

Ecofeminist Resistance and Ecological Displacement in *Dweepa*: A Critical Analysis

Mr. Shivam Shukla

Phd Scholar, English, Jananayak Chandrashekhar University

Abstract:

This paper explores *Dweepa*, a seminal Kannada novel by Na D'Souza, and its film adaptation by Girish Kasaravalli, through an ecofeminist lens. By examining the ecological, cultural, and gendered dimensions of displacement, the research highlights how the narrative intertwines environmental degradation with the oppression of women. The central character, Nagi, emerges as a symbol of resistance, whose rootedness in land and spirit of resilience offers a powerful commentary on environmental justice. The study situates *Dweepa* within broader ecofeminist discourse, drawing connections between environmental exploitation and patriarchal control.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Displacement, Gender, Ecology, Resistance, *Dweepa*, Na D'Souza, Girish Kasaravalli

1. Introduction:

Ecofeminism, a philosophical and activist movement, emphasizes the interconnection between the oppression of women and nature. In literature, ecofeminist readings unravel the symbolic and material alignment of female bodies with the earth, and how patriarchal structures exploit both. *Dweepa* ("The Island"), originally a novel by Na D'Souza and later a National Award-winning film, is a poignant narrative situated around the submergence of a village due to dam construction. This work explores how development displaces not just land but lives, cultures, and especially women. Nagi, the protagonist, embodies the link between nature and femininity. Her struggle to stay back on the island despite warnings and rising water levels is not mere obstinacy, but a deep connection with the land and a protest against forced migration. Through *Dweepa*, this paper investigates the ecofeminist themes of rootedness, silence, resistance, and the politics of displacement.

2. Ecofeminist Framework:

Ecofeminism critiques dualisms that divide mind/body, male/female, and culture/nature. Thinkers like Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood assert that modern development exploits nature and marginalizes women simultaneously. The model of "development" is largely patriarchal, prioritizing economic growth over ecological balance and cultural continuity. In *Dweepa*, these binaries are challenged, as the story critiques a model of progress that floods fertile lands, uproots people, and silences women's voices. Nagi's character reflects the indigenous wisdom that values harmony with nature over domination. Her resilience serves as a metaphor for ecological resistance and represents a voice often ignored in policy-making—rural, female, and grounded in nature.

3. Displacement and Patriarchy:

The central conflict in *Dweepa* is caused by the construction of a dam, symbolizing patriarchal development. The state's ambition to generate power leads to the submergence of villages, erasing ecosystems and cultural legacies. Women bear the brunt of this upheaval—forced to leave ancestral homes, they are rendered voiceless in decisions affecting their survival. Nagi's husband, Ganapa, becomes spiritually weak, unable to cope with the loss of religious authority and cultural identity. In contrast, Nagi remains grounded, feeding the cattle, managing the home, and guarding the island's soul. Her physical labor and emotional strength counter the spiritual erosion experienced by men, showing how women are more intimately tied to land and continuity.

4. Nature as Character and Refuge:

Nature in *Dweepa* is not merely a backdrop—it is a living force. The Swelling River, encroaching water, and disappearing landmass evoke a looming catastrophe. Yet, it also offers sanctuary. For Nagi, the island is not just home—it is a sacred space. Her interaction with nature is nurturing rather than exploitative. She prays to it, protects it, and ultimately becomes its voice. This spiritual ecology aligns with ecofeminist ideologies, where nature is revered, not subdued. Nagi's refusal to evacuate is less about defiance and more about protecting a living entity—her home as an extension of herself.

5. The Feminine Voice of Protest:

In the silence of isolation, Nagi's voice resonates powerfully. She does not deliver grand speeches, but her actions—staying, farming, caring for animals—are revolutionary. The very act of existing in a drowning world becomes a protest. Her survival and resistance stand in contrast to the collapse of patriarchal structures symbolized by Ganapa's fall. The film adaptation further visualizes her protest. Long silences, earthy tones, and Nagi's expressive face capture a muted but profound defiance. In a world where development drowns dissent, Nagi becomes the island—rooted, enduring, and echoing with resistance.

6. Comparative Analysis with Real Displacement:

Dweepa parallels real-life cases of ecological displacement in India, especially those resulting from large dams like Tehri and Sardar Sarovar. Women often face double displacement—once from their homes and again from decision-making spheres. They lose not just land but access to food, water, health, and dignity. Nagi's story reflects these ground realities. Her experience is shared by countless tribal and rural women across India who resist evacuation, demanding accountability and sustainability. Her role in *Dweepa* is thus not fiction but a composite of real voices of protest.

7. Conclusion:

Dweepa is more than a tale of submergence—it is a story of survival, memory, and feminine resilience. Through Nagi, Na D'Souza and Girish Kasaravalli offer an ecofeminist critique of developmental policies that disregard ecological and cultural realities. Her resistance is not loud but rooted. She symbolizes an earth-based wisdom that resists erasure. By weaving environmental degradation with gendered suffering, *Dweepa* asserts that the fight for ecological justice is inseparable from the fight for gender equity. Nagi's island, like many threatened landscapes today, remains a metaphor for what is at stake in the name of progress.

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