

Tribals: The Biggest Victims of “Development”

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ABSTRACT: Displacement of people from traditional habitats causes much trauma to the affected persons. Compulsory acquisition of land for construction of dams and roads, quarrying and mining operations, industries and reservation of forests for National Parks and environment protection forces people to leave their traditional abodes and land – their main sustenance. Thus, development projects have often become a major threat to the people whom they deprive of their traditional livelihood without alternatives. Tribals are the worst sufferers since most development projects such as dams and industries are located in inaccessible tribal areas. Nearly 50-60 million people have been displaced by development projects in India as a whole and tribals constitute at least 40% percent of them. Cash payment does not really compensate the tribals for the difficulties they experience in their lifestyle and ethos. Displacement can lead to violation of the Fifth Schedule* as it deprives them of control and ownership of natural resources and land essential for their way of life. The present paper will try to see the impact of such development on the traditional livelihood of the people thus affected and specially the tribals.

KEY WORDS: Displacement - Alienation of land - deterioration of economic status - traditional livelihood - urban skills

India has the second largest concentration of tribal population, after that of the African continent. Tribals are generally called ‘Adivasis’ implying ‘original Inhabitants’ of the land. There are 698 Scheduled Tribes spread all over the country barring States and Union Territories like Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Pondicherry and Punjab. Orissa has the largest number – 68 Scheduled Tribes

Land is the center of tribal life. When it is lost both its owner and its other dependents lose their economic support, socio-cultural relations, food, work and income. In recent times the large scale industrialization, privatization and globalization for sake of “development” has emerged as the biggest threat to tribal’s survival – ironically, the so called “modern civilized society” has become a predator of their age-old eco-friendly, peaceful and harmonious lifestyle. The tribals, their lands, and other resources are now exposed to the exploitative market forces, mostly due to the State and Multi National Companies (MNCs) sponsored developmental projects to exploit minerals and other natural resources. Land alienation of the tribals by the powerful entities has become common phenomena.

The indigenous/ tribal peoples who constituted 8% of the total population of India at 2011 census make up 55% of the total displaced persons due to development projects up to 2015. These have compelled

them to shift their occupation from cultivation to domestic workers, daily wage earners and so on and it ultimately reduced their income and therefore economic status. The impact of such development projects on the tribals is not limited to the economic field but impinges on the social and cultural aspects. The tribals who live in a different type of society are forced to interact with another culture and society to which they cannot always adopt themselves. Once deprived of their livelihood, tribals fall back on the same resource for survival but in this process they make a transition from their traditional constructive to destructive dependence on it.

According to many specialists (e.g. Bogumil Terminski, 2012) at least fifteen million people each year are forced to leave their homes following big development projects (dams, irrigation projects, highways, urbanization, mining, conservation of nature, etc.).

Development-induced displacement or the forced migration in the name of development is affecting more and more people as countries move from developing to developed nations. The people that face such migration are often helpless, suppressed by the power and laws of nations.

State-wise breakup of Persons affected due to developmental projects

state	Projects Cleared	Persons Affected	ST Population affected
Jharkhand	1	70,820	21,000
Himachal Pradesh	1	836	9
Kerala	1	20	20
Chhattisgarh	2	455	155
Uttarakhand	2	6,716	1,489
Madhya Pradesh	4	1,95,081	12,261
Maharashtra	11	1,51,408	20,534
Orissa	11	64,674	42,036
Rajasthan	11	34,452	4,258
Andhra Pradesh	15	3,16,242	1,23,946
Total	60	8,40,704	2,25,708

It is the height of injustice that the tribals whose eco-friendly lifestyle preserved forest, mineral and natural resources for ages are now mercilessly uprooted by “outsiders” who would only make money from the resources for some time, creates few jobs mostly for urban middle class and then walk away with the booty only to look for another place to exploit. If all citizens are equal under Indian constitution, why then the helpless tribals are forced to pay the price with their traditional land and lifestyle? Does their peaceful and preserving co-existence with natural surroundings threaten the country in any way? What makes the exploitative corporates superior to poor tribals who have served as custodians of resources for centuries?

Unfortunately such questions don't interest the "people's representatives" sitting in the parliament or assemblies. Led by the finance ministers they are happy to support efforts to sustain the sacred GDP growth rate, after paying lip service to the well being of the poor and native tribals.

The so called economic liberalization, privatization, and globalization that was started 20 years by the current Prime Minister is clearly designed to further the interests of the urban areas and the rich corporations of the country as well from outside. Liberalization, in simple terms, only means allowing the rich corporate to exploit country's resources at rather easy terms unmindful of what happens to the environment and the displaced people who have historically acted as custodians of the lands and surroundings. Who says that the British exploitative policies ended after they left India in 1947?!

Developmental projects have only increased the socio-economic gulf between tribals and rest of the citizens of India and left the former worse off on many counts.

Ways in which tribal land alienation takes place

Alienation of land of tribal communities and loss of rights to Common Property Resources, mainly forests and large scale displacement and enforced migration takes place in following ways:

- Development-induced displacement by acquisition of land by the State based on principle of 'eminent domain' for 'public purpose' without a 'land for land' provision for rehabilitation. Acquisition by the State for development projects also leads to alienation of land and displacement due to environmental pollution and damage to land in the area near projects but tribal people so displaced are not entitled to any compensation.
- Illegal land alienation takes place due to participation of revenue functionaries and officials, and incorrect interpretation of laws, manipulation of records and permission accorded to alienate land. State Laws are amended to include provisions that facilitate land alienation of tribal communities.
- Community land of tribal communities is recorded as Government land in survey and settlement operations and most State tenancy laws recognize only individually owned registered land. Such lands have not been fully surveyed and there is no record of user practices, which would be shown as Government land.
- State action of acquiring tribal lands for settling refugees has resulted in land alienation and displacement. There is also encroachment of tribal land by immigrants.
- Creation of National Parks have resulted in alienation of rights and consequent displacement and forced migration of tribal people.

- Conflicts in the Northeast have resulted in tribal people losing everything and being displaced from their home ground.

Problem faced because of developmental projects

- 1) about 40 per cent of all people displaced in India due to development activity have been tribals and only 21.16 per cent of these have been resettled
- 2) When outsiders exploit the tribe's land and its resources the natural life cycle of tribal ecology and tribal life is greatly disturbed.
- 3) The tribals rely mainly on natural resources and agricultural for their survival, and are self-sufficient as a community. Encroachment upon their lands snatches away these resources from them without adequate compensation.
- 4) Being thrown out of their lands, tribals have to undertake involuntary migration to cities. With little "urban skills" and inadequate support from the Government, they are left unemployed and hence poor.
- 5) Also, some of the tribals unable to adjust to the urban lifestyle turn to crime. This further hampers their image for the urban dwellers who then become unwilling to help the tribals.
- 6) On their displacement they generally stay in the nearest forest which also get polluted and their river, ground water are poisoned because of invasive mining.
- 7) Since they are living in forest for generations they are not immune to normal diseases of urban areas.
- 8) For long time they are living in forest, hence they lack economic value of their knowledge and vast economic difference already created. They often get very low price for the land they possess or not get anything while displaced.
- 9) Besides, as reported drunkenness has increased among the men and it subsequently led to more domestic violence. Most of the families said that this is because of the frustration men suffer due to the deterioration of their economic status.
- 10) Traditionally, tribal areas had a better sex-ratio than urban areas, but now, there is a decline in the sex ratio of tribal women in areas around development projects

For securing their interest and keeping them at least affected situation, we need to ponder on following reforms:

- 1) Integration attempts should be made to bring them in mainstream society without destroying their distinctive identity.
- 2) Rights of tribal communities to say 'no' to acquisition of their land and to access and manage forests should be recognized
- 3) No tribal land should be alienated without the consent of the tribal gram sabha
- 4) Waste or degraded land must be used for rehabilitation of tribals
- 5) cooperatives mining by tribals themselves should be encouraged
- 6) Once the mining is over land must be given back to tribals
- 7) There should be no criminal charges against tribals defending their lands on various protest or police-tribals conflict.
- 8) No use of paramilitary forces in grabbing land.
- 9) Final veto power of land acquisition should be with Gram Sabha of tribal areas.
- 10) Many areas which habitat large amount of tribal areas are not included as Scheduled Areas. They should be included immediately in the list to get extra protection.
- 11) Change of Scheduled area to normal region should be make difficult and committee recommendation necessary.
- 12) Enlargement of scope of Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act so that, village council will be more powerful to take decision on allowing miners.
- 13) Greater and Strong implementation of Forest Rights Act, New Land Act. No transfer of land from Gram Sabha to private firm under PPP agreement. Govt should belong only to PSU or Govt even after tribal give consent.
- 14) Enhance awareness about the lifestyle and preferences of the tribals so that "urbanisation" is not assumed to be their need. For this, the development strategy needs to be relooked at in an inclusive manner.
- 15) Have a dedicated department to address the needs of the tribals