
Reflections of the Acquisition of Land for Creating Reservoir and Folk's Bonding with Their Native in Jackie French Koller's *Someday*

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Abstract

The guaranteed supply of water is one of the prime requirements for developmental projects. They include the generation of electricity, setting up and operating industries, construction works, food production (irrigation in agriculture), processing, and others. The growing demand for water is being fulfilled by creating water reservoirs with dams built on the flowing rivers across the world. This results in the rise of new issues, such as the displacement of the people residing at the dam sites in society. Generally, the land is acquired to build the dam once the location is finalized. The people living there for generations are forced to evacuate their houses and lands forcefully.

The Quabbin Reservoir is created by the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission (MDWSC). It is done by building a dam in the Swift River Valley. Jackie French Koller, in *Someday*, narrates how the project affected the lives of the people residing in the area. The present paper aims to deliberate, describe, and analyze the dammed lives portrayed by Jackie French Koller. The focus shall be on the acquisition of the land for the reservoir, stirring of the emotions and feelings of the people, and the challenges they face to shift to a new place by leaving behind the familiar surroundings and sense of belongingness once they learn the fact that they have to leave the place permanently where they have been peacefully living and their ancestors too have once lived and buried after death. Koller explores the anguish of displacement that the important character in the novel, Gran, experiences and goes through psychological trauma since she is constantly being persuaded by a representative from the MDWSC to move out from her native. Her attachment to the native shall be uncovered and critically analyzed in the present research paper.

Keywords: Reflections; Land Acquisition; The Quabbin reservoir;
Dammed; Folk's Attachment to their Native; Persuasion; Displacement

Introduction:

It is perceived that internal displacement is one of the challenges being faced by countries across the globe in the pursuit of development. Availability of land and water is a must for the rapidly growing population, setting up the industries, improving the yield of crops in agriculture, and other developmental projects. Creating reservoirs is one of the attempts to fulfill the need for water requirements. However, coming up with a reservoir requires enough land, which is generally acquired by the government or its agencies. In order to create the Quabbin reservoir, some of the families from the affected village are required to vacate their houses and lands. Jackie French Koller in *Someday* captures the moments of Gran's persuasion to vacate her house by the representative of the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission. In the reactions to the representative's appeal, Gran constantly expresses her bond with the land where her ancestors lived. Despite this, the representative is finally successful in his mission, and Gran gives her a nod for the acquisition of her property. However, soon after the deal is declared complete, Gran dies of heart failure; she can't bear the thought of her separation from the house and land she had lived in for a significant number of years. It attempts to describe and analyze the dammed lives (acquisition of the land and people's bond with the natives) reflected in Jackie French Koller's *Someday*.

Operationalization of the Terms Used in the Research:

Reflection:

The term reflection is used in the present context as a replication of the dam affected people's lives in words by the novelist. In addition, the word also connotes a critical contemplation over something, i.e., the issue of the impact of developmental projects like dams on the local people. According to the Collins Dictionary (online), "Reflection is careful thought about a particular Subject"

Dammed:

The word 'dam' generates different meanings when it is used as a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to a barrier built on flowing water, especially on rivers. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines 'dam' as "a barrier preventing the flow of water or of loose solid materials (such as soil or snow)" In the same dictionary, the term 'dam' as a verb is defined as "stop up; block." The prevalent lifestyle of the locals from the dam site has come to a standstill since they were required to evacuate their dwellings. 'Dammed' is used in the present context to describe and analyze the project-affected lives.

Acquisition: It refers to the transfer of the ownership of land in the context of building of the dam. In the selected novel for the study the land is acquired by the MDWSC to create Quabbin reservoir from the locals of the dam site.

Oxford Learner's Dictionary (online) describes the acquisition as "a company, piece of land, etc., bought by somebody, especially another company; the act

ofbuyingit"

Reflection of the Land Acquisition in the Select Novel:

Jacob Taylor is a representative of MDWSC, and he has been assigned the responsibility of persuading Gran to sell her property to the authorities involved in the dam construction. He introduces himself to Gran and conveys the purpose of his visit. The novelist Jackie French Koller describes it as "Mrs. Wheeler," said Jake, I've been sent out here from the Boston office to help tie up loose ends and close out the relocation project. I've already been to see Doc Seaver and Mr. Peters. Thought you would like to know they've both agreed to sell. You're the only one left" (Koller 51-52). Gran responds furiously to this appeal and registers her protest to give away her land. It is evident from the context that Jacob Taylor has also been trying to convince other people from the dam site area to accept the deal to sell the properties.

Jake does not forget to tell Celie that it is all part of just formality and that he is putting his efforts into convincing Gran. He reveals the fact to Celie, "To be honest, it's only a formality anyway. All the remaining lands were taken by eminent domain about a month ago" (Koller 53). Even though it is just formality, Jake does not want the affected people to feel that the land is being taken away with coercion by MDWSC. As a part of this, he tells Celie that "we'd like to tie things up amicably if we can, get her signature on the bill of sale, make sure she gets what she's got coming to her" (Koller 53-54).

Mama, Celie's mother, thinks that it is better to accept what Jake is going to offer for the big house and land Gran owns. She says, "Mr. Taylor is right. The law is the law, and I think it's time you accepted it and signed the papers" (Koller 119). This shows that the new generation thinks practically and opines that Mr. Taylor's proposal must be accepted. On the contrary, the older generation, who has been bonding for many years, is more emotional. For the people like Gran, the land is invaluable.

Gran tells Celie, "My lands, what would I do in some newfangled place at my age? I'd be nothin' but a fish out of water" (Koller 135-136). This reveals that Gran has developed a special bond and attachment with her land. She expresses that if she gives up her land in old age, she would definitely be feeling like a fish out of water, i.e., away from the inhabited place. However, Gran realized that she had to accept the reality, i.e., leave the house and land and sell them to the MDWSC. She tells Jake, "As my granddaughter said, you're just doing your job. Whenever you get those papers drawn up, I am ready to sign" (Koller 136). Finally, she makes up her mind to sell her property, and she conveys the same to Jake.

Reflection of the Folks' Bonding with the Native

Chubby and the narrator witness Gran's protest of the acquisition of her land by throwing the letter received from MDWSC into the stove. They realized that the last day, which was not specified earlier, was nearing. The narrator expresses, "This

town we loved, everything we knew, the very roads we walked on, would soon rest beneath the waters of a giant reservoir, like some scene in a dime-store water globe. What would become of us, of me and Chubby, and Mama and Gran? And what about all our friends and neighbors? Who would we be without Enfield to bind us together?" (Koller 27) It is rightly mentioned in "Connection to Land: The Value of Land" in *Walking Together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum* that "The longer people spend in one location and the more their lives revolve around the land and its natural life cycles, the stronger the bond becomes" ("The Value of Land" 111).

The narrator of the novel, Cecelia's father, passed away when she was a child. She feels his personality from the lively descriptions of her Gran and Mama. When the entire village is dismantled to give way to the proposed project (dam), her father is not around, and this makes her feel relieved. The novelist writes, "I never knew my grandfather, and I don't much remember my daddy, either. I was only two when he died. I feel like I know him, though, from pictures and things we've always had around and from all the stories Mama and Gran have told me about him. He loved Enfield and the valley, and I'm glad he didn't have to see it dying" (Koller 32). Cecelia feels so because she has been witnessing the impact of the evacuation of the house and land on the mind of her Gran, who has been living in the village for almost her entire life. Her Gran is not ready to leave the land since she has got developed a special bond with it.

Feeling connected with the place one lives in is quite natural, and s/he feels the place as part of him/her. In the attempt to define a person's identity based on the place of his/her origin in the *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology*, that "Individuals often develop an emotional bond to their life space, essentially their home and the neighborhood, but often also urban places and spaces on a larger scale" (Spielberger, Charles 624). Similarly, the novelist describes that the characters have developed a bond with the houses and land. However, in this context, the place does not control the identity of the persons, but the people living claim the house to be part of their own self. The thought of taking the house down (dismantling) is not acceptable at all to its members. To capture the same feelings of the characters, the novelist writes, "How can they take our houses away from us?" I said out loud. "They are like part of us." (Koller 33)

Most of the memorable events of life have been held in the village, and those memories are kindled in the minds of the village members whenever they are in the vicinity of particular places. A wedding is one of such delicate events of one's own life. Gran, in the novel, has such a memory associated with the place that she revealed in one of the conversations with Cecelia. Cecelia and Chubby are discussing this in the words, "The wedding was held here, I had always hoped mine would be too. . . I wonder what my great-grandmother would think of her beautiful house now... I

wonder how she'd feel if she knew. . . My voice cracked, and I could feel tears stinging my nose" (Koller 38).

Jacob Taylor is responsible for convincing Gran to sell her property to the commission so that the dam can be built. He declares to Gran that he has already been to the other houses in the village, like Doc Seaver and Mr. Peters. He informs that both are ready to sell the property to the commission. He is expecting that Gran, too, must accept the relocation plan. This appeal receives an emotional reply from Gran in which she tells Jacob that it is her home. She lets him think about the result of taking the home away. The novelist captures Gran's feelings and her attachment to her house in the novel, "Don't you dare tell me you understand, young man. Is anybody takin' yer home away? Is anybody tellin' you to get off the land your people have farmed for two hundred years?" The attempt Gran is to make Jacob feel the issue of uprooting anyone from the land s/he has been living. She tells him her pain of leaving the house and land. She tells Mr. Jacob, "I was born in this town, Mr. Taylor, and I birthed my babies in this very house. And both of them died here- one of a fever at the age of three, the other of a weak heart at twenty-seven" (Koller 52, 52). When Gran feels helpless in her protest, she finally tells Mr. Taylor, "You can take our bodies out of this valley, Mr. Taylor, but you'll never take our souls. When you flood this land, you'll be drownin' a part of us, just as sure as if you took our heads and pushed 'em down under that water" (Koller 112). It is not that Gran has easily given up her house and land, and it is understood from her words. Her response to Mr. Taylor conveys a strong protest against the forceful displacement of the people from the water reservoir. She claims that they can only take the bodies of the people away but not the souls.

Finally, Gran comes to the decision to sell the property. However, she is not able to cope with the loss she is going to witness and experience. Her attachment to her home and the land she has spent almost her entire life results in her death towards the end of the novel. Koller writes, "Gran hardly touched her dinner. She seemed beaten down with exhaustion. . . . Her frail little body seemed lost on her overstuffed chair. . . . Gran opened her eyes, 'I'm not going to Chicago,' she announced" (Koller 199-200). After this, she asks Mama, "Just let me sit here and listen to my program in peace" (Koller 200). After these last words, with the gap of some time, it is noticed that her heart stopped beating. Aunt Stella says, "Your grandmother died of a broken heart. She died because this valley was so much a part of her she wasn't whole without it" (Koller 203-204). The place which has given in abundance to Gran during her lifetime has claimed her life indirectly. It is so because she feels that life outside her native is nothing. When the land was officially handed over to the commission with her signature, she felt like her support was withdrawn, and she breathed her last. She is deeply connected with the native, and it is aptly described by the novelist, "I know one thing. My roots sink deep into the soil of this valley, deeper than any earth machine can dig, and through whatever lies ahead, they will sustain me" (Koller 209).

As the tree can't survive if its roots are no longer in the deep earth, Gran, too, could not bear the loss of her 'roots' from her native.

In summary, it can be said that Jackie French Koller has realistically portrayed the land acquisition by the MDWSC for creating the Quabbin Reservoir and the impacts of the project on the local people. The land acquisition process and the folk's attachment to the land have been the focal points of the present paper. It is revealed through the novel that leaving a land where people have lived for generations with a series of memorable life events is not just physically distancing oneself easily. At the outset, it might be argued that if a handsome amount is sanctioned for the loss of property, the people must evacuate their homes permanently with no hesitation. However, the attachment to the land can't be measured in terms of money or any other monetary benefit. Gran, from the selected novel for the analysis, *Someday*, is an appropriate example of learning the attachment of someone to a place. She represents thousands of people across the globe since this issue (development-induced displacement) is not limited to a particular country. Koller has successfully delineated the feelings of loss, anxiety, and disorientation, which are commonly associated with displacement and the lives of project-affected people in her novel.

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