

LAND, ECOLOGY, DISPLACEMENT AND TRAUMA: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY AGRARIAN NARRATIVES

Mr. D. P. Budhavat*

Research Scholar, Department of English, Shri Sant Savta Mali Gramin Mahavidyalaya, Phulambri Dist. Aurangabad
(Affiliated Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad)

*Corresponding author: deodynamic@gmail.com

Dr. A. P. Ranjanikar

Supervisor & Professor, Department of English, Shri Sant Savta Mali Gramin Mahavidyalaya, Phulambri
Dist. Aurangabad

(Affiliated Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad)

Abstract

The relationship between human beings and the natural environment occupies a central position in contemporary agrarian literature. For farming communities, land, water, forests, rainfall and agricultural landscapes are not merely physical resources but constitute the foundations of livelihood, memory, identity, culture and belonging. Consequently, ecological transformation can produce economic insecurity, displacement, cultural dislocation and psychological trauma. The present research paper examines these interconnected concerns in Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa*, Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months*, Jaideep Hardikar's *Ramrao: The Story of India's Farm Crisis*, and A Village Awaits Doomsday. Sonora Jha's *Foreign* is considered comparatively in relation to the broader concept of displacement and alienation. The study employs Ecocriticism, Trauma Theory and Displacement Studies as its principal theoretical frameworks. Through qualitative textual analysis and comparative reading, the paper argues that the selected narratives challenge the separation between environmental crisis and human suffering. *Dweepa* presents development-induced submergence as a crisis of land, memory and identity; *A Village Awaits Doomsday* exposes the environmental and social consequences of development and inadequate rehabilitation; *Baromas* reveals the ecological and economic contradictions of modern agricultural practices; and *Ramrao* connects climatic uncertainty and crop failure with debt, psychological distress and farmer suicide.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Agrarian Literature; Environmental Crisis; Displacement; Trauma; Land; Water; Rural Communities; Ecological Justice; Indian Literature.

1. Introduction

Agriculture has historically occupied a foundational position in Indian social and cultural life. The relationship between the farmer and the land has shaped patterns of family organisation, settlement, occupation, community identity and cultural practice. The land is therefore not simply a productive resource. Drought, irregular rainfall, water scarcity, changing agricultural practices, environmental degradation, development projects, displacement and declining agricultural security have transformed the literary representation of the village. The rural landscape is no longer merely a setting for human action; it becomes an active force in determining human survival.

The selected works examined in this paper are particularly significant because they establish a close relationship between environmental transformation and human vulnerability. The larger thesis material identifies poverty, indebtedness, ecological degradation, displacement, institutional neglect, psychological trauma and rural resilience as interconnected concerns within the selected corpus. The present paper narrows these broader

concerns to the relationship between land, ecology, displacement and trauma.

Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa* presents the threatened submergence of a village under the Linganamakki Dam and explores the consequences of development-induced displacement. Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months* examines the continuous insecurity of agricultural life and the tensions created by modern agricultural practices. Jaideep Hardikar's *Ramrao: The Story of India's Farm Crisis* provides a deeply human account of agrarian distress, climatic uncertainty, debt and psychological suffering. *A Village Awaits Doomsday* expands the question of displacement to the collective experience of a rural community confronted with environmental transformation and inadequate rehabilitation.

Sonora Jha's *Foreign* occupies a different position. It is not primarily an agrarian narrative and should not be treated as equivalent to the four rural texts. Its relevance is conceptual: it expands the meaning of displacement into cultural, psychological and emotional domains. The comparison therefore enables a broader understanding of the relationship between place, belonging and identity.

2. Context

The agrarian crisis in contemporary India must be understood within a wider transformation of rural society. Agricultural communities increasingly encounter irregular rainfall, water scarcity, rising production costs, changing cultivation practices, market uncertainty and development-induced displacement. These pressures interact rather than operate independently. A crop may fail because of inadequate rainfall. Crop failure may reduce income. Reduced income may increase dependence on borrowing. Debt may create psychological pressure. At another level, a dam may submerge agricultural land and force a community to relocate. Such displacement may destroy not only property but also traditional occupations, social relationships and cultural memory. The environmental dimension of agrarian crisis is therefore inseparable from the social dimension.

The traditional agricultural landscape was structured through seasonal rhythms, local knowledge, indigenous seeds, community cooperation, cattle, forests and water resources. Modernisation has introduced new technologies, commercial inputs and large-scale development projects. These changes may produce economic benefits, but the selected narratives ask whether such benefits justify the ecological and social costs borne by vulnerable communities.

This question is particularly important in the context of development-induced displacement. A dam, industrial project or other infrastructure development may be presented as a symbol of progress. Yet the same project may destroy agricultural land and force villagers away from ancestral settlements. The selected literature therefore introduces a critical distinction between development as economic progress and development as lived human experience.

3. Review of Literature

Agrarian literature has a long history within Indian writing. Earlier literary representations frequently focused upon poverty, peasant exploitation, indebtedness and the unequal structure of rural society. Premchand's *Godan* remains an important example of the literary representation of the Indian peasant and the oppressive economic structures surrounding rural existence.

Ecocritical scholarship provides an important theoretical foundation for such studies. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* demonstrates how representations of rural and urban spaces are shaped by broader social and economic relations. Lawrence Buell's work on environmental imagination emphasises the importance of examining literature's representation of the non-

human environment. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant because ecological damage often develops gradually and its effects become visible over extended periods. The scholarship on displacement further demonstrates that relocation is not merely geographical. Displacement may involve loss of social relationships, cultural identity, economic security and emotional belonging. Trauma studies, particularly the work of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, provide another important framework. Trauma may emerge through catastrophic events, but it may also be associated with prolonged exposure to loss, fear, helplessness and insecurity. However, much of the critical discussion of agrarian literature tends to isolate particular dimensions such as poverty, farmer suicide, development or environmental degradation. A more integrated reading is required to demonstrate how ecological transformation produces displacement and how displacement and prolonged insecurity generate psychological trauma.

4. Research Gap

The major research gap addressed by the present paper lies in the limited integrated treatment of ecology, displacement, memory and trauma across the selected contemporary agrarian narratives. Existing approaches frequently examine agrarian crisis primarily through economic categories such as poverty, debt, agricultural productivity and farmer suicide. Such approaches are valuable but may overlook the deeper relationship between ecological transformation and psychological experience. Similarly, environmental readings sometimes concentrate on natural resources, climate or landscape without sufficiently examining how environmental transformation affects identity, memory and community.

The present study addresses this gap by bringing Ecocriticism, Trauma Theory and Displacement Studies together within a comparative framework. The paper therefore asks not simply what environmental problems the texts represent, but how those environmental problems become experiences of human loss. The research gap may consequently be expressed through the following conceptual movement.

5. Objectives and Research Questions:

The present study seeks to examine the complex relationship between agrarian communities and the ecological environments within which they live and work. Its primary objective is to analyse the representation of land, water, agriculture and ecological transformation in the selected narratives and to understand how environmental changes influence rural livelihood, agricultural productivity

and the continuity of rural life. The study particularly focuses on the manner in which development-induced environmental transformation produces displacement and affects the social, cultural and economic structures of rural communities. It further attempts to explore the relationship between displacement and the loss of memory, identity and belonging, recognising that the loss of land and familiar landscapes may involve consequences extending beyond material deprivation.

In accordance with these objectives, the study raises a series of interrelated research questions concerning the literary representation of environmental and agrarian experience. It asks how the selected narratives construct the relationship between rural communities and their ecological environment and how environmental transformation affects agricultural livelihood, social structures and rural identity. Particular attention is given to *Dweepa* and *A Village Awaits Doomsday* in order to understand how development-induced displacement transforms land, community, memory and belonging, while *Baromas* is examined to investigate the complex relationship between agricultural modernisation, technological intervention and ecological sustainability. The study further questions how *Ramrao* connects environmental uncertainty, crop-related vulnerability and agrarian instability with psychological distress and trauma. It also investigates how displacement and environmental loss affect individual and collective memory, cultural identity and the sense of belonging associated with place. Another important question concerns the forms of resilience, resistance and community solidarity that emerge in response to ecological and agrarian crises. Finally, the study asks how the selected works contribute to contemporary environmental and agrarian literary studies by presenting ecological crisis not merely as a problem of nature or agriculture but as a multidimensional crisis involving livelihood, displacement, memory, identity, psychological well-being, social justice and human dignity.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism provides the principal theoretical framework for examining the representation of the physical environment. It questions the tendency to treat nature as merely a passive background to human action. Within the selected narratives, land, water, rainfall, forests and agricultural landscapes actively determine the possibilities of human survival. Ecocriticism therefore enables the study to examine how environmental change becomes social

and cultural change. The environment in *Dweepa*, for example, is transformed through the construction of the dam. In *Baromas*, agricultural modernisation alters the relationship between farming and ecological sustainability. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, development affects forests, grazing areas and water resources. In *Ramrao*, rainfall and climatic uncertainty directly influence agricultural survival.

9.2 Trauma Theory

Trauma Theory enables the study to examine the psychological consequences of prolonged ecological and social insecurity. Judith Herman's analysis of trauma further demonstrates the psychological consequences of prolonged exposure to threatening conditions. This framework is particularly useful for interpreting *Ramrao*, where agricultural crisis develops into psychological despair, and *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, where displacement creates collective anxiety and insecurity.

9.3 Displacement Studies

Displacement Studies expands the concept of displacement beyond physical relocation. The selected texts demonstrate several forms of displacement: geographical displacement, economic displacement, social displacement, cultural displacement and psychological displacement. The comparison with *Foreign* is especially useful because Sonora Jha's narrative demonstrates cultural and psychological forms of displacement rather than agrarian displacement.

10. Methodology

The present study follows a qualitative and interpretive methodology. The primary method is close textual reading. Selected passages from the primary texts are examined in relation to land, water, agriculture, displacement, ecological transformation, memory and psychological suffering. The research does not attempt to provide statistical measurement of agrarian distress. Instead, it examines how literature transforms social and environmental realities into narrative and symbolic experience. The primary texts constitute the principal sources, while theoretical works in Ecocriticism, Trauma Studies and displacement studies provide the conceptual framework.

11. Textual Analysis

11.1 *Dweepa*: Water, Land and Displacement

Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa* presents the relationship between development and displacement through the construction of the Linganamakki Dam. The central ecological conflict is created by the threat of submergence. Water, which normally sustains agricultural life, becomes an instrument of

destruction. This duality is significant. Water represents life and fertility, yet through technological intervention it becomes the medium through which homes, fields and community spaces disappear.

11.2 *A Village Awaits Doomsday*: Ecological Destruction and Collective Trauma

A Village Awaits Doomsday expands the theme of displacement from the individual to the community. The consequences of development affect forests, grazing lands, agricultural fields, water resources and cattle-rearing practices. When grazing land disappears, cattle become difficult to maintain. When cattle disappear, dairy income declines. When agricultural resources become inaccessible, traditional livelihood systems weaken. The environmental crisis therefore becomes an economic crisis.

11.3 *Baromas*: Agricultural Modernisation and Ecological Uncertainty

Baromas presents ecological crisis through the changing structure of agriculture. Hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides represent modern agricultural practices intended to increase production. Yet increased production is accompanied by increased expenditure. The farmer becomes dependent upon external inputs and credit. This produces a contradiction between productivity and sustainability.

11.4 *Ramrao*: Climate, Agriculture and Psychological Trauma

Ramrao presents the human consequences of the agrarian crisis through the life of Ramrao Panchleniwar. Environmental uncertainty is central to his agricultural existence. Rainfall, crop conditions and agricultural prices determine whether cultivation will generate income. The farmer invests before knowing the outcome. This uncertainty creates a structural condition of vulnerability.

11.5 *Foreign*: Cultural and Psychological Displacement

Sonora Jha's *Foreign* contributes to the broader theoretical understanding of displacement. Unlike the other selected texts, the novel does not primarily represent farmer displacement. Its significance lies in the experience of cultural unfamiliarity, alienation and uncertain belonging. This comparison demonstrates that displacement may occur at multiple levels. An individual may experience psychological displacement even while physically secure. The common element is the disruption of belonging.

12. Comparative Discussion

A comparative reading of the selected texts demonstrates that ecological crisis takes different forms but produces interconnected consequences. In *Dweepa*, the central environmental force is water and submergence. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, it is development-induced ecological transformation. In *Baromas*, it is the changing relationship between agricultural production and ecological sustainability. In *Ramrao*, it is climatic uncertainty and crop vulnerability. In *Foreign*, displacement is primarily cultural and psychological.

13. Major Findings

The study produces several major findings. The first major finding is that nature functions as an active component of rural existence rather than merely as literary background. The second is that land possesses economic, ecological, cultural and psychological meanings simultaneously. The third is that development-induced environmental transformation frequently creates unequal consequences for rural communities. The fourth is that displacement is multidimensional. It may involve physical relocation as well as economic, cultural, social and psychological loss. The fifth is that modern agricultural practices can create contradictions between productivity, ecological sustainability and economic independence. The most significant finding is that ecological justice and social justice are inseparable.

14. Conclusion

The present study has examined the relationship between land, ecology, displacement and trauma in selected contemporary agrarian narratives. Through an integrated application of Ecocriticism, Trauma Theory and Displacement Studies, it has demonstrated that environmental transformation is inseparable from the social and psychological lives of rural communities. *Dweepa* demonstrates how a development project can transform water from a source of life into an agent of displacement. The threatened submergence of the village represents not merely the loss of property but the destruction of a lived cultural landscape.

A Village Awaits Doomsday further demonstrates that displacement is a collective experience. The destruction of forests, grazing lands and agricultural resources affects not only individual families but the entire social structure of the village. *Baromas* reveals the contradictions of modern agriculture. Increased productivity does not necessarily guarantee prosperity or sustainability. The dependence upon commercial agricultural inputs creates new forms of economic and ecological vulnerability. *Ramrao* brings the

environmental crisis into the psychological sphere. Climatic uncertainty, crop failure and economic pressure become experiences of anxiety, despair and trauma.

The final ethical proposition emerging from this study is clear: a development process that destroys livelihood, ecological security, cultural memory and human dignity cannot be considered complete merely because it produces economic or infrastructural growth. Sustainable development must include the voices, rights and lived experiences of the communities whose environments it transforms.

References

1. Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
2. Deshmukh, Sadanand. *Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months*. Translated by Vilas Salunke, Popular Prakashan, 2013.
3. D'Souza, Na. Dweepa. Translated by Susheela Punitha, Oxford UP, 2013.
4. Hardikar, Jaideep. *A Village Awaits Doomsday*. Penguin Books India, 2013.
5. Hardikar, Jaideep. *Ramrao: The Story of India's Farm Crisis*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2021.
6. Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
7. Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann, editors. *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana UP, 2014.
8. Jha, Sonora. *Foreign*. Random House India, 2013.
9. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.
10. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.
11. Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford UP, 1973.