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## **Displacement and Intrusion of Modernity in Na. D'sauza's *Island***

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### **Abstract**

Struggle has been an age old phenomenon that human beings have been encountering in every generation. Man is born free but he is in social, cultural, economic and political bondages. Survival instinct is the prime concern despite innumerable odds. Struggle for survival and struggle to give new meaning to life, in spite of the unfavorable conditions, and advent of modern technologies and systems and their impact on humans have become the focal points of discussion in the present paper and how it has led a group of human beings to be displaced and isolated from the mainstream society. The paper extensively analyses *Dweepa*, a Kannada novella by Na. D'sauza, which was translated into English by Susheela Punitha as *Island*, to show how displacement and modernity brings havoc and despair to the unprivileged groups in the last rung of the hierarchy in the caste based Indian society.

**Keywords**

Na. D'sauza; *Dweepa*; *Island*; Struggle; Intrusion of modernity; Development; Ganapayya; Sharavathi.

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Construction of Dams is one of the foremost causes for the displacement and dislocation of human beings in India. The most targeted groups for this cause are the tribal and Dalit communities, who reside in deep forests and alongside the rivers for cultivation of crops. The brutality of displacement due to the building of dams were witnessed in various projects in India such as the episodes of Sharavathi Hydroelectric Project and Linganamakki Dam Project in Karnataka and Sardar Sarovar Dam Project in Gujarat. In spite of the continuous resistance of people, the government paid no heed to them and went on destroying the rich biodiversity and rare species of flora and fauna of the land. *Island/Dweepa* as its name suggests is detached from mainland and surrounded by wide range of water. The river island was at Hosamanehalli, a small village on the bank of the river Sharavathi, where five families have been living since time immemorial. Now as the modern era unfolds new avenues of life, government has planned to build a dam on Sharavathi, and the five families have to be evacuated from the havoc of the newly built dam. *Island/Dweepa* has seven chapters, Krithika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Aridhraa, Punarvasu, Pushya, and Aslesha. They are all stars that influence the different phases of the monsoon and accordingly the novel follows on.

“If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country...Jawaharlal Nehru speaks to villages who were to be displaced by the Hirakud Dam (1948) in Odisha, exactly applies to the concept “the Greater Common Good” (*Greater Common Good* 1), laying down one’s own life for the sake of the country. To Nehru, dams were “the temples of modern India,” (GCG 2) this is typical and reductionist way of observing things. But Arundhati Roy lashes out her indomitable spirit against the government that dams only will support

the electricity production for urban areas, benefit big farmers and some bureaucrats but to the indigenous people they can bring great havoc.

The protagonist Ganapayya leads his tragic life and feels that he has been discriminated. It makes him all the more inferior to others and fills him with rage and even self-doubt. The Arrival of Krishnayya a daily laborer from Nagaveni's father's house brings some respite and hope in their life. He has come here to lift them up from the untold miseries of human sufferings. But soon it becomes a burden for Ganapayya as he notices some secret things happening between Nagaveni and Krishnayya. Nagaveni's infidelity towards her husband is responsible for the doom of her family. But it can't easily be ruled out that she has found life, love, warmth and affections in Krishnayya than her husband Ganapayya.

Government is solely responsible for the tragic demise and downfall of Ganapayya and his family. It has not compensated him in due time. If the government had taken necessary steps at the right time, then it would have saved Ganapayya and his family. Duggajja had great love towards the land, "he loved his piece of land with attachment a woman feels for her mother's house" (*Dweepa* 12). Such was the affection he had for his land. It had given him great pleasure to be on the island and raise his family there with love and care. Ganapayya too had this notion. Therefore, he says "Even if the government compensates me with land and money right now, I'm not the kind who'll up and go immediately. I'm going to stay here this monsoon and reap a harvest on my land. Let whatever happens, happen" (*Island* 13). In contrast to Ganapayya and Duggajja, Herambha, another farmer from Hosamanehalli had high regards for city. "He was attracted to city and so he decided to loosen the bonds that bound him to Hosamanehalli" (*Island* 15).

Due to the rampant development, nature came to be segregated from the human beings and human beings stood alienated and separated from the erstwhile integrated whole. Ecologically sensitive theories as it has emerged and developed over the last two decades, has been among the many things in the

attempt to reintegrate the conceptual and experiential aspect of nature into the mainstream of theory alongside other equally significant aspects of class, race and gender.

Twentieth century India has brought heralds of good news for the industries and entrepreneurship. One of the most notable development and modernization of India is building of dams. As it signals that dam projects remain as the nation building body is a welcome sign for the development of the country but the means and intentions that go along with projects make a big difference, as Roy has the opinion “big dam, in other words, suggest a potentially deadly alliance between the modernist ideology of technological gigantism and the repressively authoritarian politics of state ownership and control” (*The Cost of Living* 91-92). In the words of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin

Arundhati Roy is not an anti-development junkie, nor a proselytizer for the eternal upholding of custom and tradition. It seems safe to conclude that she sees Development (Capital D) largely as an instrument of state authority, and as a mechanism by which to force through large-scale, often foreign funded government initiatives that are then falsely sold to people, the government has never bothered to consult such policies, Roy suggests, cannot be other than self-destructive; peddling the postcolonial search for national selfhood as the panacea for continuing poverty, caste snobbery and illiteracy, they help to create a reified sense of collective suffering and victimization that leads inexorable to the bomb” (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 51).

Monsoon rain has brought great havoc to the family, and it filled the surrounding areas with water. Water stood in the neighboring forests and valleys during monsoon. Nature comprises of everything under the sun and on earth “nature came to be generally equated with wild and wilderness, and culture with tamed, refined and domesticated” (*Ecological Criticism* 5). With the destruction of forests and animals habitats, the wild animals lurk for prey and rest.

Wild animals would come towards Sita parvatha, seeking refuge. And now foxes, deer, and wild goats scrolled fearlessly behind the house looking for shelter. A python crept into the wood-shack beside the kitchen. Rabbits scurried about the veranda. The cattle had mooed restlessly a few nights earlier. Nagaveni said she had heard the' low oomphs and coughs of a tiger near the cattleshed before dawn. (*Island* 50-51)

Since his birth, Ganapayya has been in the lap of nature, but now he behaves like a stranger. In the words of Solomon Rees “land becomes the ultimate bone of contention as meaning of cultural expressions and relational affiliations get redefined with possession and dispossession. People get driven off their lands, and in many cases their cultural identity gets lost with the dispossession of their lands” (*Contemporary Contemplations on Ecoliterature* 57). The government officials acts like colonizers imposing and subjugating people with an ecological destructive economic agenda.

The casual factors of displacement are manifold and complicated: some visible and others not as ostensive as is the impact on the affected. Activities that are undertaken in the name of development has displaced large people. “This may be due to the direct acquisition of land for project or because of the environmental or health related consequences of the project, such as deforestation, pollution of air and water resources, charges on land holding around the project area. Displacement might not be actual physical displacement; it may be displacement from existing lifestyles and sources of livelihood without alternative” (*Development, Displacement and Resettlement* 93). Ganapayya's case was different, he was ready to vacate his land, but the government government did not compensate him and in the end the poor farmer has to face his tragic death. Even his life partner Nagaveni, abandoned Ganapayya and eloped with Krishnayya. The next feature of displacement is the proportion of displaced and project affected people from the weaker sections,

particularly tribal communities and Dalits. It has been high in the past and is on the rise even today.

Most of displaced people are asset-less rural poor like landless laborers and small and marginal farmers. The tribal groups, who constitute 8.08 per cent of the country's population are estimated to be more than 40 per cent of the displaced people affected by construction of dams and mining. (*Development-Induced Displacement: Case of Kerala* 35)

In recent past, the rapid developmental activities benefits the privileged few, while the others bear the cost. Project planning has to ensure that there should an equitable distribution of the benefits. Madan Mohan in his book *Ecology and Development* explains about the sustainable development; in order to achieve ecological balance with industrial development there should be plan for suitable development in harmony with nature should be formulated. This environmental plan has to include three approaches, viz. firstly environment management, secondly environmental impact assessment and thirdly eco-development. In the novella, dam becomes a symbol of man-made evil lurking to devour the human relationship. This evil has taken various forms such as tiger that starts invading the human habitats. Nature is not always benevolent and it sometimes too becomes furious when it is disturbed by damming and other anti-environmental projects.

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