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**Vernacularizing Ecocriticism: Green Reading of Tales in Two Translated Novels of Indian Languages**

***Abstract:***

The term Ecocriticism was first coined by Joseph Meeker in his book 'The Comedy of Survival' in 1972 defining the collaboration of literature and nature. This paper explores the connection of vernacular literature and ecocriticism through an eco-friendly reading of translation of two novels: *Akkineni Kutumba Rao's Kolleti Jaladu (Softly Dies a Lake)* and *Na. D'Souza's Dweepa (Island)*. The research examines how these narratives articulate the material and cognitive impacts of ecological change by focusing on the socio-economic and political dimensions of human-environment interaction.

Set against the backdrop of the sinking Kolleru Lake, *Softly Dies a Lake* depicts the interconnected lives of villagers and the lake's ecosystem, and reveals its uncertain character by transferring blame from natural volatility to the destructive forces of industrial exploitation. The narrative laments a once-surviving ecosystem surrendering to modernization and unlimited exploitation. The novel, *Dweepa* depicts the trauma of deportation and disorganized livelihoods caused by subsequent flooding and dam construction, which, once symbolized as progress, becomes a source of hardship revealing the human cost of development. The paper explores the gendered aspects of environmental deterioration and social hierarchies through an ecofeminist lens. It

examines how women's experiences are seldom underrated in environmental discussions, irrespective of their silent sacrifices by the totalitarian structures as concepts of honor span through environmental issues, affecting their engagement with resources.

By examining these novels, the study promises to acknowledge how vernacular literature collaborates with environmental concerns, demanding anthropocentrism and promoting multifaceted insights into the complicated human-environment relation in India. It delves into the restrictions of the identical anthropocene concept, highlighting influences of capitalist organizations on ecosystems. The paper ultimately concludes the ethical conundrum of balancing economic growth with human needs, questioning the significance of short-term benefits over environmental consciousness.

***Keywords:***

Postcolonial criticism, Environmental sustainability, vernacular literature, Anthropocentric influence, gendered exploitation, capitalization, blue humanities

Some critical perspectives have emerged since the 1990s known in academic circles as ecocriticism or 'green criticism'. Deriving insights from varied disciplines such as ecology, environmental studies, social sciences, literary criticism and their allied branches; it attempts to examine the interaction between the humans and the environment or rather the degraded environment marked by contemporary ecological crises notwithstanding the fact that the categories of both human agents and perceptions of environment are numerous and are not immutable on time-scale or spatially rigid. Glotfelty had called the literary production regarding nature an "undervalued genre". Initially, ecocriticism emerged in the Western world but now the non-western literature is

also increasingly analysed through ‘green’ lens. But, the hierarchy manifests there also as English literary works belongs to a privileged and more providential sort. We will, however, examine some two novels originally written in Telugu and Kannada but again will rely on the translated versions in English due to our own limitation of proficiency in these diverse regional languages. We hope that despite the linguistic constraint, we will be able to lay bare some of the socio-economic and political dimensions of the encounter between human and other living-beings with their ‘natural environment’ and articulation of this material and psychic impact in this selected literary and cultural field of production. The literary texts we would examine are- *Kolleti Jaladu* (translated as *Softly Dies a Lake* by Vasanth Kannabiran) by Akkineni Kutumba Rao and *Dweepa* written by Na. D’Souza in Kannada and translated as *Island* into English by Susheela Punitha.

*Kolleti Jaladu* (translated as *Softly Dies a Lake* by Vasanth Kannabiran) by Akkineni Kutumba Rao, a reputed Telegu writer and film director and producer, is an elegiac story centred on one of the largest freshwater lakes Kolleru interwoven with lives of the farmers and fisherfolk living near it. The unique interdependence of the water body and all forms of animate life along with human life-world is vividly narrated through the eyes of a five-year-old boy Sheenu. Instead of idealized and reverential mode of depiction to which ecocritical texts often falls victim to, the lake Kolleru is shown as nurturing and munificent yet unpredictable, volatile, dynamic and intimidating. But, in the end precarity of market and profit driven human agents proves to be far more deadly than the occasional floods of wetland swamp ecosystem about the ruthlessness and wildfulness of which people complained but in which they survived with humanly traits of adaptability.

Kolleru lake is the second largest freshwater lake in India lying between deltas of Godavari and Krishna rivers in Andhra Pradesh and near town Eluru. Fed by seasonal streams of Budameru and Tammileru and connected to the Godavari-Krishna River system through many channels and rivulets. In the parlance of ecology, it is a marshland wet-land type of dynamic ecosystem with an enormous biodiversity. Typical wetland vegetation like *Ipomoea aquatica*, *Ottelia spp*, *Typha spp*, *Acacia nilotica*, *Samanea saman*, *Prosopis juliflora* provide habitat for many species of birds and migratory birds like Glossy Ibis, Open Billed Stork, Purple Moorhen, Painted Storks, Pied Avocet, Marbled Teal, Common Redshank, Grey Pelicans etc. A rich biomass of about 63 species of fish and planktons of the lake are linked to a major food chain as food for the birds.

(<https://forests.ap.gov.in>>kolleru, A.P. Forest Dept.) According to the Central Board of Pollution Control, the lake has an area of 901 Sq. Kms was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in November 1999 under India's Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, and designated a wetland of international importance in November 2002 under the Ramsar Convention. The important activities in the lake area are agriculture and aquaculture. The ecological degradation of the lake was set in due to water diversion, extensive agriculture by use of pesticides & fertilizers in upper catchment and delta regions, bunding for pisciculture, draining of sewage and industrial pollutants through in-flowing drains and channels. The lake is under stress mainly due to encroachment, aquaculture activities, pollution from industrial and domestic sources and prolific growth of weeds. Problems of encroachment have also resulted in deterioration of this water body. There are 46 island villages and 76 shoreline villages and the majority of people are engaged in agriculture and the rest are fisherfolks. Aquaculture was introduced into this predominantly agriculture and fishing based economy of the lake by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1977 for the Fisheries Co-operative Societies. But the private players also aquaculture in a big way not only in production but also packaging, long distance transportation (to Kolkata) and marketing. Apart from reclamation and encroachment for cultivation and commercial fisheries, the lake is dying due to increasing pollution load by industrial effluents from sugar factories, distilleries, tanneries, agro-chemical factories, paper mills and rice mills. There is also dumping of huge amounts of sewage effluents from nearby towns. (Reddy, 2014: 277-288)

Written in the genre of a realistic memoir, the literary text is based on reminiscences of Srinivasa Rao, a five-year-old guileless, candid and innocent child of village Pulaparru but it touches on life of its people, and their customs, religious belief-system culture, and livelihood which drew sustenance from farming, cattle-rearing and fishing, activities which were unthinkable without the precious sweet water of Kolleru. Interdependence of animate and inanimate forms of nature and equal relevance of all forms of biomass is a fundamental tenet of ecology. It is revealed a number of times in the text. For instance, ecosystem of lake Kolleru is described in the following lines:

“As summer approached not only buffaloes, sheep and goats but also herds of cattle from dryland villages would come to Kolleru for pasture. However many the herds, Kolleru would draw them all into her embrace like a true mother....countless birds across the world would come like faraway travellers to brighten the land with colours..,blackbirds, storks, cranes, herons, hawks, snakebirds, cuckoos, mynas, red-legged storks, spotted-beak ducks, black bald hens, they all flocked there.” (p. 10)

“The lake was full of great loaches, sucking fish, eels, catfish, jellyfish, snails, Bombay duck.....Sheltering so many kinds of birds and few hundred thousand other life forms, providing them food and sanctuary, Kolleru had more than a hundred island villages. One of these villages was Pulaparru.” (p. 11)

The theme of dependence of flora and fauna along with human inhabitants is reiterated again and again throughout the narrative. The interdependence of all forms of life is discernible in the following passages:

“Once one entered the small stream the weeds, the bulrushes, the cork trees, the underwater plants, the rushes and the mosses made it impossible to negotiate.... Weaving through the weeds and water plants, the blue water lilies and lotuses of many colours floating on the surface of the lake, the raft carrying the vaddis would snake its way over the water.” (pp. 88-89)

"The water was full of fish, crabs, snails, snakes, leeches...not just one but as far as one could see a range of different forms of water life. On the water a wealth of green grasses waving in the breeze. Feeding on these grasses the cattle, birds and insects. All living things depending completely on nature and mingling with nature in complete harmony, Kolleru seemed to reveal a great and miraculous truth." (p. 101)

The fictional description looks like a mirror image of a non-fictional account. Kolleru “...serves as a habitat for a variety of flora and fauna including several species of migratory birds.....a habitat where there is a harmonious coexistence of aquatic organisms, birds, people and life-supporting water.” (Sabesh, 2010: 6 ) and Kolleru is a “wetland in a low-lying deltaic setting acting as an important flood-balancing reservoir, a haven for migratory and resident birds, and a source of livelihood for traditional fishermen.” (Rao and Others, 2010: 1289)

In the village of Palaparru, there were about seventy families of Kamma caste farmers, ten families of Vaddi fisherfolk and one Muslim tailor. The usual fracture of the ‘human-scape’ with entrenched hierarchy of castes in the countryside of the region was almost absent here and villagers are depicted as leading an idyllic, harmonious and altruistic existence with a shared collective identity. This is expressed in the description of the character of Rangayya, the father of Sheenu. “For Rangayya, everyone who passed that way was ‘our’ people. Without any reference to caste, religion or race everyone was ‘our’ people. ‘Our village’, ‘our next village’, ‘our Kolleru’, ‘our man’. But not just humans, even the dogs that passed that way were ‘our dogs’,... There was nothing in nature that was

not 'ours' to him. (p. 28) It was actually an idealized and romanticized picture of village-life. In the parlance of sustainability discourse social-equity is an equally important pillar of a just and sustainable society which is defined as the society in which prospects for full involvement in all activities, entrée, benefits and policymaking of a society are offered to all. But, the social-stratification and differentiation among cultivator Kammas was discernible who had mostly migrated from other villages and settled down in Palaparru. Kakayyagaru had bought 25 acres land with money and he used two *palerus* (servants) and locally available hired labourers for farming his land and he supplemented his income with money lending to Kaikalur Komatis and local villagers and was one wealthy person. (pp. 15-16) Then, one Veerabhadram, husband of Sheenu's aunt Vajaramma, never worked on farm land and always wore an ironed *khaddar dhoti* and a white shirt. (p. 19) The village elder, Veeraraghavayya, who was the only among the older people who was little bit educated and who got all his children educated. He was a link man between governmental agencies and villagers and he indulged in some business and he was always dressed in khaddar and wore glasses. (p. 22) Here, we can see the social role of clothes as Tarlo (1996: pp.1-8)) emphasizes the functions of clothes as markers of social-identity as they play an active role in the identity construction of individuals, families, castes, regions and nations.

The feelings and behavioral traits of altruism and co-operation were more pronounced during the time of crisis. One such time was flooding of village settlements during the rainy season by Kolleru. The floods washed away crops, caused problems for livestock and there was the problem of getting drinking water, cooking food and even attending to nature's call. Only three houses in the village remained unaffected and all took shelter there and all village folks were fed and served there. Even after the flood, villagers co-operated in repairing their broken houses and the breaches in bund erected to protect the village from flood. The floods were frequent as the descriptions again repeated. "Last year the flood had drowned the planted seedlings ... .till the paddy seedlings had rotted ... .This time too it was the same. The Kolleru had snatched the crop from their very mouths.....By then, as if their tears had added to its volume, the Kolleru entered the village. Every house became a Kolleru. Kolleru was swelling in the houses. And in the minds of people as seas and oceans. Oceans of sorrow" (pp. 154-55) Common sorrows evoked feelings of shared fate and empathy for each other in such times of crisis. At this point in story, Atluri Pitheswar Rao nicknamed Pitchayya, a nephew of Veerabhadram and Rangayya, who have studied outside and obtained a degree and influenced by leftist ideas enters and inspired the villagers to reclaim 500 acres of shallow swamp of Kolleru and



build a strong bund to protect the reclaimed land from flooding and practise co-operative, collective farming on that land. The experiment was successful but not long-lasting. But clearly, his idea was based on the basic premise that humans can precisely know, technologically modify, and exploit nature. The reverence or worship of nature is not a new belief. It is perhaps as old as the existence of human culture on earth. Similarly, the idea to confront nature, modify it through tools and techniques co-existed with the idea of reverence towards nature. The *Softly Dies a Lake* thus underpins and opens up a discussion about the trajectory of this development. Basically, it boils down to debate between proponents of individualism and those who argue for the market as a fundamental mechanism for distribution of societal resources and those who lay stress on some other human needs and instincts for managing human affairs. Auguste Comte, as an influential French thinker, took a different approach to understand human affairs. In a world where the market was seen as a sole sovereign governing the newly industrialized world, he emphasized a rather controversial stance than later classical theorists, by stating that altruism was an important human drive. He defined altruism as the complete submission of the self, and felt it was necessary to the benefit and progress of society. In stark opposition to selfish greed and individual interests, altruism was “living for others” (*vivre pour autrui*). He wrote:

“The individual must subordinate himself to an existence outside himself in order to find in it the source of his stability. And this condition cannot be effectively realized except under the impulse of propensities prompting him to live for others. The being, whether man or animal, who loves nothing outside himself, and really lives for himself alone, is by that very fact condemned to spend his life in a miserable alternation of ignoble torpor and uncontrolled excitement. Evidently the principal feature of progress in all living things is that the general consensus which we have seen to be the essential attribute of vitality should become more perfect. It follows that happiness and worth, as well in individuals as in societies, depend on adequate ascendancy of the sympathetic instincts.” (Comte, 1973: 556-65). John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), a contemporary and acquaintance of Comte, was fascinated by Comte’s idea of altruism, but he disagreed with his interpretation of how and why it operates in human societies. Mill, being a liberal philosopher, was not willing to shed his individualism and he was not convinced that society could always act in the interest of universal welfare. Mill proposed a different clarification of altruism, one that he viewed as more down-to-earth and practical. According to him, Individualism, seen so negatively in Comte’s interpretation of egoism, should instead be perceived as a necessary element in the social realm. Mill understood

Comte's version of altruism to be the complete submission of the self to society, which he viewed as unworkable. Another influential thinker of the time, Herbert Spencer felt that altruistic behaviour was ultimately damaging to society's growth and progress, because it inhibited the evolution of dominant members of society. Spencer's theories of altruism were largely influenced by what came to later known as Social Darwinism, which supposedly derived from his theory of natural selection, is largely associated with survival of the fittest, a term actually coined by Spencer in his reactionary work *Principles of Biology*. According to Spencer, earlier ideas pertaining to the comparison of egoism and altruism are weakened by the exclusion of the all-important factor of heredity. In line with his coining of the term, "survival of the fittest" he wrote "If health, strength and capacity are usually transmitted, and if disease, feebleness, stupidity, generally reappear in descendants, then a rational altruism requires insistence that egoism which is shown by receipt of the satisfactions accompanying preservation of body and mind in the best state" (Spencer 1879: 192). On the contrary, Peter Kropotkin, the famous Russian Anarchist thinker, argued that society prospered when individuals engaged in the behaviour of mutual aid, and not in individual egoist behaviour. He based his observations on his numerous explorative journeys in Siberia and other remote areas of Russia. Kropotkin preferred to use the term mutual aid and not the term altruism. While Marx appreciated and hailed the evolutionary ideas of Darwin and went on to use them in his historical materialism, Kropotkin rejected Darwin's theory, and concluded that mutual aid, or the presence of a kind of altruistic behaviour was crucial to the maintenance of life, the preservation of species, and their continued evolution. Unlike Comte who favoured unhindered altruism, 'mutual aid' of Kropotkin was based on a balance between altruistic and egoistic behaviours. (Kropotkin, 1910). In the pre-modern times, this interruption between nature and human or culture was never so deep and it never led to the kind of ecological disruptions which we have witnessed in the last couple of centuries. In the Western literature, the ecological consequences have been portrayed in various ways. Dewey W. Hall in his *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists: An Ecocritical Study, 1789–1912* (2014) tried to trace an environmentalist legacy that asserts Romanticism as a key position of proto-ecological thought although many scholars have criticized Romanticism for conjuring up nostalgic and sentimental views of nature and for separating questions of the nature from social, cultural, and political context. At the heart of ecocriticism is "a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point" (Buell, 1995: 11). The discredited anarchists and the early Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in which he criticizes the alienation from the nature of our

species or human existence among other manifestations of this estrangement. The notion of alienation describes the estrangement/distancing of human-beings from their work, their human nature, and their own 'being'. The first wave of ecocriticism paid attention to simply green or nature writing and contemporary environmental crisis in multifarious forms. The second wave deconstructed the age-old division between the human and the inanimate nature. Perceiving the division as a social-construction it redefined nature and environment. Its by-product was the politics of eco-justice movement which raised "an awareness of class, race, and gender through ecocritical reading of text" (Bressler, 1999: 236). In the Western literary tropes and images, we often encounter depiction of rusticity, pastoralism and wilderness. (Garrad, 2004: 33-71) In Indian regional literature, it is broadly not about romanticism, rusticity, pastoralism and wilderness but about *Jal*, *Jameen*, *Jangal* and *Jan* (Water, soil, forest and people and their interdependence). The duality of nature and humans is mostly missing because both are treated as divinely created entities.

We would like to see *The Softly Dies a Lake* from eco-feminist lens also. Ecofeminism largely "analyzes the interconnection of the oppression of women and nature" (Bressler, 1999: 236). Postulating equivalence between control of land and the authority of men over women, eco-feminists observe these tiered, gendered relationships, in which the land is often likened with the feminine, seen as a productive resource and the property of man. Although mostly preoccupied with their drudgery of domestic chores, here is a sample of gossip among women in the village about two girls who have come to visit their relatives.

"What is wrong with them? Each looks like a Maali buffalo ready to deliver."

"They are studying it seems," said Devamma.

"These female widows who roam shamelessly with such big breasts on the streets, who knows what some donkey will think and then what will happen?" (p. 32)

Look at another rant about the behaviour of widows.

"I am only letting my tongue loose you filthy widow! Just see what you are letting loose without any control over your body! Where is that *odni*? Where should it be? Do you want all those male corpses to be excited and aroused like dogs? The bitches in this village have all fattened up so much! And Pitchamma began her tirade of abuse. (p. 36) The patriarchal tone is more disheartening as it came from the mouth of a widow herself.

Women are often depicted as sexually alluring or as dangerous to male and family honour and onus is put on them for men's morality. The ideal women are contrasted with sexually or supposed to be sexually active women, the evil seductresses, outside the familial control; both in religious text and secular discourses. (Franmann, 2000: 83-85) We find glimpses of the same discursive strategy in *Softly Dies a Lake*. The male domination of elders of caste is also revealed in the story of rape of a Vaddi woman, Savithri by an elder of Vaddi caste, Pedda in a drunken state. The incident is hushed up by the elders of Vaddi caste as it would be to dis-honour an elder of the caste. Subsequently, when an altercation between the young son of Savithri and a girl of Kamma caste and Savithri's son slapped the girl for teasing him about the relationship between his mother and Pedda, the village *panchayat* excommunicates the Savithri's family. The boy had given a promise not to tell the *panchayat* what actually transpired between himself and the girl whom he had slapped as such revelation would jeopardise his mother's honour. The excommunication was lifted only through some manipulative, diversionary intervention of some youths of the village but it thoroughly exposes the inherent gender-oppression and injustice in social life of the Indian villages. The village communities and their caste-system actually ratified the masculine domination, the sexual-division of labour, the notions of honour and properties. French scholar Bourdieu rightly observes that the social order functions like an immense symbolic order tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded. It is sexual division of labour and activities as well as structuring of space in which assembly and market are reserved for men and house and hearth reserved for women. (Bourdieu, 2001: 8-10)

Coming to the role of human agency in interaction with Kolleru, it must have been a long history as the lake was mentioned in the inscriptions of the ancient king of Andhra region, king Shalivahana. The numismatic evidence in the form of coins of king Ikshvakus and the Vishnukundins and literary accounts of Dandi and Huan Tsang all attest to its antiquity. (p. 162) Earlier, we mentioned an attempt to harness the lake to a human project of reclamation of a tiny portion of about 500 acres to ensure their survival through control over the lake by a co-operative venture of collective farming to which Sheenu too was a witness. This is narrated through the myth of ocean churning in these lines: "So they turned on Kolleru herself. Not like humans but like demons. Like the ocean of milk that was churned by the Devas and Asuras who held onto Adisesha's tail and fought the flames of poison in quest of the eternal *amrita*, they churned the Kolleru in rebellion to produce nectar." (p.173) But when Srinivasa Rao alias Sheenu returns to his village after sixty years and walks to Kolleru along with his cousin, Radhakrishna alias Kishtudu of his childhood company, "What lay before

them...was a filthy pond, a breeding ground for germs, a danger to the environment, a toxic net for birds. The Kolleru which had once nurtured so much life, having fallen into the hands greedy for wealth, was an image of destruction and death.” (p. 2)

One more question arises here regarding the efficacy of the notion of Anthropocene as a human-dominated geological epoch in explaining the environmental crisis of our planet. The notion became a centre of focus in environmental discourses but scholars and scientists have raised many questions about it. Besides others, one concern which looks convincing to us is that human activity is treated as undifferentiated and the differential impact of various human agencies on ecosystems is not clearly spelt out. It can be argued that the Western Europe gave rise to a dynamic new economic arrangement. Initially, the change began in rural areas of the Western Europe transforming the agrarian sector, but subsequently changes in manufacturing activities led to the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century. Though the seeds of the process of divergence might have started a bit earlier. The plundering of world resources began, facilitated by rise of imperialism, racialism and colonialism supplemented by plantation economies based on slave labour and new forms of technological power and ascendancy.

The awareness of environmental degradation and ecological crisis is certainly a recent phenomenon. The Kolleru lake has existed for thousands of years in its pristine beauty and in complete harmony despite human settlement around it. The signs of its death and decay were clear to Srinivas Rao when he returned to it after about fifty years. *Softly Dies a Lake* also delves into the causes of the decay of Kolleru’s ecosystem in such a short time-span and it is not undifferentiated human responsibility. The fortunate, intelligent and those with capital among the Vaddi fisherfolk developed fish-ponds and this commercial pisciculture and grew rich while the poorer fishermen caught fish on their ponds. (p. 192) The administrative apathy of the government is highlighted and expressed in these words: “There is politics and there is capital. There is a business of a level that you can not even comprehend. The politicians are doing things that they should not do because of that.” (p. 193) The pollution, another factor accountable for the decay, is forcefully pointed out. “All the industrial waste from Vijayawada and Eluru flows into Kolleru.....From the fish food to the medicines everything is toxic waste ... .Now all the pesticides used in the agriculture and toxic waste enters the Kolleru, poisoning it.” (p. 194) The nexus between big-business, state and politicians is, thus, plainly held responsible for the ecological disaster of Kolleru wet-land ecosystem. Dante described in his poetical fiction *Inferno* the journey through seven circles of hell. We do not know if hell exists or not but it is

explicitly made clear in the story of *Softly Dies a Lake* that the human greed and unchecked predatory tendency to appropriate and accumulate everything is definitely paving the pathway to hell and endangering our posterity.

The second story is *Dweepa* written by Na. D'Souza in Kannada, translated as *Island* into English by Susheela Punitha. It takes up the problem of displacement and psychological and cultural impact on people due to submergence of their locale by construction of dams over rivers. D'Souza had worked on the Sharavathi hydro-electric project which built the Linganamakki Dam which resulted in submergence of 'forests, valleys, canals, villages, the villagers and their agricultural lands.' D'Souza penned down this tale of development-induced displacement in the 1970s when environmental concerns were not so prominent in Indian writings. Besides *Dweepa*, some short stories and two other novels of D'Souza, *Mulugade* (Submersion, 1984) and *Oddu Dam/Barricade*, (1990) also deal with the theme of sociological and psychological violence of development related projects in realistic and concrete manner. Although, the Indian political scene as witnessed its first anti-dam agitation way back in 1920s when the Tata Hydro Electric Power Supply Company planned to build a dam at the confluence of the rivers Nila and Mula in the Mulshi Peta tract of Poona district, the reservoir for the dam would submerge many villages of Mulshi Peta and displace thousands of *Mavlas* or the villagers of Mulshi. The villagers launched a *satyagraha*, from May 1922, under the leadership of the radical Gandhian leader, Senapati Bapat. By the end of 1924, many *Mavlas* accepted compensation for their lands and the *satyagraha* was called off. Vora (2009: 150-51), in his definitive account of the Mulshi satyagraha explains that one reason for its failure was an unresolved division between those who resisted the acquisition at all costs – a policy of 'Jan or Jamin' (life or land) and those who aimed simply to extract more generous compensation from Tata. But, there was also a voice in the movement that believed that the dam would give "a death- blow to their homesteads, their holy temples and all the happy associations these places carry with them." (Phatak, 1921: 18)

*Dweepa* is a heart-rending story of an ordinary landowner's family of an isolated hamlet of Hosamanehelli on the verge of submergence due to creation of a reservoir with the construction of a dam on river Sharavathi. Ganapayya with his ailing old father and wife Nagaveni is left stranded on a man-made island living a risky life of uncertainty, while few other landowners and his neighbours moved out of the hamlet after receiving compensation for bribing the lower-rung officials of the Submersion office. Initially, an idealized picture of the village is depicted. "Ganapayya was neither rich nor poor. All had two acres of wetland for an areca farm and three acres of agricultural land to

grow rice. He did not own farm hands; he hired some for wages. But that did not make any difference to his status. The respect the landlords commanded came from their place and role in the community, not from wealth. This had been the system in the Malenadu villages for generations.” (p. 1) This romanticised image is illusory as we find the unambiguous, seamy side of the picture in the narrative of the story very soon. On the foothill of Sita Parvatha hillock five families lived. Out of the five families, “...three were those of the landlords who owned the areca farms and paddy fields, the other two were bonded labourers, bonded since birth because their fathers had not been able to pay off their debts to the landlords.” (p. 5) Breman (2007) examines the phenomenon of labour bondage in a different spatial context the Western India and its social history but his observations regarding this labour under-class, their servitude and lack of opportunities for ameliorating their conditions in the post-Independence India due to privatization of common property resources by the landlords are equally valid in the countryside of other regions also.

Ganapayya tried to get some farm hands to work on his farm but it became difficult to get them partly due to shortage of labour and partly due to apprehension of working in that hamlet which was on the verge of being marooned completely in the rainy season. Ganapayya accepts his wife’s proposal of using the services of the servant in her paternal home, Krishnayya, who had been raised like a family member by his father and had childhood deep emotional bonding with Nagaveni. The incessant Monsoon rains and surging level of reservoir threatening to sink the once sustainable and benevolent lands of Hosamanehelli is *mise-en-intrigue* or the plot of the story now onwards which symbolizes violence of a state project against livelihood of a trapped family. The obstruction to the river’s natural flow was a kind of violence committed by ‘humans without humaneness’ and it was bound to respond with its own counter-violence by creating precariousness in place of nurturance. While water from the river threatens to inundate the farm lands, the physical material assets created by human labour; the loneliness and boredom felt by isolated inhabitants endangers the human-relationship between Ganapayya and Nagaveni. Nagaveni’s sense of alienation is evident from these lines: “Working on farm and field had lost its charm as she had to work like an owl. Of course, Ganapayya worked alongside....Her husband was taciturn by nature. He spoke only when in the mood, not otherwise. And even when he did, there was no intimacy, no companionship she could bank on.” (p. 40) But, the first sacrifice to the fury of the monsoon was Ganapayya’s ailing father.

Inundation of surrounding forest land by the rising water of reservoir compelled the wild animals to abandon their natural habitat and seek prey and shelter in human-settlement areas. “Wild animals

like the tiger, cheetah, bison and wild boar lived in the Malenadu forests but they lived on their own territory most of the time. Now with all the extra water around they could be scared too. Ganapayya became even more apprehensive because of their presence.” (p. 51) And when, the ferocity and rage of monsoon rains passing through various phases like Krithika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Aridhraa and Punarvasu had waned and it was apparent from the stabilization of water level in reservoir that the worst was over and they have survived the ordeal, the natural retribution came from two unknown forces. Firstly, the repressed instinctual nature burst forth in Krishnayya and Nagaveni. Krishnayya mused about his childhood days: “In those days we always spent time together eating, sleeping, playing. Even as she was growing up, I was fascinated by her. I’ve noticed her firm breasts under her blouse, her arms filling out, her reddened cheeks, her slender swaying waist. I’ve wanted to be with her all the time....It was a longing, a craze.” (pp. 63-64) Nagaveni unconscious kindled in a similar fashion. “Krishnayya truly my companion. As soon as I hear his name, my heart light up like those different coloured matchsticks we light up for Deepawali. It sparkles like a hundred flower-pots lit together. It arches like the rainbow from heaven to earth and set me afire.” (pp. 60-70) So, despite the dilemma of social morality, they ended up having physical relations one night. Wilhelm Reich, a psycho-analyst, defined orgasmic potency as “the capacity to surrender to the flow of biological energy, free of any inhibitions; the capacity to discharge completely the dammed-up sexual excitation through involuntary, pleasurable convulsions of the body.” (Reich, 1999: 102) Orgasmic impotency is comparable to damming of free-flowing river and its destructive potential for both human inhabitants and other vegetative and wild forms of life and much broader riverine ecosystems. The human species was able to modify the hydrological cycle by storing water for drinking, irrigation purposes to increase agri-food production. But, in modern times our intervention modified ecosystems to such an extent that our profligacy and poor resource practices are threatening our future as well as biological diversity itself. (Ramachandra *et al.*, 2012: 2) The large reservoir of Linganamakki has filled to capacity only thrice since its commissioning some 20 years ago. If the dam height had been restricted to a lower level such that the reservoir would be filled more regularly, not only would the cost of the project have been substantially reduced, but several thousand hectares of forest would also have been saved. (Gadgil, 1979: 297)

Secondly, a predatory tiger comes to Hosamanehelli as a symbol of natural revenge after inundation of its natural habitat seeking prey in human-settlement. The tiger devours Ganapayya’s cow and then Ganapayya himself. Interestingly, the prey-predator analogy has been applied by some to highlight



the plight of women in society, highlighting their vulnerability in a system where power predominantly resides with patriarchal figures. (Jain, 2024: 299-306) One contentious hypothesis of prey-predator relationship proposed by the state bureaucracy in the context of climate change is that ".....in the winter leopards are pushed down by snowfall from the higher reaches of the Himalayas to spaces inhabited by humans .... Previously, there was abundant prey available for them (sheep, goats, deer, and so on). However, due to resource degradation and biodiversity depletion in the Himalaya, the leopards now find themselves faced with sparser options for hunting out their regular prey and are, thus, constrained to turn on humans. This disappearance of regular prey for the leopards is directly related to the set of processes that fall under the rubric of climate change." (Mathur, 2015: 93-94) However, the prey-predator metaphor is an unsettled one. Sometimes the government or the Indian state is projected as a predator for forests. For instance, the musing of Ganapayya is reflective of this. He is reflecting that "Malenadu was becoming barren with trees being cut to make way for railway tracks and highways, telegraph lines, and dams and townships for outsiders...If they continue to hack trees at this rate, of course, rains will become scarce. And there won't be enough water in the Linganamakki dam. The Sharavathi project will be a waste..." (p. 76)) Nagaveni is symbolical prey in the relationship with her husband as 'she was the property of her husband now' (p. 80) And her love and trust for a creature called her husband dwindled as she felt that she was facing the flooding, snake and tiger on a marooned island because of his decision. The Feminist scholarship has done much to produce a kind of re-configuring of research practice in last couples of decades. It has brought women into public gaze by exploring women and their experiences. Women now do surface in research but the naturalization of gender roles is discernible here in the literary texts we are examining. The flood water surrounding the hamlet assumed the role of predator when Krishnayya was trying to escape by swimming across it after committing the 'moral turpitude' but turned back to save Nagaveni who jumped into water when he did not heed the repeated entreaties of her to come back.

Thus, both the tales expose the role of state and its agencies in engineering the landscape and its differential harm of this on the life-experiences of people. While the rich and wealthy are able to acquire wealth and power, the laggards and foot-draggers become the victims of natural retribution of the damaged environment of wetland and riverine ecosystems as a result of massive landscape transformations. The tales are not only literary expressions of peoples' anguish over enslavement of water-bodies, it is also an anthropological statement about the impact of infrastructural projects and

environmental protection legislation on people's lives and social identities. They keep us wondering about whether to view a lake and a river as a source of life-sustaining water imbued with a spirit of its own or as a resource to be utilized for fishing or irrigation, as an instrument of political economy capable of generating profit and wealth. The landscape transformation may begin with good human intentions but effects of these might turn out to be quite opposite of that. The graphic and vivid observations are possible only in literary imagination but these stories from vernacular languages are fully attuned to the details of tangled ecological and social life of the rural hinterland.

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