read biblical narratives. The idea that we humans have a spatial link to the geographic spaces in these stories enables our journey into those spaces and makes it more real. The five narratives are ancient stories, and the lands and environs that engendered those stories are still unfamiliar, and there is more to be learnt. The framework this research has deployed is a potential design that can be used for other narratives. A gender-ecocritical approach has yielded answers to the fundamental question of how water and the natural world are represented; and how daughters as water-fetchers are narrativized. I have

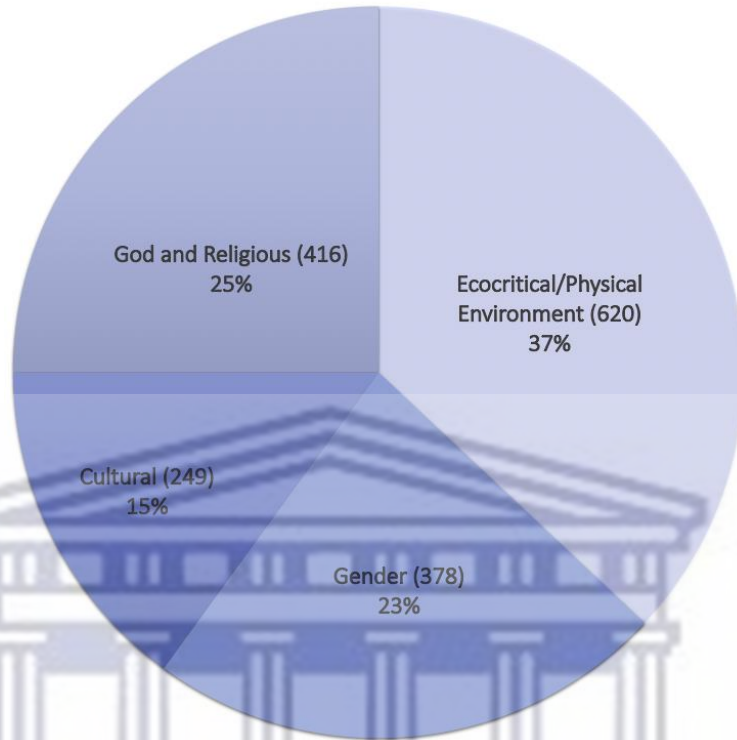
explained each word or phraseology that suggested a description of the physical world—the natural features like the land, water, the animals—camels, goats, sheep, cattle and donkeys, and human interactions.

Using an ecocritical reading strategy has accentuated the prominence of water, plants, wells, animals— camels, sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys and bio-organisms below the earth and round the well. These details were unnoted within the previous readings undertaken by each field of biblical studies. This study has identified the importance of water and plant life that demonstrate the vitalizing aspects of the narrative. The five narratives pivot around the well within the context of thirst, which features the narratives. Such readings contribute potential new knowledge to the field of biblical studies. The age-old interpretations will enhance their meanings by incorporating and dialoguing with the fields of ecocriticism and gender criticism.

By situating all the physical elements near a water source, I articulated how these physical features interacted with each other collaborating as they function in an interconnected manner—which is the fundamental principle of ecocriticism. By underscoring how daughters are marginalized both within the texts and by traditional exegetes—I have attempted to retrieve those omitted aspects using gender analysis. Biblical narratives are 'work-in-progress' ancient writings, with the potential for new interpretations to emerge at any time. Reading strategies such as gender-ecocriticism help weave the stories of counterparts in the contemporary world onto those stories. The theories from the cognate disciplines of gender-ecocriticism have facilitated this study to critique the dynamics of gender-water at play. Biblical narratives are not locked in a linear chronology but become alive and meaningful to equivalent contemporary issues of water and women's role as water fetchers and water managers. The non-moving characteristic of history is evident in the current similarities of the water dilemmas that daughters experience all over. Like water's fluidity—biblical narratives are fluid and malleable; paradoxically, they are dangerous too—and therefore, as a reader of the Bible and exegetical experts, our reading habits need to reflect the ongoing ecological and gender crisis.

As the projection in the pie-graph below underscores— in the 1663 words that this study analyzed, more than half of the words have referenced the physical world and natural environmental features and the aspect of gender—as an indication of the vast potential for readers to uncover and retrieve.

The Five Biblical Narratives for Study



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Appendix

1. A Model for Narratological Analysis – Gender-ecocriticism Motifs

A Model for Narratological Analysis— Gender-Ecocriticism Motifs

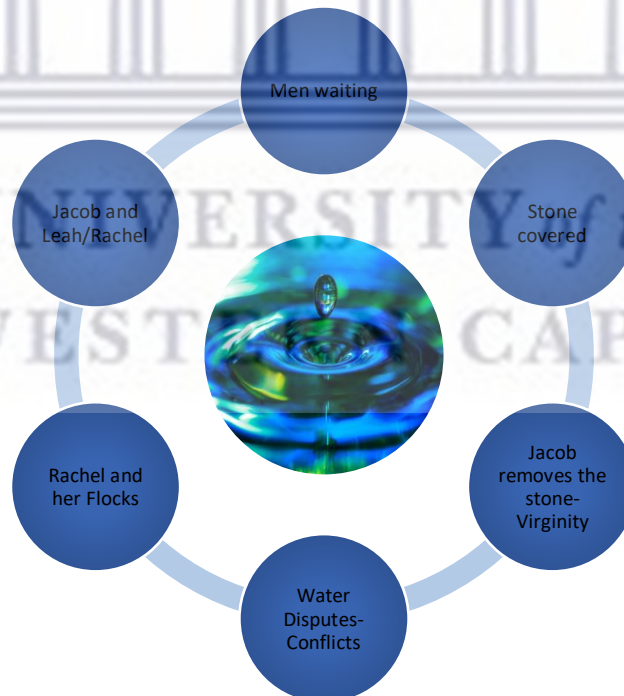
Texts	Daughter/Water	Historical Tradition	Socio-Cultural Theological	Geographical Specifics	Narratological/ Ecocriticism Motifs	Gender Motifs Wo/men
Genesis 24: 13, 15	Daughters of townspeople coming out to draw water; Rebekah coming with the jar on her shoulder to the well	Abraham sends his servant Eliezer to fetch a wife for Isaac	Endogamous marriage/genealogy/ Racial purity? Virginity/Transaction of Jewels(Gayle Rubin)/Taking Rebekah, God Monotheism×Canaanite	Journeying through boundaries, Canaan, Hittites Aram-naharain, City of Nahor	Wells, Springs of water, water jar on her shoulder, troughs, Camels, repeating the sequence of events	Abraham, Eliezer (No Isaac), Ten men(masculinity) watching Rebecca watering the camels—gender performance/Laban the negotiator who has authority over Rebekah/ Gendered task of water fetching/Marriage as Trafficking of women (gifts)
Genesis 29: 6	Rachel coming with the sheep to the well—to water the flock	Jacob flees Esau, meets Rachel, serves Laban to take both Leah and Rachel	Jacob's Servitude for Rachel(& Leah, Kinship	Journey to Paddan-Aram	Land of the people of the East/ Well, field, Stone on the wells mouth, watering the flocks of sheep, Rachel's sheep	Jacob flees from Esau—Moves the large stone/ Masculinity/Shepherds waiting for Rachel to help them move the stone/Laban and the play of indentured laws/Women-Animal Juxtaposition
Exodus 2. 16	Seven daughters of Midian came to draw water/ Moses drew water	Moses flees from the Pharaoh, marries Zipporah	Zipporah in Marriage/Son/Fleeing after two murders/Alien in a foreign land/	Journey to the Land of Midian/Well/	Stepping out of the city/ water source downhill/Politics of water sharing- contest/shepherds and sheep	Moses (masculinity) got up and came to their (daughters) defense- Gender power?
1 Samuel 9: 11	Some girls coming out to draw water	Saul in Search of his father's donkeys, finds Samuel, gets anointed as king	////	Wandering through Country of Ephraim, Land of Shalishah, Land of Benjamin, Land of Zuph	Straying of donkeys/Girls knowledge of their geographical space/spatiality of Zuph	Saul Handsome young man (ambiguous stature)/gender performance/ The girls' knowledge of space
John 4: 7	A Samaritan woman came to draw water	The Woman of Samaria meets Jesus and believes in Jesus	Ethnic Conflicts/Ancistor belie/ Living Water	Judea, Galilee and Samaria, Sychar city, the plot of Jacob's well	Deep well and Bucket/well for the flocks and families	Water Innuendo misperception/Thirst/ Masculinization of water? Gendering of waters—well and river

2. Water-Centers of the Five Narratives

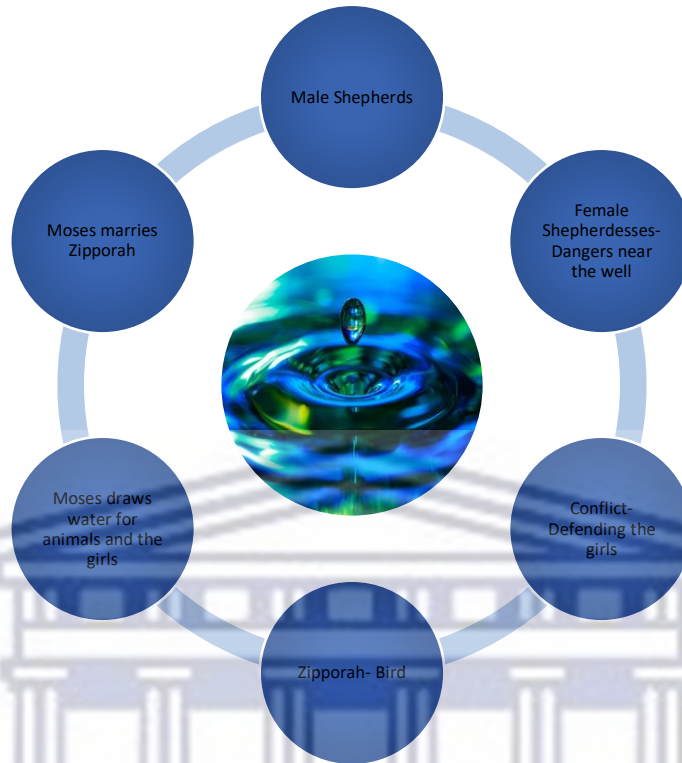
Genesis 24



Genesis 29



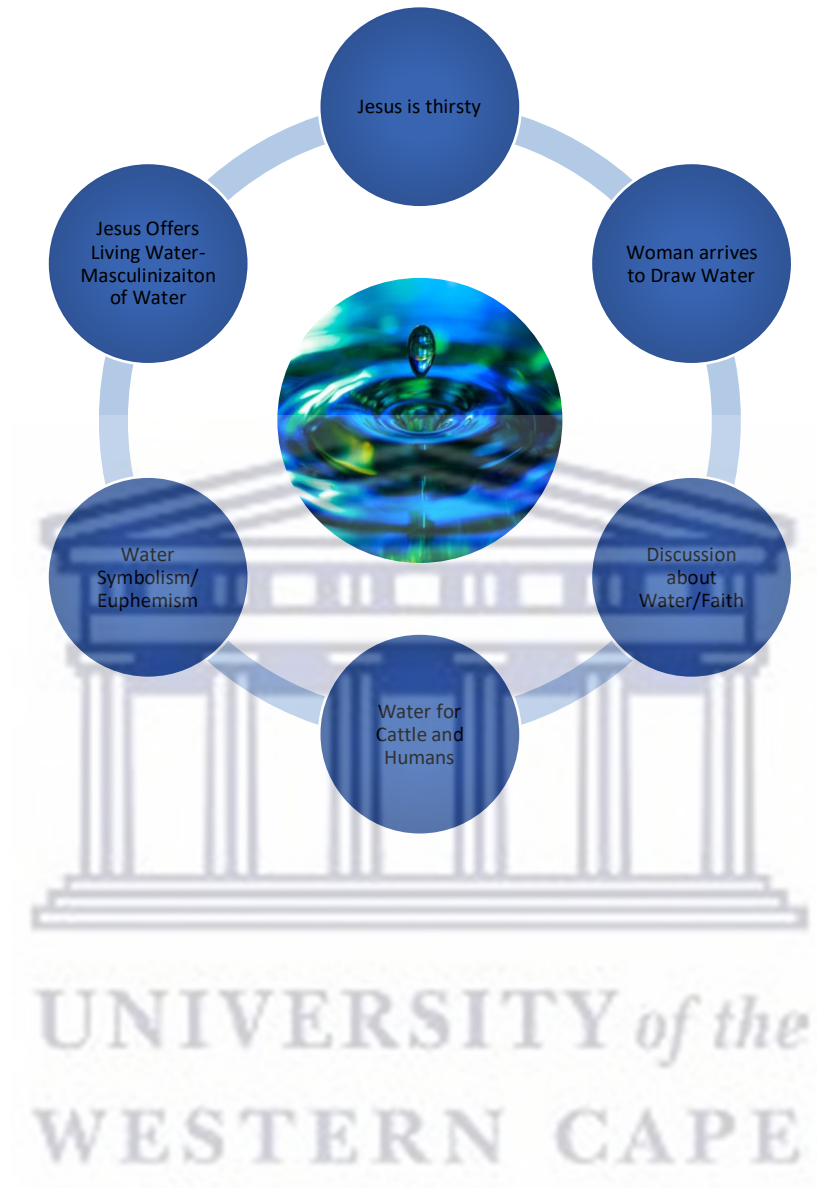
Exodus 2



1 Samuel 9



John 4



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