

**An Ecocritical Study on Ecology, Displacement and Resistance in the novel
Dweepa by Na. D'Souza.**

¹**U. Rathi Priya, ²Dr. M. S. Saritha**

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Article Received: 07/07/2026

Article Accepted:09/08/2026

Published Online:10/08/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.247

Abstract:

Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa* (Island), set in the Western Ghats in the state of Karnataka, is the story of a homestead community forced to confront the dangers of submergence due to the construction of a hydro-electric dam. It explores the emotional, ecological and cultural trauma of people forced to leave their ancestral land due to rising waters. This paper argues that the novel interweaves ecology, displacement, and resistance as closely connected, wherein deforestation and displacement are caused by ecology, while preserving the land and the animals within it and being rooted in the earth. Focusing on characters such as Ganapayya, Nagaveni, and Krishnayya, along with the changes taking place in the natural environs and the animals, the arguments are set to demonstrate how the novel seeks to redefine the Western Ghats as a contested space wherein the marginalized human and the non-human are challenged by the effects of development.

Keywords: Displacement, Ecology, Hydroelectric dam, Resistance, Western Ghats

Introduction

Dweepa, the novel was originally written in Kannada and translated into English. It sheds light on by focusing on a Ganapayya's family and his wife Nagamani and their cousin Krishnayya who choose to hold on to their ever-reducing island while the waters of the dam creep into their village. Specific to one homestead, this novel portrays the human experience of dislocation through the depiction of distress to the mind and the moral dilemmas involved. "The ecocritical approaches, as discussed by Greg Garrard, investigate the representation of the natural world, human responsibility, and transformation in literature," writes M. L. Donnelly. Applying the ecocritical approach to the novel *Dweepa*, it is evident that the Western Ghats are a 'changing, vulnerable environment' and not only a background, while the 'dam symbolises a technological force that alters water, land, and life. Ecofeminist

approaches highlight the vital role played by Nagaveni in maintaining her family and the environment, thereby establishing a parallel between feminine labour and care for nature as a way of challenging the developmental policies, which ignore the needs of rural women.

The novel shows how dam construction impacts different social groups. The story takes place in Hosamanehalli village, where Ganapayya employs paid workers who lack farm ownership rights. "The respect that landlords received in the community depended on their social standing and their functions in society rather than their financial status" (D'Souza 1). The village existed at the base of a hill, which contained five families, three areca plantations and three rice fields. Three families in the village worked as landlords who controlled the farmland, while the two remaining families worked as bonded labourers who remained in debt for their entire lives. Byra and Hala were destined to work on lands owned by Herambha Hegde and Parameshwarayya, who had control over the Hasalaru community labourers.

During the summer months, the villagers could reach only a handful of towns by crossing the river; however, this route became impassable during the monsoon season. The construction of the Linganamakki dam across the Sharavathi River caused water levels to rise, leaving the village nearly isolated except for a few narrow paths. The dam resulted in stagnant water and the submergence of local lands, creating severe flood conditions that threatened the entire surrounding region. As the rising waters slowly engulfed Sita Parvatha, the village of Hosamanehalli was eventually submerged. A critical issue in these delta regions is the loss of riverbank sand, which allows monsoon floods to sweep into villages and ruin agricultural fields, thereby destroying resident's livelihoods. The Linganamakki dam created a massive reservoir that resembled an island sea nestled within the forests, stretching between a prominent hillock on one side and forested low-lying hills on the other side. The stagnant water, flooding and the loss of riverbank sand lead to ecological destruction. The description of the reservoir's vastness looks like a sea surrounded by hills and forest. "The dam would create stronger flood conditions, which would cause the river to flood all surrounding areas" (D'Souza 6). The narrative captures their struggles between the attachment to land and memory, and the fear of displacement. As the water level rises, the island shrinks, symbolising the slow erasure of their identity, history and their way of life. The construction of dams stands as the primary reason for human displacement throughout India. The most targeted groups for this cause are the tribal and Dalit communities who live in remote forest areas and use rivers for their farming activities. The building of dams caused severe displacement problems, which people experienced in multiple Indian projects, including the Sharavathi Hydroelectric Project, the Linganamakki Dam Project and the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project. The study analyses three main components of the novel. The first aspect investigates how the novel presents ecological themes through its depiction of terrestrial environments, aquatic systems, animal life and seasonal transformations. The next section explores the experience of losing social ties and physical ties to the world through environmental changes. It also examines how characters respond to their challenges in their current situation and prioritise their needs. The combined elements of D'Souza's work

demonstrate his complete rejection of development concepts based on specific locations and the existence of nonhuman entities.

The novel *Dweepa* develops its chapters through six lunar mansions, which produce rain according to the traditional Indian calendar. It keeps pulling the readers back to these "rain stars", which connect the characters' lives to the monsoon season. Here, Water serves as more than scenery because it drives all aspects of the story. The rains become more intense with every passing star. The reservoirs expand to their maximum capacity. The entire valley undergoes a gradual transformation, which starts with scattered islands and ends with the isolation of mountain peaks such as Sita Parvatha, where the characters become trapped while observing their environment's transformation. It reflects the changing mood of the protagonists, sometimes threatening and at other times protective. The river's eternal companion, rain, also plays a significant role. The chapters are named after stars that influence the different phases of the monsoon, each suggesting a different mood and behaviour of the rains corresponding to the changes that happen in quick succession in the lives of the three families in this novel. Thus, nature, both as an external presence and an internal force, it shapes the structure of the novel and pushes it to its final resolution.

The land in *Dweepa* is very important and precious to the people who live there. It is not something you can buy or sell. The land in this village has a lot of history and stories behind it. It also connects the people who work on it and discuss their spiritual beliefs. Ganapayya's farm, his home and his animals show how hard his family has worked over the years. If he has to leave the land, then it will be the end of his life. The environment and its land are being destroyed slowly, and the valley is being flooded gradually. and the monsoon, in the novel, is being changed forever.

The presence of animals apart from humans is necessary in this environment. There is a Belli, the cow who's like a family member. Her well-being affects the family's economic stability. The other animals, like snakes, rabbits, foxes and a tiger that eventually slayed Ganapayya, it shows how rising water levels and shrinking forests force animals to move to humans. The tiger is more than a threat. It represents an imbalance. It shows how progress is displacing humans and all other species. The tiger and its actions reveal the impact of progress on the environment and on all living beings. The presence of these animals highlights the connection between their welfare and that of humans.

He sat with his head in his hands. He was weighed down with worries he could not handle. He had never felt so helpless ever before. His spirit trembled every time it struck him afresh that they were not in touch with the world outside. The water in the river had to subside someday, if not today or tomorrow. (D'Souza 50)

The involuntary relocation of individuals from their primary residences constitutes a profound psychological trauma, disrupting established social and domestic foundations. Displacement is a deeply distressing experience, as it compels individuals to abandon their established homes. While political instability, civil conflict, and natural disasters are common catalysts, a significant cause is environmental decline resulting from state-led development initiatives aimed at modernisation and urban expansion. Ironically, the construction of a dam often leads to the forced removal of indigenous populations. This form of internal displacement creates profound instability and hardship for local communities. Within this context, this study examines how the author portrays the theme of forced relocation and the systemic inequities inflicted upon native people.

The valley's ecological transformation forms the foundation for depicting displacement in the novel. The dam that was built by the government was used as a source of power and improved communities through the annexation of land, the displacement of people, and the eventual flooding of towns. The novel *Dweepa* presents an example of displacement that has been represented as a process of loss, insecurity, and betrayal rather than the promise of national development through the dam. Ganapayya and Nagaveni's displacement goes beyond physical relocation and also includes the issues of dignity, identity, and belonging. Their reluctance to resettle stems not from attachment to their land but from fear of becoming dependent on others in an uncertain environment, without income or social interaction. With other neighbours having received compensation and moved on, this 'island'. It enhances their sense of isolation and separation from Nagi. Even when they settle in Hembra's house for some days, they don't feel it as their home. The Characters in *Dweepa* appear to represent strength rather than just being victims. Ganapayya's decision to maintain the farm on the island and reject the government's housing program represents an act of rural farmers' resistance. Even though his actions are constrained by his fears: fear of deep water, fear of being attacked by wild animals and fear of being ridiculed socially, his actions challenge the state's right to control him at will or pace.

The Ecofeminist resistance of survival is exemplified by Nagaveni. She is a farmer and a homemaker who keeps the family intact by farming, raising animals, and collecting water, all while she safeguards the family even when it continues to erode. Ecofeminist theory recognises the significance of female labour and the role of female ecological knowledge in achieving the endurance of the natural environment, and the contributions made by women are not evident within the overall development structure. Nagaveni is the embodiment of these realities, possessing an indomitable spirit, intelligence, and emotional resiliency as she provides mediation for both Ganapayya and Krishnayya, and provides hope for the family during their most vulnerable times, and serves as the narrative's moral reference, thus reinforcing the family's relationship with the land.

In opposing the rising sea levels, Krishnayya brings to bear is unity and being unselfish in resisting the conflict that they experience in living on the island and how that creates a danger for him and for his family members. Krishnayya's struggle with the tiger in an effort to save Nagaveni represents man's desire to oppose both the ecological and systemic violence. The author does not depict the relationship as being "man's fight against nature", but as a tragedy where both human beings and animals are the ultimate victims of the disruption of the ecosystem. Krishnayya's act of self-sacrifice, being a demonstration of caring, ethical and moral responsibility, his daily activities, such as cattle rearing, farming and ceremonial acts, serve as acts of resistance towards legal possession of the land.

The novel is an example of an environmentally themed story set in the Western Ghats region, and the protagonist's experience of dam construction and moving from his home town. It also represents an exhaustive description of many places and many people. The author has presented a small social and geographic area, which helps the reader to become more aware of the environmental problems and emotions related to submerged homes. In this novel, there are limited characters and a focus on a single family, thus providing a strong portrayal of the many homes of rural areas affected by development projects in India.

The readings of *Dweepa* from an Ecocritical perspective emphasise that the representation of land being gradually flooded with water shows the soil as a victim, whose productivity and significance are destroyed by the water that is diverted for the benefit of distant industries and city dwellers. It also emphasises the significance of Nagaveni as a major symbol of resistance, in which her physical touch with the land signifies the vulnerability of the ecology that is under threat.

At the conclusion of the novel, the island itself symbolises both a physical and metaphorical place where the battle is fought. Ganapayya and Krishnayya's troubles and the wild waters they left behind demonstrate the human costs associated with fighting against government oppression. Despite this, Nagaveni's survival and connection to the island embody the unending need for witnesses to modernity's triumph and the creation of the dam. Therefore, *Dweepa* appeals to the theory of what Rob Nixon calls an "environmentalism of the poor," which puts the people who rely on nature's gifts at the centre of environmental struggles.

Dweepa, the novel serves the themes of ecology, displacement and resistance are depicted throughout the text, and highlights the changing patterns of monsoon rains, the migration resulting from increased water levels, as well as how, at the onset of modernity, animal species migrate in search of suitable living space due to the destruction of their home place caused by urban development. The novel details the physical, psychological and cultural effects of the multiple generations of Ganapayya who have experienced the radical disruption to their traditional lives due to the construction of a dam on the Sharavathi river

associated with the ancestral village. It deeply layered portrayal of ecological transformation and its human consequences, where displacement is not physical, but existential. The novel foregrounds displacement as a form of slow trauma where loss unfolds gradually through the erosion of memory, livelihood and belongings. In this sense, ecology in the novel is inseparable from identity making, displacement a deeply personal and collective wound. However, resistance in *Dweepa* emerges not through overt rebellion but through quiet resilience, particularly embodied in the character of Nagi. Her resistance is rooted in care, memory, and attached to place, suggesting an alternative ecological ethic that values coexistence over control. Ultimately, it redefines resistance as an act of staying, remembering and enduring even in the face of inevitable loss. Thus, the text contributes significantly to blue humanities and eco trauma studies by illustrating how marginalised voices negotiate survival within submerged worlds, turning displacement into a site of both suffering and subtle resistance. Therefore, the narrative in the novel adds a significant dimension to the South Asian literary tradition as environmental studies and displacement studies by showing how individual lives are affected when both nations are confronted by the widespread destruction of the environment as well as the dominance provided by the government.

Works Cited

- Banerjee, Suman. "Dams, Displacement and Devastation: A Study of Na D'Souza's *Dweepa*." *International Journal of Research Science and Management*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2024, pp. 7–11.
- D'Souza, Na. *Dweepa*. Translated by Susheela Punitha, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Karmakar, Goutam. "Dams, Development and Disposability: Eco-Anxiety, Precarity and Submerging Voices in Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa*." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, vol. 12, 2025.
- Kaur, Rajbir, and Rupinder Kaur. "Landscape of Loss: Analysing N. A. D'Souza's *Dweepa* through an Eco-Critical Lens." *International Journal of Environmental Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 7, 2025, pp. 295–300.
- Roy, Arundhati. "The Greater Common Good." *Frontline*, vol. 16, no. 11, 1999.
- Santhi Sree, B., and N. Usha. "Submersion of Soil: An Ecocritical Reading of Land in Na D'Souza's *Dweepa*." *Literary Oracle*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2024.
- Shukla, Shivam. "Ecofeminist Resistance and Ecological Displacement in *Dweepa*: A Critical Analysis." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 2025.
- Snita, S. Arul Little. "Uprooted Lives: The Dual Sides of Forced Displacement in Norbert D'Souza's *Dweepa Island*." *Indian Literary Narratives Journal*, 2024.

-
- Uma, T. "A Sensitive Portrayal of the Conflict Between Man and Nature: An Eco-Critical Reading of Na D'Souza's Novella Dweepa." International Research Journal on Advanced Engineering and Management, vol. 3, no. 5, 2025.
- Vinayakaselvi, M. Angkayarkan, and R. Abinaya. "A Study of Displacement and Injustice in Norbert D'Souza's Dweepa." Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, vol. 17, no. 1, 2021.