



Displacement: A Social Problem for Tribal Women

Dr. Sai Aanchal

Assistant Professor, PG Department of Sociology,
Sri Guru Gobind Singh College, Sector-26, Chandigarh, India
Email - saiaanchal99@gmail.com

Abstract: *Displacement as a social problem can significantly impact the lives and experiences of displaced Indian tribals regardless of their gender identities. It is imperative to study the challenges posed by the displacement because it is proliferated through severe socio-economic and socio-psychological complexities. The severity of this social problem varies across geographical lines. However, substantial gender disparities can be witnessed with regards to traumatic experiences of tribal men and women. Thus, it is pertinent to address the gender-specific challenges in the context of displacement for safeguarding the rights of all Indian tribals. Displacement is accompanied by disturbing ramifications that leave a negative impact on the lives of Indian tribal women. Displacement of tribal women occurs because of haphazard approaches to development that are often unsustainable in the long run. A humane and sustainable multi-faceted approach can be a significant step towards transforming the lives of tribal women by empowering them. Stakeholders from tribal communities, civil society, and the government through constructive collaborations can contribute in creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all the tribals.*

Key Words: *Displacement, tribal society, tribal, sustainable development, gender disparities, gender.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Smt. Droupadi Murmu, an educationist Santhali woman from Mayurbanj, a tribal district of Odisha was appointed as the President of India. Her appointment was widely celebrated across the Indian tribal communities. Many tribals look up to her as their inspiration for thriving with hope while battling with challenges of life. Tribal welfare for long have been part of public policy and social welfare measures in India. Displacement is a major factor that causes unrest among the tribals (Joseph & Beegom, 2017). Tribal displacement is not a new phenomenon and it has marred the existence of tribals from a long time. Displacement refers to the forced or voluntary movement of individuals or groups of people from their homes or habitual places of residence. It typically occurs due to a variety of factors, including conflict, violence, persecution, natural disasters, development projects, or economic instability. Before proceeding to the review of literature it is important to have a look at the research methodology and objectives.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper is based on secondary data derived from relevant and credible sources. For formulation of the research objectives relevant sources of literature have been reviewed which included books, newspaper articles, magazines, and research papers from journals.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To examine the impact of displacement on the tribal women
- To study the impact of displacement in context of gender-specific challenges
- To investigate the measures to improve the condition of tribal women in India
- To study the measures taken by the Indian government for tribal welfare

Following section of this paper presents a thematic review of literature that is structured under two themes –

1. Gender and Displacement, 2. Displacement of Tribal Women in India



4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Environmentalist Vandana Shiva said that displacement is neither development nor progressiveness. She proclaimed, “The shift from Prakriti to natural resources, from mater to matter was considered (and in many quarters is still considered a progressive shift from superstition to rationality...for women...the death of prakriti is simultaneously a beginning of their marginalization, devaluation, displacement and ultimate indispensability” (Shiva, 1989: 145).

Gender related problems, especially the displacement of tribal women is a major concern. 47 percent of India’s tribal population is represented by the tribal women who are highly aware of their environments and communities (Piramal, 2022). Before understanding the problem caused by the displacement of tribal women in India, it is important to study how the repercussions of displacement get more worse in case of women. Thus, in the following section, an attempt has been made to understand how gender significantly impacts the lives of the displaced women:

4.1. GENDER AND DISPLACEMENT :

Ekanayake et al. (2023) found minimal integration of gender in humanitarian literature that was based on forced displacement. These researchers emphasized in their study that gender specific challenges are not directly addressed whenever forced displacement is discussed. Though, forced migration studies tend to trace linkages between gender and displacement (Kofman, 2021; Rosen & Twamley, 2018; Shuman & Bohmer, 2014).

Gender can have a significant impact on displacement, affecting the experiences and lives of men, women, boys, and girls differently. Displacement due to conflict, disaster, or development projects can have a profound impact on the lives of individuals, particularly women and girls. Some of the ways in which gender affects displacement are:

Increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence:

Women and girls in displacement situations are at higher risk of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, and exploitation. This risk is often heightened in crowded and poorly-secured displacement camps and settlements.

Inequities in access to resources and services:

Women and girls may face unequal access to shelter, food, water, healthcare, and other essential resources and services in displacement situations, due to cultural and societal norms, as well as discrimination and marginalization.

Loss of support networks and traditional roles:

Displacement can disrupt support networks of women, including family, friends, and community networks, leading to feelings of isolation and a loss of identity and purpose. Women who previously held traditional caregiving roles may also face difficulties in fulfilling these roles in displacement settings.

Restrictions on movement and freedom:

Women and girls may face additional restrictions on their freedom of movement and personal security in displacement settings, which can impact their ability to access resources and services, and participate in decision-making processes. It is crucial to address these gender-specific challenges in the context of displacement to ensure that the rights and needs of all individuals are respected and protected. This can involve measures such as providing separate and secure shelter for women and girls, increasing the presence of female security personnel, and promoting gender-sensitive decision-making processes.

4.2. DISPLACEMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA :

According to UN guiding principles on Internal Displacement *‘Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border’* (United Nations, 2004).

The displacement of tribal women in India is a complex and deeply concerning issue that has far-reaching impacts on their lives and communities. Tribal women, who belong to India’s indigenous populations, face a unique set of



challenges related to displacement that stem from their cultural background, economic status, and lack of access to resources and services. One of the major causes of displacement of tribal women in development projects, such as large-scale mining, dams, and industrialization.

According to a study, *'during the last fifty years, some 3,300 big dams have been constructed in India. Many of them have led to large-scale forced eviction of vulnerable groups. The situation of the tribal people is of special concern as they constitute 40 to 50 percent of the displaced population'* (Chrine, Siwale, Kukano, & Chitanda, 2020).

These projects often result in the loss of ancestral lands and homes, which can have devastating effects on the lives of tribal communities. 21 million Indians including tribals and rural people were displaced by dam projects in India (Fernandes, Das, & Rao, 1989). According to some social activists, this number is only an estimated account of displacement that has happened so far. Sardar Sarovar Dam was India's most controversial Dam project that gave birth to a meteoric rise of the social movement known as Narmada Bachao Andolan. The movement became massive by the leadership of social activist Medha Patekar, who said that big dam projects can harm tribal societies, especially in terms of displacement (Singh Negi & Ganguly, 2011). In 2022, while addressing an august audience in Gujarat, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi countered the allegations levelled by Medha Patekar by clarifying that, *"The Narmada project was the only solution to quench the thirst of the arid region of Kutch and Kathiyawad"* (Scroll Staff, 2022). Thus, a collective approach is required to avoid ideological conflicts which thwart the national development but the sustainable development ensuring welfare of marginalized tribes must be of utmost priority.

Thakkar (2000), too substantiated the impact of displacement due to the construction of dams. Women are particularly affected as they are often the primary caretakers of their families and communities, and their displacement can lead to a loss of traditional roles and support networks. In addition, tribal women face a heightened risk of violence and exploitation in displacement situations. The breakdown of social structures and the lack of adequate protection mechanisms can leave women and girls vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation. The displacement of tribal women also exacerbates existing inequalities and marginalization. Women may face difficulties accessing essential resources and services, such as shelter, food, water, and healthcare, due to discrimination and a lack of cultural sensitivity in displacement settings. This can have a significant impact on their physical and mental health, and can also lead to further social and economic disadvantage (Singh Negi & Ganguly, 2011).

The brutal displacement of tribals from their lands and forests is often forcibly implemented. In the year of 2009, 245 Baiga families in Chhattisgarh were barbarically displaced from the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve – it was a planned move by the authorities. The tribes were moved to a new land where they could no longer pursue their traditional livelihood of collecting Sal leaves, Tendu and Bamboo. These tribals neither received any support in terms of employment nor full compensation that was promised to them under the Project Tiger Relocation Scheme (Nadimpally, Venkatachalam, & Fatima, 2019).

According to Bera (2012), *"Vedanta's BALCO bauxite mines began operations in Bodai Daldali hills of Kabirdham in 2003. The project officially displaced 261 families and an unestimated number were made to evacuate their hilltop villages since they did not have land titles."*

5. CAN THERE BE SAFE CITIES AND SAFE PUBLIC SPACES FOR DISPLACED TRIBAL WOMEN?

Unfortunately, there isn't a widely recognized set of metrics or index for ranking cities on safety for women, especially for those tribal women who migrate to cities in search of better opportunities. Tribal women after getting displaced find it very difficult to adapt to the fast-paced lifestyle of the cities. They are also exposed to higher risks of sexual harassment and crime. Various organizations and NGOs have conducted studies and surveys to assess the level of gender-based violence and harassment in cities, as well as the availability of resources for women, such as healthcare and legal support. For example, the Thomson Reuters Foundation has published the results of its survey on the world's most dangerous megacities for women, based on perceptions of healthcare, economic opportunities, cultural traditions, sexual violence, and harassment. It is important to note that such studies have limitations, as they are based on perceptions and may not fully reflect the reality on the ground. It is also crucial to recognize that the safety of tribal women who migrate to cities is a complex issue that involves multiple factors and requires a multi-faceted approach to address.



The following measures can be used to build safe cities and safe public places for tribal women:

- Increase lighting in public spaces to deter criminal activity.
- Implement police patrols and surveillance systems in high-risk areas.
- Encourage public reporting of suspicious activity.
- Educate the public on safety measures and awareness.
- Encourage gender equality and challenge gender-based violence.
- Provide women-only transportation options.
- Increase access to resources and support for survivors of sexual assault.
- Develop urban planning that prioritizes safety of women, e.g., well-lit paths and accessible public transportation.

6. MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA :

Tribal women have valuable skills but their voices are missing from the mainstream narrative because equity is often neglected. The voices of the tribal women must be amplified.

Several actions can be taken to improve the condition of tribal women in India:

Protecting their rights to land and resources: The government should ensure that tribal communities are not displaced from their ancestral lands and resources without their free, prior, and informed consent. This can help to prevent the loss of traditional livelihoods and support networks for women.

Providing education and job opportunities: Access to education and employment opportunities can help to empower tribal women and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and violence. This can also help to break the cycle of poverty and improve their overall well-being.

Promoting gender-sensitive development programs: Development programs should be designed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by tribal women and should be implemented in a culturally sensitive manner.

Increasing access to healthcare: Tribal women should have access to comprehensive healthcare services, including reproductive health services, to ensure their physical and mental well-being.

Strengthening protection mechanisms: The government should provide adequate protection mechanisms for tribal women, including measures to address sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation.

Engaging with tribal communities: The government and other stakeholders should engage with tribal communities to understand their needs and perspectives, and to ensure that their voices are heard in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Building partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations: The government should build partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations to enhance their efforts to improve the condition of tribal women.

Improving the condition of tribal women in India requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the various challenges they face and empowers them to realize their full potential. By working together, government, civil society, and tribal communities can help to create a more just and equitable society for all. Many NGOs are working for tribal welfare. Out of these, Raah Foundation is one such NGO which has an understanding of the tribal culture and know how to work with them. Raah Foundation works for empowerment of the tribal communities by creating awareness and advocating for tribal rights. Raah Foundation works with the tribal communities to provide them with essential services such as health, education, and hygiene, with an aim to empower the tribal communities so that they can take control of their own lives and make choices which can improve their lives. To ensure the implementation of *Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas*, it is important to raise the collective consciousness of tribal women. We have to emphasize progress that is socially inclusive thereby ensuring positive social action.

7. MEASURES TAKEN BY INDIAN GOVERNMENT FOR TRIBAL WELFARE :

Indian government and other stakeholders have taken action to address the displacement of tribal women. This involves measures such as compensating displaced communities fairly and adequately. In 2022, Shri Arjun Munda, Union



Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India emphasized that government has taken several steps to eradicate historical injustices faced by tribals. He emphasized that budgetary allocations have gone up every year, besides expenditure. Government also announced Minimum Support Price (MSP) for 87 forest produce. The tribals of Jharkhand and Assam, especially where the silk was being produced are being trained in value addition (Statesman News Service, 2022).

Government of India has enacted the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, (RFTCLARR) 2013. The purpose of the said Act is to ensure a humane, participative, informed and transparent process for land acquisition with the least disturbance to the owners of the land and the other affected families and provide just and fair compensation to the affected families whose land has been acquired or proposed to be acquired. The second Schedule to the RFTCLARR Act, 2013 provides for element of rehabilitation and resettlement for all the affected families in addition to the compensation for land owners that is provided in the first schedule to the Act. The Third Schedule provides for infrastructural amenities for a reasonably habitable and planned settlement in the resettlement area. Since the land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement are undertaken by the State Governments, the needs of the displaced persons are to be addressed during these processes by the provision of infrastructural facilities and livelihood opportunities to these persons after due assessment. Hence, the provisions of various schemes of the Central and State Governments are utilized for this purpose (Digital Sansad, 2022).

8. CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, the displacement of tribal women in India is a critical issue that requires urgent attention and action. By addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by tribal women, and by working to ensure their rights and well-being, we can help to create a more just and equitable society for all. Furthermore, it is important to ensure the tribal rights to return to their ancestral lands, providing secure and culturally sensitive shelters, and addressing the risk of violence and exploitation through increased protection and support mechanisms.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST :

Author certifies that she does not have any kind of affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this paper. No funding or aid of any kind was received for publishing this research paper.

REFERENCES :

1. Bera, S. (2012, July 31). *Baigas in exile*. Down To Earth. Retrieved from: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/baigas-in-exile-38674>
2. Chrine, C. H., Siwale, J., Kukano, C., & Chitanda, J. (2020). Impact of Development Projects on Displaced Residents: A Case Study of Mwomboshi Dam in Chisamba District, Zambia. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 10(7), 274-280. Retrieved from: <https://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0720.php?rp=P10310252>
3. Digital Sansad. (2022). *Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No 2380, Programs for Displaced Tribals*. Retrieved from: <https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/179/AU2380.pdf?source=pqals>
4. Ekanayake, A., Lakshman, R., Blitz, B. K., Aghapouri, J., Javed, A., Malik, M., & Rahim, K. (2023). Gender and Forced Displacement in Humanitarian Policy Discourse: The Missing Link. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 11(3), 243-260. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/23315024231189487>
5. Fernandes, N., Das, J. C., Rao, S., Fernandes, W., & Ganguli-Thukral, E. (1989). Development and Rehabilitation: An Estimate of Extent and Processes. In Fernandes, W., & Thukral, E. G. (Eds.), *Development, Displacement, and Rehabilitation* (pp. 62-68). New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.



6. Kofman, E. (2021). Gender, Migration and Policymaking in Light of the 60th Anniversary of International Migration. *International Migration*, 59(5):273-76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12918>
7. Nadimpally, S., Venkatachalam, D. & Fatima, A. (2019, February 28). *Eviction of Tribals: Forced Displacement and Its Links With Poor Health*. The Wire. Retrieved from: <https://thewire.in/rights/supreme-court-eviction-tribals-displacement>
8. Piramal, S. (2022, August 9). *Tribal women have a significant role in India's transformation*. Hindustan Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/gender-equality/tribal-women-have-a-significant-role-in-india-s-transformation-101659968704115.html>
9. Rosen, R., & Katherine, T. (Eds.). (2018). *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* London: University College London Press.
10. Scroll Staff. (2022, November 21). *Narendra Modi criticises Congress over activist Medha Patkar's appearance in Bharat Jodo Yatra: Patkar had opposed to Gujarat's Narmada project citing ecological concerns*. Scroll.in. Retrieved from: <https://scroll.in/latest/1037896/narendra-modi-criticises-congress-over-activist-medha-patkar-s-appearance-in-bharat-jodo-yatra>
11. Shiva, V. (1989). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zed Books.
12. Shuman, A., & Carol, B. (2014). Gender and Cultural Silences in the Political Asylum Process. *Sexualities*, 17(8): 939-957. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714552262>
13. Singh Negi, N., & Ganguly, S. (2011). Development projects vs. internally displaced populations in India: a literature-based appraisal. (COMCAD Working Papers, 103). Bielefeld: Universität Bielefeld, Fak. für Soziologie, Centre on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD). Retrieved from: <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-422011>
14. Statesman News Service. (2022, March 17). *'Modi Govt ended historical injustice to tribal population': Arjun Munda*. New Delhi: The Statesman. Retrieved from: <https://www.thestatesman.com/india/modi-govt-ended-historical-injustice-tribal-population-arjun-munda-1503052631.html>
15. Thakkar, H. (2009). Displacement in the Name of Development. In Iyer, R. R. (Ed.), *Water and the Laws in India*, (pp. 414-431). New Delhi: SAGE Publications
16. United Nations (2004). Guiding Principles on Internal Displacements. Retrieved from: www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/.../GPsEnglish.pdf
17. United Nations (2020). International Mayors Forum Preparatory Webinar Series. Retrieved from: <https://unosd.un.org/events/2020-international-mayors-forum-preparatory-webinar-series>