

FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA: A GENDER ANALYSIS

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In independent India, development policies pursued by the successive governments have been leading to widespread displacement of population. It is estimated that some five lakh persons are displaced every year as a direct consequence of administrative land acquisitions. Displacement of people may occur due to many reasons; like earth quake, flood, infrastructure development, and dam construction etc. Majority of displaced people are poor and they also suffer the most from displacement. It appears that development has made rich richer and the cost of development is borne by the displaced poor. It creates some specific problems like marginalization, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, and family loss etc.

The study is used gender perspective and attempts to examine gender inequality as an offshoot of resettlement. It has been found that due to the absence of uniform rehabilitation and resettlement policy in India, most of the displaced women face difficulties with regard to their compensation, rehabilitation, employment etc. Displaced women do not find mention in the rehabilitation policy as they are considered as dependent family members. In rural India, most of the women, in order to help their families economically, are directly dependent upon the natural resources. In the wake of displacement they do not get any kind of benefits from the government. They always face gender discrimination by the government with regard their compensation and rehabilitation policy.

Keywords: Displacement, Rehabilitation, Resettlement, Compensation, Gender Inequality Displaced women.

INTRODUCTION

The present study has proposed to understand the gender inequality in India among displaced people on compensation, rehabilitation and employment issues. In Independent India, development policies pursued by the successive governments have been leading to widespread displacement of population. It is estimated that some five lakh persons are displaced every year as direct consequences of administrative land acquisitions (Mishra, 2002). In India, displacement is not a new, since the British period people have been forced out of their villages in the name of development. After independence, the nation too pursued the policy of development and set up large-scale industries or industrial estates and projects like mines, dams, construction of roads and railway lines. Each of them has displaced people in large numbers (Nayak, 2008). The first and second five years plan mainly focused on developmental projects but ignored the consequences of displacement (Patnaik, 2000). For this purpose large scale of land has been acquired which has been resulted in the displacement of millions of people without proper concern for the resettlement and rehabilitation (Murickan, 2003). Most of the development victims belong to the poor sections of the society like Dalits, tribal, women and other backward classes (Ibid). The problem of displacement is not merely economic; it is also a socio-cultural problem because it disturbs a network of social relationships supporting an ethos and a way of life. It affects the entire gamut of traditional activity and an established social order. It forces people to adopt new ways of occupational activities and an unknown environment.

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The displaced people are forced to change their social patterns, without getting any compensation for social costs and, thus they are under pressure, causing a situation of socio-cultural stress (Advani, 2009).

It has been observed that involuntary displacement may create psychological depression among affected people and result in sickness, grief, and death. Displaced people have no access to basic facilities, and natural resources and have to face lots of hardship before and after the process. People are forcibly displaced and are bound to live in new atmosphere, new place with new people, and changed norms and values which leads to the change in the entire socio-economic life of displaced people (Patnaik, 2000). In this patriarchal society, women have been denied compensation for land that they cultivate for years but did not have a registration in their name. Cases of ineligibility have been identified in many women headed households and widows where women have been excluded from compensation in the resettlement package. Men are the recognised heads of household; therefore, compensation is often paid only to them (Asthana, 2012). These gender inequalities are comparatively more starkly evident in hill region where women are the backbone of the hill economy and most men migrate to the plains in search of jobs (ibid). Rehabilitation packages do not give equal status to women. Compensation is given in the name of men rather than in their joint names (Thukral, 1996). The ownership of landed property is an essential condition before one could claim compensation. Those who do not have property or those who are indirectly dependent on it could not claim compensation (Advani, 2009). In Land Acquisition Act 1984, the main law of acquisition reveals a gender bias which seems to reinforce the existing situation of women's lack of ownership of land and property. Similar lack of gender sensitivity is present in almost all the policies and plans that govern rehabilitation and resettlement (Thukral, 1995).

Resettlement and Rehabilitation Issues in India

In India, post-independence economic development is based on large projects and big industries which has been accompanied by widespread displacement. In the absence of a national Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) policy State government or even specific project authorities introduced their own principles and handled the R&R of the displaced by way of ad hoc plans. Rehabilitation measures and policies adopted by most State government based on the LAA Act of 1984 which adopted a very narrow approach to compensation. This act was based on cash compensation alone and offered no compensation to those who had no legal title of land.

The Rehabilitation and Resettlement policy was first introduced in 1985 by a committee of Ministry of Welfare. It took lot of time, and there were discussions for nearly two decades over various draft policies. The National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) for displaced families in 2003 came into force in 2004. But, there was a need to make this policy more participatory and transparent and to reduce the adverse impact of displacement. Hence, the national policy of R&R was revised and the R&R bill came out in 2007. But, this policy again failed because gender factor was ignored. The resettlement and rehabilitation policy is still open for discussion since 1985 (Pervez, 2008). The main objective of the R&R policy in 2007 is to reduce displacement, focus of weaker section of the society, identity widows, unmarried women those above 50 years of age, adult brother and son are treated as separate unit but not adult sisters, widow, divorced. Compensation will be transformed to male members and women were totally ignored in term of compensation and other activities. The R&R policy totally failed to recognise gender (ibid).

In India lack of transparency is another issue in R&R. Because, if we look at the past literature we find

that government authority, NGO, and researcher provide different data about the displaced people. Though involuntary resettlement is a very sensitive issue despite that the government authority does not pay adequate attention towards resettlement and rehabilitation policy. There is some data which shows how figures are under represented by government authorities.

Viegas, 1992 pointed out after drawing excessive field investigation that the numbers of person displaced by the hirakud dam was 1.6 lakh and while government official figures was only 1.1 lakh. Patnaik, Das and Mishra, 1987 stated in the case of Bargi dam on Narmada River in western MP, the project authorities said that 101 villages will be submerged. However when the reservoir was filled the number of villages submerged were 162 villages.

Development induces displacement has brought about a profound economic and socio-cultural description to the victims of displaced communities. While forced displacement affect both men and women, women experiences displacement and relocation in a particularly gendered way. This differential impact a women occurs due to the gendered division of labour that has arises from socio-historical processes of men's traditional incorporation in the age earning and labour-oriented tasks while women remain on the land jobs and its management as a daily basis's. The resettlement and rehabilitation policy expose the male biases inherent in the insensitivity of the government towards need of women (Asthana, 2012).

The process of development are not gender neutral, a gap exists in the ways in which distribution and calculation of benefits of development is accomplished. Women's contribution as the invisible workforce have either not been calculated or it's have been disproportionately enjoyed by men (Agarwal, 1996). The women head households (widow, divorcers and those deserted by their husband) do not attract in the policy. Women in general has been ignored since neither the baseline survey nor census collect information relation to their specific requirements nor the Rehabilitation and resettlement schemes (Saxena, 2008). A gender gap exists in both policy and practice. Thus gender remains distant in local and state discourses (Asthana, 2012).

From the above discussion it has been found that in India, there is no any uniform rehabilitation and resettlement policy in which the displaced people can get proper compensation packages.

Gender Issues and their Problems

Gender scholars have proved it repeatedly that taking household or family, as a unit in sociological analysis we undermine the specific needs and right of vulnerable group especially women with in household (Agarwal, 1996). The concern of women in general has been ignored since neither the baseline survey nor the census collect information relation to their specific requirements not the rehabilitation and resettlement schemes. (Saxena, 2008). In compensation and resettlement schemes is not paid to the specific position of women. Compensation money, linked to the ownership of land, is paid to men. Women of indigenous communities, who usually do not have ownership rights in land, but have access to forest and other common properties which are also lost in dispossession, are not separately identifies for compensation. In resettlement too, houses and plots of land are allotted to men (Nathan, 2009).

Displaced family as a person: his or her spouse, minor sons, unmarried daughters, mother, and other members living with him/her and dependent on his/her for their livelihood. This makes provision for adult son and adult brothers to be treated as separate families but not for adult females. This explicitly means that major unmarried daughters and sisters, widows and divorced women living in

the same household are not liable for compensation (Parvez, 2008). She further adds, in the case of landholding families, land would be allotted to those having a legal title. In a patriarchal society as India where land is transformed from male head to male heir, women may have rights over the land and the forests but are rarely allowed to inherit the land.

Mirdula Singh and others, 1992 observed that the policy maker did not consider women as a separate unit. A widow, unmarried and adult daughters and divorced women were recognized as dependents. The policy for displaced people from Maharashtra clearly mentioned that adult women will not be entitled to any land.

Fernandes and Walter, 1996 highlighted the employment problems among displaced women. He found that job has been given to men as they are considered to be the bread winner and get first priority in jobs, women are being forced in to low labor market and get low wages. Patnaik, 2000 his study was based on anthropological perspective. He wrote that most of the displaced women were affected because of loss of the source of income. Traditionally women were engaged in economic activities like fishing, preparing baskets, collecting food, fodder fuel etc. but the policy makers did not include them in any compensation.

Mohanty, 2011 observed that women play an important role in the family, community and society. But after displacement they have totally become dependent on the husband or son for household expenditure. Decrease in family income has created family conflict and bitterness among them. He further added that problem arises out of cash compensation which is often misused by the male members like in consuming liquor, purchasing durable items due to which domestic violence increased

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it has been seen that in India there is gender discrimination among displaced men and women. After the 1950, large number of projects were constructed for the economic growth in India but none of the policy makers paid adequate attention towards gender issues and their policies. In Land Acquisition Act 1984, Rehabilitation policy and the compensation issues women do not considered any place. Study has found that compensation will be transformed to male members and women were totally ignored in term of compensation and other activities. In this patriarchal society, women have been denied compensation for land that they cultivate for years but did not have a registration in their name. Cases of ineligibility have been identified in many women headed households and widows where women have been excluded from compensation in the resettlement package. Men are the recognised heads of household; therefore, compensation is often paid only to them. Most of the development victims belong to the poor sections of the society like Dalits, tribal, women and other backward classes. Women are the worst victims of development and displacement. Study also found that there are number of social problems arise among displaced women such as increased domestic violence (because the availability of cash received in compensation has led to increase in alcohol intake by men and folk resulting in violence against women such as wife beating). Feel insecurity at new sites, weakness of kinship bound, breakdown of family members, and conflict among family members, loss of income resources, additional burden on women, dowry demand increased, child marriages, education problems among displaced girls etc. It has clear from the foregoing discussion that in the absence of a national policy on rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced people in the country, those policies have not accorded equal status to the displaced women at par with their male counter parts.

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