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Landscape Of Loss: Analysing N.A. D'Souza's Dweepa Through Eco-Critical Lens

Rajbir Kaur, Research Scholar
Dr. Rupinder Kaur, Supervisor,Department of English, RIMT University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India

Abstract
The paper aims to establish the crucial relationship between developmental projects and displacement, making significant observations on their impact on Indigenous groups and the environment by reading N.A D'Souza's Dweepa. Dweepa was first published weekly in Kannada in 1970, later translated into English by Susheela Punitha in 2014 under the title Island. The study unravels the environmental crises and victimization of Indigenous communities through development-induced displacement in N. A D'Souza's novella Dweepa. In his narrative, the author examines the repercussions of dam construction that adversely affect ecological health and traumatize the underprivileged communities living in the target areas. The author shares the lived experiences of Indigenous communities in the Shimoga district of Karnataka, which speak volumes about the failure of authorities in measuring the impact of developmental projects on local communities surrounding the target areas. The paper's conceptual framework is built around the ecocritical views of Rob Nixon and Indian environmental critics Vandana Shiva, Ramchandra Guha, and Arundhati Roy, adding to the current debates on ecological crises. The paper also underscores the urgency of addressing climate change, emphasizing that these issues should not be deferred to the future.

Keywords: *developmental projects, environment, displacement, Indigenous communities*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has evolved in countless ways throughout history and into modern times. It serves as a powerful tool for reflecting on our reality, offering itself as a work of art and a gateway through which new ideas and perspectives can flourish. Literature holds the mirror to our belief system and enables us to examine our relationship with other beings on the planet. It has the power to influence human thought and bring about change. Literature has been instrumental in shaping societies, challenging political structures, and exposing injustice. Contemporary literature delves into the varied facets of modern-day existence. The themes, such as identity, race, gender, sexuality, globalization, technology, social inequality, mental health, and the environment, provide an exploration of the intricacies and obstacles of the contemporary world. By delving into these themes, contemporary literature offers profound insights into the human experience within the context of present-day society. In today's literary landscape, writers have increasingly turned their focus to the pressing issue of environmental crises while calling for the urgency to seek solutions under the branch of ecocritical studies in English literature. It is this field of Ecocriticism theory that my present research deals with.Ecocriticism defines man's relationship with nature, questions the deep-rooted attitudes and cultural influences as reflected in the literary works. Writers have taken up the contemporary environmental crisis as an essential ecological aspect for discourse. It is established that man is yet to explore his equation with nature and the truth about his existence. Eco critics are working to, "...call for a carefully case-based, historically contextualized analysis of contemporary social and environmental problems". (Huggan 7). Recent trends showcase that literature has taken a step forward, i.e., from celebrating nature in terms of human emotions to deliberating upon the disastrous effects of human actions against nature. The books written in the field of literature are brimming with ecocritical ideas, evoking eco consciousness in their readers. The environmental crisis has brought people to one platform globally. Ecocritical theory is interdisciplinary in nature, as it has writers from diverse fields investigating the issues from varied perspectives. Ecocritical studies also consider ecological issues related to ecosystems and displacement caused by developmental projects as one of their focuses. Development-induced displacement has been a persistent issue, tracing its roots back to the postcolonial era in India when Western development models began to take hold. Scholars and writers addressing migration and displacement highlight that

the consequences of uprooting individuals from their homes extend far beyond mere statistics; they delve into the deeper emotional, social, and economic ramifications of such experiences. Literature often explores the complexity of displacement, emphasizing that it encompasses issues of loss and alienation, as well as the dismantling of familial and community ties. The definition of displacement has been continuously reshaped, adapting to the evolving realities of our interconnected world and the varied perspectives that emerge in today's transnational environment. Narratives of displacement powerfully convey the intimate relationships that Indigenous communities maintain with their natural surroundings—be it the rivers that sustain their livelihoods, the dense forests that offer sustenance and shelter, the mountains that hold spiritual significance, or the very soil that nourishes their crops. These stories not only celebrate the rich cultural heritage tied to these landscapes but also reveal the harrowing experiences faced by displaced individuals.Many authors also expose the stark injustices perpetrated by authorities, who frequently exhibit a blatant disregard for the welfare of those forced to move. Issues surrounding inadequate compensation and bleak employment opportunities reflect a troubling apathy toward the lives disrupted by development projects. The portrayal of the struggles confronted by displaced populations underscores the urgent need for more empathetic and just approaches to development.

Displacement Narratives in Indian English Literature

Kamala Markandaya's The Coffer Dams, set in the Malnad region of independent India, unfolds around the turbulent controversies surrounding the dam construction, an endeavour that casts a long shadow over the land and its people. The dam project was driven by the interests of Western powers, which led to devastating losses, uprooting the indigenous communities from their land, which holds the memories and dreams of generations. As the story progresses, the clash between progress and preservation becomes a moving reflection of the broader socio-political landscape, scripting the heartache and resilience of a community caught in the web of the developmental dreams of a nation. In his novel The Hungry Tide, Amitav Ghosh weaves together disturbing themes of displacement. He powerfully illuminates the heart-wrenching realities of development-induced displacement, illustrating the stark and painful journey of countless individuals who find themselves uprooted and homeless. Through a realistic storytelling, Ghosh presents a touching narrative of lives torn apart by the constant march of development, echoing the deep emotional and social scars left in its wake. Rajam Krishnan's When the Kurinji Blooms portrays the struggles faced by marginalized communities, capturing their strength amid the tumult of modern influences that seek to manipulate their lives and minds. Through rich imagery and evocative storytelling, the narrative explores the harsh realities and silent battles these individuals experience, as their vibrant dreams clash with the encroaching shadows of societal upheaval. Vishwas Patil's Marathi classic, A Dirge for the Damned tells the tale of displacement, encapsulating the essence of rural life. This acclaimed novel, translated by Keerti Ramachandra, amplifies the haunting voices of those who bear the impact of the nation's ruthless march toward development. With every page, it invites readers into a world where dreams collide with stark realities, narrating a story of human resilience against the backdrop of societal change. In her essay The Greater Common Good, Arundhati Roy fiercely critiques large-scale developmental projects such as dams. She vividly recounts the controversial saga of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, proposed to rise majestically over the Narmada River—a project she describes as "India's Greatest Planned Environmental Disaster." Through her narrative, Roy sheds light on the irreparable ecological and social ramifications of such initiatives. She also raises concerns for the struggles faced by those displaced and the natural beauty at risk of being submerged forever.Through the lens of ancient Indian philosophy, the Earth is envisioned as a grand, interconnected family, with every being residing upon its surface holding equal claim to its resources. This Indian belief system underscores a deep reverence for nature and kinship among all living things. However, the relentless march of developmental projects often casts a shadow over this harmony, intensifying the vulnerabilities faced by Indigenous communities. These communities, once guardians of the land's wisdom, find themselves increasingly at risk as their ancestral connections and resources are threatened by modern pursuits. Shiva articulates concerns regarding the welfare of both nature and

humanity, which are systematically undermined by technocrats and bureaucrats. She observes, “Dams, mines, energy plants, military bases — these are the temples of the new religion called 'development', a religion that provides the rationale for the modernizing state, its bureaucracies and technocracies. What is sacrificed at the altar of this religion is nature's life and people's life” (Shiva, Mies 98).
P. Sainath, in his book Everybody Loves a Good Drought, reveals that between 1950 and 1991, approximately 21.6 million people were displaced in the country as a consequence of developmental projects involving dams and canals. Sainath contends, "Those uprooted are then robbed off their history, traditions, and culture; may be even forced to adopt an alien diet" (Sainath 39). They also experience discrimination, lower social status, and unemployment. (39-40). "Oddly, it all happens in the name of development, which is justifiably argued as inevitable for the national integration and the progress of the nation" (40). The UNHCR reported that by the end of 2014, 59.5 million people had been forcibly displaced, cutting ties with their homes and communities. At the end of 2023, this number surged to 117.3 million, impacting all age groups within marginalised communities. This reflects an 8% increase from 2022, continuing a trend of escalation observed over the past 12 years. In recent years, human activities have caused significant dislocation and displacement of people, particularly in India. Families have found their lives uprooted, torn from the lands they have inhabited for generations. This chaos not only disrupts the fabric of society but also casts a shadow on countless species, pushing them closer to the brink of extinction. As we reshape the environment around us, the delicate balance that sustains our planet's ecology hangs precariously, threatened by our choices and actions.Na. D’Souza’s impressive thirty-seven-year journey in the Karnataka Public Works Department, coupled with his unwavering commitment to the welfare of his community, resonates throughout his body of work. Renowned as the ‘submersion writer’ in Kannada literature, he adeptly highlights the implications of grand industrial projects and their far-reaching effects on both the lives of individuals and the surrounding ecosystem. His novel Dweepa stands out as a poignant exploration of development-induced displacement, weaving a narrative that remains at the forefront of contemporary literary discourse. This richly layered tale unfolds through seven distinct phases, each in sync with the lunar cycles, symbolically named after celestial phases like Krithika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Aridhraa, Punarvasu, Pushya, and Aslesha. The stars that grace the monsoon sky not only illuminate the text but also encapsulate the myriad emotions that ebb and flow throughout the narrative. As the story progresses, the island and its residents become vivid embodiments of the diverse moods ushered in by the monsoon rains, reflecting the shifting phases of the moon in a masterful dance of nature and state. D’Souza skillfully captures the complex tidal emotions of the river Sharavathi, the environment, and its people, laying bare the heart-wrenching consequences of relentless progress and the dislocation that often accompanies it. Through his evocative prose, the reader is left to grapple with the painful realities wrought by development, revealing rainbows of resilience amidst turmoil.
In India, the construction of massive dams has led to the forced relocation of millions from their homes, uprooting families and dismantling communities. Expansive, lush forests have been submerged beneath vast reservoirs, resulting in graver human and ecological consequences. The rich biodiversity that once thrived is now buried under murky waters, and the vibrant life network has been replaced with stark landscapes. The emotional and environmental toll of these monumental projects is staggering, as they leave behind lasting scars on the land and the people who once called it home. Nixon notes, “The combined processes of imaginative and physical displacement have gained significant importance, particularly in the context of building megadams. These dams are monumental symbols of modernity that represent the concept of developing nations "catching up" through impressive, broadcastable engineering accomplishments (Nixon 151).
In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi presents a visionary framework for his unique model of development. This work critiques Western paradigms, which he argues promote unchecked industrialization and foster an overreliance on mechanization and technology. Gandhi passionately decries this frenetic quest for progress, advocating instead for a return to simplicity and self-sufficiency that reflects the true essence of human dignity. Despite the recurrent echoes of his philosophy that champion modest and sustainable living, the political leaders of India chose to emulate their Western counterparts, steering the nation

toward paths illuminated by the harsh glare of modernity rather than the gentle light of Gandhian ideals. Nixon notes, "By 1999, India had become the world's third most prolific dam builder" (Nixon 155). Nestled in the heart of Hosamanehalli, a village perched on the banks of the Sharavathi River, lies an island steeped in beauty and serenity. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of this beautiful landscape, where five families, intertwined by generations of shared history, face a harrowing upheaval. As a colossal dam rises to reshape the river's flow, the peace of their ancestral homes shatters, forcing these families to confront the gruesome reality of displacement. The writer effectively highlights the intense physical and emotional dislocation experienced by each character, painting a poignant portrait of their struggles. With every brushstroke of narrative, the sense of loss is palpable—echoes of laughter and tradition giving way to the cold, unyielding grip of modernization. Amid this turmoil, the cultural alienation accompanying such development projects becomes painfully clear. The characters grapple with not only the loss of their homes but also the erasure of their identities, as biases and misconceptions about environmental stewardship surface in the wake of progress in the Global South. Na. D'Souza in this powerful exploration reveals the painful complexities of change and the enduring spirit of those who have called the banks of the Sharavathi their home for generations. Shiva, in her book Ecology and the Politics of Survival: Conflicts Over Natural Resources in India, contends: Nature and people are, however, never taken into account in development plans which emerge from the North in terms of their intellectual and political genesis. Through international aid, control over resources has shifted from local communities to national and international financial institutions to clear the way for global plans and ideologies of development. (Vandana 11)The growth of technology has led to the unethical exploitation of natural resources, endangering the lives of marginalised communities in the name of development. D'Souza weaves a narrative about a group of five families closely connected to the Sharavathi ecosystem. This community has been facing the ongoing threat of their land being submerged for more than a year. The "ominous bit of news" (D'Souza 1) as declared by the elderly peon, "Sharavathi might swallow the Hosamane Parvatha this monsoon" (2) creates a hostile atmosphere for the local inhabitants, which was swiftly alleviated by the government's promise officers, "Nothing of that sort will happen… you can stay on peacefully until we compensate you with land elsewhere" (2). Ganapayya, a farmer from Hosamanehalli, expresses the pain and turmoil resulting from the flooding of land. The narrative begins with his introduction as a resident of the village who, "was neither rich nor poor. All he had two acres of wetland for an areca farm and three acres of agricultural land to grow rice…but that did not make any difference to his status. The respect the landlords commanded came from their place and role in the community, not from the wealth" (1). The description of the village community exhibits the interconnectedness of the community, revealing how their very existence hinges on the agricultural traditions that have been woven into the fabric of their lives. These time-honoured practices serve as the foundation of their livelihood and a heartbeat that sustains their culture. However, with the impending developmental project looming on the horizon, the delicate balance of their existence begins to crumble. The subtle yet relentless erosion of their organic way of life commences, paving the way for exploiting the humble farmers who have long toiled the earth. They stand at the precipice, watching as the roots of their heritage are threatened, their struggles overshadowed by the ambitions of a world that often overlooks the rich stories of those who nurture the land. Ganapayya's father, Duggajja, struggles deeply to sever ties with his family home, "he loved his piece of land with the attachment a woman feels for her mother's house" (12). He remembers and cherishes his memories of the village when only a few families lived there. "…what a fate for an innocent village! The old man grieved. Hosamanehalli accompanied him through the profound experiences and challenges of his life, making the thought of leaving it in his later years unimaginable. The idea of saying goodbye to the village filled him with deep unease. "He had wished a thousand times that the dam would collapse" (12). The essence of any developmental project lies in its ambition to nurture growth and cultivate opportunities for local communities, ultimately elevating their living standards by tackling issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. However, ironically, those on the fringes often find themselves further ensnared by the endless machinery of capitalism. The marginalized endure not just the challenges of their situation, but also the harsh and unforgiving repercussions of these

development endeavours. Many watch in despair as the promise of their nation's progress occurs, often at the steep price of their homes, land, and traditional livelihoods. The landscape of their lives transforms, leaving them to struggle with loss and displacement as the world pushes forward around them. Nixon points out similar concerns, "This violent conversion of inhabitant into uninhabitant has been a recurrent trauma amidst the spread of gargantuan dams across the so-called developing world. People viewed as irrational impediments to "progress" have been statistically— and sometimes fatally— disappeared…— became virtual uninhabitants" (153-154). The author effectively portrays the complicated lives of the inhabitants of the island, intertwining with the turbulent flow of the Sharavathi, which is angered by the dam's construction. Ganapayya observes the destruction of the surrounding nature. Not only were people displaced, but the river Sharavathi and the surrounding ecosystem also felt the impact of this development. Areca farms, palm trees, and banana trees were uprooted and are now dying in the waters of the Sharavathi. He notices, "A lime tree floated, wrenched out by its roots. A few banana plants too had met with the same fate. The water in the pond had eroded a part of the bund to the farm and so one of the areca palms was in danger of falling" (38). Vandana Shiva, in her book Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India, observes, "With the destruction of forests, water and land, we are losing our life-support systems. This destruction is taking place in the name of 'development' and progress, but there must be something seriously wrong with a concept of progress that threatens survival itself. The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model" (Shiva xiv).The illegal and human-driven development inflicting irreversible harm on people and nature is illustrated through the struggles of the village's residents. The author depicts a bleak scenario of contemporary development methods while highlighting the uprooting of non-human nature. The floodwaters displaced the animals from their homes, forcing them to wander in search of safety shelter**.** "Foxes, deer and wild goats strolled fearlessly behind the house, looking for shelter. A python crept into the wood-shack beside the kitchen. Rabbits scurried about the veranda (51). Wild animals inhabited the Malenadu forests, but as their territory became submerged, they encroached upon human lands, leading to conflict.

CONCLUSION

Modernisation, when examined through the lens of development, frequently unfolds as a ruthless exploitation of natural resources, resulting in grave detriment to the indigenous communities. This unethical encroachment ravages delicate ecosystems and irrevocably alters the lives of the people who have long called these lands home. The devastating impact of such reckless human activity is poignantly illustrated in the heart-wrenching experiences of Ganapayya, who grapples with feelings of betrayal and disillusionment at the hands of the government. His grievances echo the pain of many who have witnessed their ancestral lands become battlegrounds for profit-driven enterprises, leaving behind a scarred landscape and a community stripped of its dignity and heritage.The author compellingly articulated his apprehensions regarding the harmful consequences of development projects that neglect the realities of those who sacrifice their lives for the advancement of their nation. The enforced displacement of individuals not only shatters their once-thriving ecosystems but also inflicts great mental and emotional turmoil, uprooting their sense of belonging and stability. The anguish of leaving behind cherished homes and familiar landscapes echoes in the hearts of those affected, underscoring the urgent need for thoughtful consideration in planning initiatives that significantly alter the fabric of their lives.The author illustrates how dams engulf cherished landscapes that embody the cultural heritage and historical significance for Indigenous communities. The construction of these massive structures threatens to uproot entire ways of life, leaving people homeless and stripped of their connections to the land. Furthermore, the natural ecosystems bear the brunt and burden of this transformation, as the diverse flora and fauna are decimated, paving the way for the extinction of species and a drastic decline in biodiversity. The consequences are far-reaching, echoing through both the lives of the displaced and the delicate balance of nature itself.

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