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A Study Of Displacement And Injustice In Norbert D'Souza's Dweepa

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Abstract

Displacement is traumatic as it forces the movement of individuals from their habitual residence. People are displaced mostly due to political reasons, internal violence, natural disaster and above all environmental degradation caused by government sponsored development projects for modernisation and urbanisation purpose. The irony behind dam construction is displacement of the native for whom the dam was originally meant to be. Internal displacement poses a great danger and uncertainty among the native people. Within this purview, this paper aims at analysing the theme of displacement and injustice caused to the native people as represented in Norbert D'Souza's *Dweepa*.

Keywords Displacement; Compensation; Dweepa; Dam construction; Developmental projects

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy's "Greater Common Good" more vividly presents the scenario of capturing the after effects of dam construction as she comments on the Sardar Sarovar dam project. She discusses how the tribal people were denied the proper compensation for the land they have been living because they legally did not own it. They were first denied of the ownership of the land as they were isolated from the modern civilisation by means of awareness and by the social strata. Roy continues grieving that the farmers who owned acres of land became pauper overnight and they are still living in misery while the labourers of those lands are forced to live in slums and work for minimum wages. The people who were not aware of the so called civilized system measured by the standards of the majority of people are made outcasts forever.

Roy critiques how Nehru and Gandhi differed in their approach towards developmental projects. She projects Gandhi as Anti-Development resistant group, thus, putting their individual projections of the greater good for the people into a web of disagreements. Roy dismisses both the principles suggesting that one, the capitalist based industrial development; "Soviet-style Centralised State" and the other return to nature idea; "romanticised village Republics". Dams were used as a tool to bring the "local political elites and the regions they represented into the national mainstream" (Swain 823) into the Indian leadership and thus, ensuring the power of the local elites. She suggests the dismantling of the bigger ideologies and to concentrate on the smaller or marginalised issues hoping for the better future which is more sustainable without neglecting development.

The effects of dam construction and other developmental projects include massive displacement, questionable compensation norms and poor or no rehabilitation process, and the ecological impacts such as water logging, salinization, soil erosion, and so on which come at the cause of deforestation and submersion of land basin to start the projects. Roy represents the contrast between elite politicians who promote the dam construction with the native people who have lost their livelihood as a result of their displacement. The tribal populations and the native villagers who were mainly dependent on forest and its produces for their survival were deprived of not only their rights to sustain their home but also their cultural and social ontology to live in slums more or less as refugees. Dam construction paralleled to the image of a developing country “took control of small, traditional systems that had been managed by village communities for thousands of years” (Roy 1999). Roy provides how the first world countries are against dam projects while its thriving in India, and she elaborates that it is a way of depriving farmer’s traditional knowledge and robbing the poor of their natural resources to strengthen the rich. Roy overwhelms her readers with data of the displaced people which with much reduced average numbers to 33 million people displaced only by the big dams. She questions on the victims of the numerous developmental projects of the country. Roy adds that the tribal and Dalit people are the major victims of the displaced and she questions the comparative ratios of the beneficiaries and loss that is placed on the marginalised; “India’s poorest people are subsidising the lifestyles of her richest” (Roy 1999).

The government is entitled to provide only cash compensation for a displaced person under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 amended, 1984. As most tribal people doesn’t have legal ownership of the land, they are denied of any kind of compensation and end up migrating to the cities to live in the slums there but that place also gets threatened by the city officials in many “clean-up missions” (Roy 1999). National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy was formulated in the year 2007 and it was continued by the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill was proposed in 2011. A large number of displacements have preceded these acts and policies without any compensation or rehabilitation measures. Roy points out that the toll of the country’s development was put on the marginalised people all around.

Dweepa depicts the issues surrounding compensation among the people of different social strata along with the after effects of dam construction. The setting of the narrative is Hosamanehalli village and Ganapayya, unlike others residents of the village, hired paid labourers who did not own farm hand (family of labourers working for a particular family for generations). Despite him owning two acres of wetlands and three acres of agricultural land, he was not treated equally as “the respect the landlords commanded came from their place and role in the community, not from their wealth” (D’Souza 1). The village was at the foot hill, and it consisted of five families, three areca plantations, and three rice fields. Three out of the five families were landlords who owned the farm lands while the other two were bonded labourers for many generations who had not been able to pay off their debts. Herambha Hegde and Parameshwarayya owned those labourers from the Hasalaru community; Byra and Hala destined to work in their lands. The people of the village had access only to a few towns during the summer which could be crossed through the river while it was impossible during the monsoon and the village will be completely cut off except some narrow roads.

The Linganamakki dam constructed over the river Sharavathi had raised the water level which had come closer with the submergence of the lands and the water was more stagnant. This would intensify the flood and the river might “overflow from all sides” (D’Souza 6) due to the dam. The river was slowly drowning the Sita Parvatha, and thus, eventually the village of Hosamanehalli. The important problem which happens around the delta regions, due to the loss sands in the bank the occasional monsoon enters the villages and destroys the fields destroying the livelihoods of the people. The Linganamakki dam which took in three or four hills had a huge expanse of water which was like sea among the forests. One edge of the dam stood by the hillock and the other edge was forestland on low-lying hills. There were sightings of fire far beyond the forests across the dam due to the dry forest landscape as a result of the diverted water.

The plight of the farmers towards compensation from the government through the local revenue departments was represented in the novel through Ganapayya. The government officials had displayed

a warning sign on the top of the hillock to indicate how high the water would rise. The submersion office from Kargal had warned that the coming monsoon, the river would drown the village and the hillock. Ganapayya blamed the government for destroying “thousands of homes”, and he pondered about the compensation that was promised for his land. He agonised about the fact that “all kinds of filthy strangers” (D’Souza 3) who had come to the fields which the native people worship, stomping every vegetation to measure the farm, house, the garden, the bathrooms and all setting a price, enquiring about where he preferred a land. These incidents happened a year before but he received no compensation. The bonded labourers were not allotted any kind of compensations as they did not own anything. He received the news that Parameshwarayya got the compensation and Herambha would receive it soon. This made Ganapayya realise that they had bribed the officials. He did not get any response even after his frequent visits, as they claimed that his file was missing. He was perplexed that he might not receive any compensation and the flood warnings were alarming. Parameshwarayya and his bonded labourer Hala and his family went away immediately after an announcement of the flood warning. Herambha had received land, cash compensation of around 50,000 rupees and money even for his cultivations. He advised Ganapayya to bribe the official to move his files sooner at the submersion office. Ganapayya replied that he had given more than Herambha suggested and he owned nothing more to give them and he would not move from the place until he got the compensation. The family of Byra migrated with Herambha and his bonded labourers. The remaining people in the village were Ganapayya, his wife, Nagaveni and his father, Duggajja. They have to survive alone for around four months as the monsoon would cut off the village from the neighbouring towns. They did not have anywhere else to go, “I’ve depended on this farm and the field till now, where else can I live?” (D’Souza 11).

Ganapayya’s further enquiries about compensation were either returned with pacification or assured hope that the water would subside soon for them to sustain the forthcoming monsoon. Despite the questions of the water rising deeper than monsoon, Ganapayya was reluctant to move from the place. He always hoped that even if the water would drown the hillock, there might be a way for him to continue living there. He denied Nagaveni’s advice of moving to her native home during the season because they would have no provisions to live after the monsoon if they did not work through the seasons. He also wondered if he could harvest Herambha’s land too as he was moving out. He advised Ganapayya to get farm hands from the Deevru community or from Aralagodu or Hiermane. This did not end with displacement alone as it paved way for exploiting the nearby marginalised community.

Ganapayya went to Talaguppa the next day to hire some workers and his wife joined him to meet her family as their village will be isolated without any transportation after the rains. As the roads were submerged by the dam, they had to take bus at one rupee and eight annas through Hosamanehalli – Aralagodu – Kargal – Talaguppa, while earlier it was only eight annas crossing the river through a small boat. They could not find any help and thus, Nagaveni suggested of taking Krishnayya who was raised by her family. Rain was heavy that day which was called as Rohini, following the heavy pour that came on and off for four days and it was the sign of the arrival of the monsoon. “Heavy wind, thunder, and lightning were harbingers of the mirugi phase of the monsoon. Once this intermittent rain became incessant, it would stop only after four months” (D’Souza 35). This made him realise that he had to stock up firewood and supplies for the monsoon.

The rain started to get severe continuously for eight days since they got back, and due to the feast of the Mirugi rain, the farm hands did not come to work and the rain had damaged the poorly built farmhouse. As Ganapayya observed that the river was disturbed of its flow, earlier it went towards the waterfall while now the dam had blocked its way. “The Sharavathi lay like a pregnant woman, full and ready for birthing” (D’Souza 37). The workers had commented that the river had risen to the hill, and he knew that he could not get any more farm hands from outside. Luckily, Krishnayya came to help but he said to Ganapayya that the river had risen up to the hill marooning the village and the only way out of the village would be the road to Aralagodu, and if the water kept rising in this speed it might engulf the village making it an island.

But now that her flow was blocked further down, she had begun to spread out, encroaching the neighbouring forest and valley. Trees, shrubs, and

bamboo were already knee-deep in rain water, in red muddy water, still and silent.... Who ever thought the government would bring us to this state, Ayya?''. (D'Souza 45)

The rain continued and it lasted for another eight days. The proverb "Survive the Aridhraa, you're sure of a harvest" (D'Souza 45) kept echoing in Krishnayya as he went to find farm hands from Aralagodu and as Aridhraa rain was pouring and they could not find anyone. Ganapayya had to sow Herambha's field along with his, though Krishnayya was of help, he wanted to get some labourers. The road to Aralagodu from Hosamane was fine as it would take another six feet to flood it. He convinced the men to work in his land after much persuasion and an offer of increased wages of eight annas per day. Duggajja died of sickness during the third phase of Aridhraa rain and Ganapayya did not inform anyone from outside as he saw the water engulfing the hillock. Though the wind and rain was heavy the saplings in the fields were slender yet alive. The areca farm, banana and palm could hardly survive the downpour, and the water started to get collected from the ponds, hills down reaching the river. The lands of Parameshwarayya were already submerged and Herambha's were nearly drowning, and the river was brimming. Hosamanehalli looked like an island surrounded by water with no contact to the outside. There were only three people in the entire village, and the next rain began after eleven days. Krishnayya realised that it was the dam which made them marooned as it prevented the natural flow of the river. The two men were worried as they were isolated from the outside world of all kinds of possibilities if they were in a dangerous position. Moreover, due to the stagnation of water wild animals like foxes, deer, wild goats strolled around looking for refuge. Though tiger, cheetah, bison and wild boar lived in the Malenadu forests, they could have also been scared due to the extra forest to make them roam around their village. All these things worried the three of them as the cattle were restless mooing all night making them wonder if a tiger was spotted nearby. The Aridhraa rain was heavy as if competing with the Mrigashira rain.

Ganapayya was worried if that the compensation would get delayed and if he lose that year's harvest, they would possibly starve. The punarvasu rains continued after eight days which made the sun shine once again. As Ganapayya and Krishnayya went to work, they could see that the rain did not do much damage to Ganapayya's field. Herambha's field faced more havoc, a few trees were uprooted and the supportive sheaths were washed away and the low lying areas of the paddy fields were submerged leaving only half of the field. Krishnayya said that the water wouldn't raise more as the dam was full and it was releasing the rest of the water, and the flow would not make the water stagnant. The killing of water snake in the kitchen by Nagaveni symbolically infers the harm done towards all living being.

From the top of the Sita Parvatha, Krishnayya could see water everywhere like a waterfall. He could see the Aralagodu hill beyond it in a distance he could only see the top of submerged trees. As he walked into the water "there were a few carcasses floating about: rabbits, wildfowl, and deer. He could hardly make them out; they were that bloated. They might have drowned in the water or might have died in the wind and rain." (D'Souza 63) Ganapayya sent word for him but he hesitated and as his Yajamanaru had asked to go there and stay the four months with them. He even tried to avoid the situation with many excuses but he had to obey anyway. He had once liked Nagaveni as they grow together but she was his master's daughter and her mother had always kept keen watch on them and he knew that she behaves differently in his presence and worries about how her husband would take this. Ganapayya was jealous of his wife and Krishnayya but he had no choice but to keep him as he cannot get any other help. Krishnayya explained that he would go back if that is what they wanted and also claimed that he would go back if he beat Nagaveni once more. Ganapayya could not refute his words and accepted them. Nagaveni thought to herself that she wanted to be with Krishnayya but feared what others would say and also she can't deceive her husband.

The rain started after the eight day and "Dark clouds cast their gloom and the wind howled like one possessed" (D'Souza 71). Krishnayya was bored and he could not ask Nagaveni to play games like pagade and channamane. As the rain fell he thought about Nagaveni and he could not be with her being a labourer and also married now. He told that he would go back when the rain stops. Ganapayya up from his sleep commented on the rain and how the rains could continue when the forests in Malenadu was

destroyed. The dam would become waste as the rains had become less comparatively. Krishnayya started to look up for Belli as she had not come while the other cattle had. As suggested by Ganapayya, he went to see up the hillock near the cave, the usual spot of Belli. There he saw the cow covered in blood and he could sense the presence of the tiger in the cave. He ran down the hill to say what he saw and Ganapayya was terrified on hearing the news. He wondered if it would take long for the tiger to come to the cattle shed then to the home as the water is now engulfing and marooning them.

2. Conclusion

The novel ends with tragic death of all the main character who were the victims of displacement and compensation issues. Through the plot D'Souza highlights how developmental policies result in the loss of life and the landscape. D'Souza critiques the government's insensitivity towards approaching the displacement issues. This novel has also shown the impacts of direct and indirect displacement subtly throughout the plot. In Indian context, the developmental projects continuously challenge the natural environmental resources. The major victims are the indigenous group of people. Discrimination against the native people by large development projects results in the failure of food security and safety measures.

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