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THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF TRIPURA: A CASE STUDY OF DUMBOR DAM PROJECT IN GOMATI DISTRICT, INDIA

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Abstract: The main purpose of this research is to highlight the historical miseries of the displaced Indigenous people who are deprived from their basic rights due their innocent culture and personalities for the mere benefit of the state government, where the dam constructed was not even sufficient to provide electricity to the publics of Tripura. It was rather loss of habitation, displacement from their fertile soil, no economic benefits from the government and no proper documentation of the displaced Indigenous population from the Dumbor Dam Project, Gomati, Tripura, India than benefits. Submergent of fertile Indigenous land was the cause of displacement and no records of the displaced people are fully tracked.

Keywords: Indigenous, Habitation, Submergent.

Introduction

An overview of Development project and Displacement

The twentieth century is considered to be the period of unprecedented economic development in many areas of the world. Megaprojects, like irrigation projects and large dams, have become symbols of economic development; apart from generating energy, these projects have also generated employment and income for the people affected (Singh, A.K, 2020).

However, such mega-development projects involve the acquisition of land from common and poor people resulting in forced mass displacement which disrupts the socio-economic fabric and spoils the environmental flavour of the surrounding areas. A large number of people are deprived of their cultural identities and livelihood primarily as a direct consequence of land acquisition. The experiences suggest that the long drawn-out process of displacement has caused widespread traumatic psychological and socio-cultural consequences including the dismantling of traditional production systems, desecration of ancestral sacred zones, graves and places of worship, scattering of kinship groups, disruptions of the family system and informal social network (Singh, A.K, 2020 and Kothari,1995).

Development project and displacement has always been an issue of something has to be Sacrificed in order to gain something, rather it's kind of Parito Optimality. Development is a must for every nation.

The country's need to acquire land for Development projects comes with the price of involuntary displacement thereby creating anarchy among the displaced population. This phenomenon of development projects and displacement takes place all over the world irrespective of developed or developing or under-developed nations.

Despite the problems of displacement faced by the particular section of population, environmental degradation such as deforestation, contamination of soil, water, loss of agricultural land, loss of society and culture for the tribal affected population also takes place.

It is certain that the benefits of development projects are enjoyed by large population, but the after-math effect of land acquisition for development purpose are faced by the smaller primitive communities. Most of the development projects are based on cost-benefit analysis depending on economic loss and gain while ignoring the social loss.

Development projects and Displacement in India

Land acquisition has gained popularity all over India due to introduction of various development projects such as Dams, mines, railways and roads, power projects, industries, etc. For this land acquisition has become easier for the government due to the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (LAA) which gives the government the right to acquire land from the land owner. The private property of a citizen is under thread due to LAA of 1894. However, the land acquired by the government from the land owner had to be compensated for such acquisitions. Legacy of the colonial British, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 is a law still prevailing in India and Pakistan that allows the government to acquire private land in those countries.



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India right after its independence started planning under first five-year plan (1951-56) in order to achieve development. GDP was low at the time of independence, as the planning started every five-year, there started various development projects such as infrastructure projects, industrial projects, Dams projects, power projects, railways and roadways projects.

Few hydel powered projects were constructed in order to supply power to the industries and irrigation system which enhanced the crop productions and enabled India to export crops.

According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MTA), nearly 85 lakh tribals were displaced until 1990 on account of large developmental projects (Goodpal, 2012). Verma (2004) had made a comprehensive sociological study of the processes and problems of development-induced displacement and its ramifications on the socioeconomic, cultural, psychological, political, ecological and other aspects of life.

The “Modern Temples of India” depicted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru speaks about the Dam Projects which prospered the country and the people in general. But the sad part of Dam projects also needs to be highlighted as some communities had been affected by the construction of Dams and put them to involuntary displacement.

Most of the Development Projects constructed in India belongs to areas of tribal communities which had suffered a lot since the very beginning of the country’s independence.

M. Gogoi (2016) speaks about Assam state of India where majority of the dams project affected are tribal communities.

Hussain (2008) finds that, as per Assam government Gazette notification, from 1947 to 2000, 27,333.37 acres of land are acquired for various dam projects.

Most of the development projects particularly in the State of Orissa were constructed in areas dominated by the tribal leading to displacement of people from their homeland. The rehabilitation measures extended by the project authorities have so far remained very nominal. Numerous studies have been made by scholars to point out the loopholes in the rehabilitation measures that proved beyond doubt that not more than 25 percent of those displaced during 1950-1980 have been rehabilitated properly (Hansda, 1983:23). As per the estimate of Fernandez, Das and Rao (1989) the number of people in India who have been displaced and not rehabilitated properly between 1950 and 1980 is over 11.5 million (Mohanty, 2011).

The neo-liberal economy that has been the official policy in India since July 1991 development-induced displacement is growing in India as a whole as well as in the northeast. The focus on mining and possible 166 dams being planned in the region is bound to displace a much bigger number of people than in the past in the northeast (Fernandes, W. 2013).

The violence over land acquisition by the government witnessed recently. The drive for land acquisition in the name of modernisation and development has been the reason behind rise in protests by the farmers and tribal people across the country. The focus on economic issues overlooks other no less important issues such as social and cultural, which may prove to be crucial in building links and networks in the new environment. The protests by civil society and peoples against land acquisition have been growing in recent years. These protests and violence increasingly question the so-called “greater good”. The recent protest in Bhatta-Parsaul of Noida in Uttar Pradesh state tells us another centre of violence provoked by an attempt to displace the farmers. In fact, whether it is Bhatta-Parsaul in UP, Nandigram in West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Jarkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and recently in Tamil Nadu all point the need to examine the matter immediately. The participants asserted that mega dam constructions that had already been commissioned such as Loktak Project in Manipur (Tewari, 2018).

Development Projects of Tripura since 1974

The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 laid down that all land not in the name of private persons belonged to the state. The Administrator is vested with the power to allot land for industrial and public utility purposes under this Act thereby making land acquisition easier for the state for various purposes.

The Dumber hydroelectric project added to the plight of the tribals as large numbers of tribal families were ousted from the region of the Dam (Paul, 2009).



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Total completed projects in Tripura are

Name of the Project	Year of Installation	Land Covered
Gomati H.E Project (Dumboor)	1974	40 Sq. Km
Rokhia Gas Thermal Project	1995	
Baramura Gas Thermal Project	2002	
Bodhjungle Industrial Development Association	2011	222.48 acres

Name of the project/Department	Term/Period	Total approved Cost (In Crores)
Agriculture Related Projects	1991 to 2012	10.26
Forest Related Projects	2002 to 2004	11.10
Fisheries Related Projects	2003 to 2007	1.45
Health Related Projects	1997 to 2005	7.35
Horticulture Projects	2002 to 2003	4.85
PWD (R&B)	1996 to 2007	322.40
Power Projects	1995 to 2012	292.09
Rubber Park at Bodhjungle	Rs.23.00 crores	This project site is about 12 KM away from Agartala town and from Airport is 22 KM. 30 acres of land utilized for establishing industrial unit.
Bamboo Park	Rs.29.35 crores	135 acres of land has been developed for establishing Bamboo Park.

Sources: <https://tidc.tripura.gov.in/projects>

Objectives

1. To analyze how much of Indigenous families have been affected
2. Historical analysis of displaced indigenous people due to Dumboor Project.

Overview of the study area

Despite of recognized as lake it has 50 islands and the locals resembles majority of indigenous population totally dependent on lake which has a significant impact on their life and culture of Tripura. It is situated in the Gandatwisa region in Dhalai District of Tripura and is 120 kilometers away from the capital of Tripura. The Lake has a long historically significant role in generation of revenue where the Dumboor lake was once a Hydro Powered Dam constructed in the year 1974 and was supposed to produce and supply sufficient power for the people of the state which eventually failed to produce sufficient power. Many fertile lands and indigenous families were submerged and displaced in due process to construction of Dam. This submerged land and mountains now has turned into a beautiful lake with potential in rural tourist destination.

Dumboor lake has become the second largest lake (41 Sq. Km in North-east India after Loktak Lake (Manipur). Currently Dumboor lake site has become one of the most visited tourist destinations of Tripura.

Methodology

The findings will be based on Empirical study and the study will be of secondary sources. This is an exploratory study for land acquisition and displacement of indigenous people of Tripura. This paper will provide a historical overview and socio-economic condition of indigenous people due to development projects.

Impact of Dumboor Dam Project on Indigenous People

Based on the empirical study on the Dumboor dam project the socio-economic conditions and historical analysis of the displaced indigenous population are found to be:

Dumboor Dam in Tripura have already led to widespread dispossession, loss of lands, extinction of flora and fauna, demographic impacts on indigenous peoples in the region and other human rights violations (Tewari, 2018).



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The dam submerged a valley area of 46 sq. km. This was one of the most fertile valleys in an otherwise hilly state.

The Government of Tripura, official records suggest 2558 families were ousted from the Dumbor dam project area – these were families who could produce land deeds and were officially owners of the land they were ousted from.

Unofficial estimates varied between 8000 to 10,000 families or about 60 to 70 thousand indigenous population.

The construction of the Dumber dam in the 1970s submerged over 23,530.55 acres and additional land was used for its power house and the setting up of other infrastructure. Most of these came up on tribal community land, whose loss was not compensated by the authorities. “The project facts mention 2,558 individual land-owning displaced families (13,000 persons) but studies point to 8,000 to 9,000 families (40-50,000 persons)” (Bhaumick, 2003: 84).

It shows the disparity between the records and the ground reality. “Of the 209,336.59 acres known to have been used in Tripura for development projects during 1947-2000, a third is known to be tribal commons and more than half of the rest is tribal land” (Fernandes & Bharali, 2010: 71).

The Dumber dam was the turning point because by 1970 the tribes had lost 20 to 40 percent of their land officially. Thus, when the Dumber dam was announced they protested against it but the state ignored them. That is when the tribal insurgency began. “It is called terrorism but it is for land”, which shows that the cause of the insurgency is due to loss of land held by the tribals through alienation (Bhaumick, 2003: 85).

Most of those ousted by the Dumbur failed to get any rehabilitation grant and were forced to settle in the hills around the project, returning to slash-and-burn agriculture called *jhum*. The present Left government has recently announced that all Dumbur ousted, wherever they are, will be covered under the ‘Kutir Jyoti’ electrification programme. A list of 500 Dumbur ousted families were submitted to the Power Department, which has provided electricity connections to 114 families under the Kutir Jyoti programme. But what these families need more than free electricity is arable land and resources to earn a livelihood. The dam destroyed the once surplus tribal peasant economy of the state (Bhaumik, 2004).

The Gumti hydel project was commissioned in 1974, despite fierce protests by nearly 40,000 indigenous people whose fertile lands went under water. The reservoir of the 10 MW Gumti hydroelectric (hydel) project. For example, indigenous peoples in Tripura have lost their land and livelihood due to a dam, and they have allegedly been under-compensated.

The indigenous/ tribal peoples, who constituted 8% of the total population of India at 2001 census, make up over 50% of the total displaced people due to development projects (Paul, 2009).

"The fertility of this land is likely to increase after so many years under water. At least 30,000 tribal families, perhaps the whole of its landless population, can be gainfully resettled in this fertile tract. Tripura's food deficit can also be solved," says Tripura's leading economist, Malabika Dasgupta.

This project not only disturbed the fragile ecology of the Raima valley in the Gomati district of Tripura, but also left a permanent sense of loss in the tribal psyche. Most of those ousted by the Dumbor failed to get any rehabilitation grant and were forced to settle in the hills around the project, returning to slash and burn agriculture called '*jhum*'. The dam destroyed the once surplus tribal peasant economy of the state (SANDRP, 2003).

‘Yarwng’, screened at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) on November 25 2008, tells the story of a man and woman displaced when their village is flooded just hours before they were to get married.

“The film deals with the real problem of displacement that has occurred in Tripura due to the building of the Dumbur dam,” director Joseph Pullinthananth told reporters at the film festival in Goa, where ‘Yarwng’ was the opening film in the Indian Panorama section.

“We estimate that at least 30,000 to 40,000 people have been displaced and we made this film for every person who has ever been dispossessed.” says the director Joseph Pullinthananth.



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Conclusion

This paper has discussed the phenomena of development projects and displacement of the diverse indigenous population of Tripura. Thus, historical analysis indicates the socio-economic conditions of the displaced indigenous population of Dumbor have lost their culture, scattered society, lack of education, lack employment opportunities, loss of agricultural land, low standard of living, no compensation provided to them, no rehabilitation, no proper maintenance of land records and compensation documents, full exploitation by the officials to the indigenous innocent population.

The measures to re-look the matter is very important as the Dumbor hydel project was inefficient to produce power but has affected and displaced a massive family of indigenous population without any compensation, resettlement, employment, etc. As, at present it is not possible to compensate the many decades old displaced families of Dumbor by the government, the current situation of Dumbor can be looked into by the government for the locals who are residing at present by generation of employment opportunities through various means and also provide good infrastructure system (Education, Roads, DWS, Hospitals, Good Internet Connection, etc.).

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