

# Human Rights Discourse on Dams, Displacement and Resettlement



# Human Rights Discourse on Dams, Displacement and Resettlement

By

Namita Gupta

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



Human Rights Discourse on Dams, Displacement and Resettlement

By Namita Gupta

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Namita Gupta

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1003-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1003-6

Dedicated to my daughter Ananya who inspired me to start working  
on the book during the Covid-19 pandemic



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	ix
---------------	----

## **Section I: Development Induced Displacement and Resettlement: Risks and Rights**

Chapter 1 .....	2
Introduction	

Chapter 2 .....	13
Displacement and the Critique of Neoliberal Model of Development	

Chapter 3 .....	22
Resettlement and Rehabilitation Planning and Management: Key Components, Issues and Challenges	

## **Section II: Dams, Displacement and Resettlement: International Perspective**

Chapter 4 .....	40
Formulation of International Standards	

Chapter 5 .....	55
Resettlement Experiences of Some Controversial Hydroelectric Projects: Aswan, Three Gorges, Ilisu and Belo Monte	

## **Section III: Displacement and Resettlement in India: Legacies, Challenges and Solutions**

Chapter 6 .....	92
Resettlement Laws and Policies in India	

Chapter 7 .....	103
Displacement and Resettlement in India: Case Studies	

Chapter 8 .....	124
Social Resistance against Dams and Displacement in India and Role of Civil Society Organizations	
Chapter 9 .....	134
Human Rights of the Displaced and Judicial Intervention	
<b>Section IV: Conclusion</b>	
Chapter 10 .....	142
Is There a Way Forward?	
References .....	151



## PREFACE

Since the 1990s, development-induced displacement has emerged as a major human rights concern. At the heart of this debate lies the issues of equity, governance, justice and power. The reason for the same is the mounting number of those displaced due to multiple development projects. A large number of examples are available throughout the world where dam-induced displacement and resettlement has been mismanaged and has led to enormous social and environmental costs. The devastating impacts of such projects on the life and livelihood of those resettled led to resentment and a proliferation of public actions, campaigns, protests and resistance. Such mass mobilization against the development projects brought issues of participation, legitimacy, accountability and transparency to the fore, and into the policy domain, questioning the authority of planners and policy-makers at different levels. The developing impasse necessitated fresh insights into the life-worlds of affected people, and a review of assumptions, questions and options in social engineering, a challenge that was taken up in sociological and anthropological research.

The recent conflicts and social movements on the subject have led to the academic debates and policy discussions on the issue per se. This scrutiny by the various stakeholders has led to the major agencies funding development projects and as well as national authorities to re-examine the process as well as the purpose of development. It has now been accepted that any developmental activity can be meaningful only when the dispossessed and displaced people are taken care of and adequately rehabilitated. With this newly found attention of the academicians and policy makers, the issue of displacement has also gauged interest of media and urban elites recently. There have been increasing calls for attention to social and political aspects of displacement, particularly by social scientists. Researchers have analyzed a range of complexities in particular situations of displacement and resettlement, such as lack of effective participation of project affected communities, socio-economic consequences on the displaced and missing attention on the specific needs of women, indigenous peoples, encroachers and squatters, and other such groups. Academic scholarship on this important issue, however, has been both sporadic and inconsistent.

This book is an endeavour to provide a comprehensive outlook on the human rights issues involved in the development induced displacement and resettlement. This book is organized into four sections. The first section of the book has been titled 'Development Induced Displacement and Resettlement: Risks and Rights'. The introductory chapter provides a brief conceptual understanding of the term displacement and deliberate upon some serious human rights issues involved in dam induced displacements. Keeping Cernea's impoverishment risks as a reference point, it discusses at length the consequences of these displacements on indigenous communities and women, who undoubtedly are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized of all affected. The ecological consequences of these projects have also been discussed briefly. The second chapter provides a critique of neoliberal model of development which relied heavily on capital investment and advancement of technology for economic growth by harnessing existing natural and human resources. The dams have been considered to be the most desirable option by policy makers, ignoring the irreversible long-term social and environmental costs of such projects. By comparing the radical and reformist approach to development, this chapter emphasizes on the need to have a development model that is economically viable, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable. The third chapter starts with providing conceptual and theoretical understanding of resettlement and rehabilitation. As a well-articulated resettlement plan helps in mitigating the adverse impacts of displacement and in creating better development prospects for project affected people, this chapter deliberates upon various essential components of a resettlement action plan in detail.

The second section of the book has been titled 'Dams, Displacement and Resettlement: International Perspective'. The first chapter of this section discusses the existing international framework for the resettlement of the displaced. Tracing the origin of the human rights discourse of forced displacement in the international human rights law, the chapter endeavours to critically analyze the resettlement principles framed by various international agencies such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and International Finance Corporation. It further suggests the adoption of these international policy standards for involuntary resettlement in the legal and regulatory frameworks at the national level. The second chapter of this section shares the resettlement experiences of some most controversial hydroelectric projects across the world. Starting with the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, followed by the Three Gorges Dam in China, and the Ilisu Dam in Turkey and Belo Monte in Brazil, it highlights that though these big dams may have been successful in achieving the predetermined goals (electricity, flood

control, irrigation, navigation), these have led to severe socio-economic hardships to the displaced communities and have also played havoc to the ecosystem.

The third section 'Displacement and Resettlement in India: Legacies, Challenges and Solutions' specifically deals with the dam induced displacement issues in India. The first chapter of this section while tracing the origin of the land acquisition laws in the colonial era comprehensively discusses the various existing laws and policies for the resettlement of the displaced in India. While critically analysing these laws in context of certain social justice issues such as: What constitutes public purpose? Who is entitled to the compensation? What will be the mode of compensation? It asserts that though new legislations and policy initiatives attempt to introduce a right based approach in the process of acquisition of land; growth-centric and market-centric paradigm of development still dominates. The second chapter of this section discusses two of the most prominent hydropower projects in India. The resettlement policies and its implementation in the case of the Bhakra Dam Project has been analyzed as the project with one of the largest investment schemes in newly independent India and has faced least resistance from displaced people. The second case study is of the Sardar Sarovar Project, as the project faced lots of resistance from displaced people as well as from civil society organizations, both at the national and global level. The third chapter 'Social Resistance against Dams and Displacement in India and Role of Civil Society Organizations', while tracing the earliest resistances against dams in India, elaborates various tactics and strategies such as: Protests and Agitations, Publications, Lobbying at the international and national level, Mobilization at International Conferences and Workshops and Litigations, adopted by the civil society organizations and individual activists to uphold the rights to equality and justice for the displaced persons. The last chapter of this section discusses how large dam projects have been a subject of litigation in the courts of India. Through various case laws, it specifically elaborates judicial stances on some most contentious human rights issues such as: defining public purpose; issue of compensation and resettlement of the displaced; ecological concerns and the rights of the tribal communities.

The last section of this book looks for answers to the most pertinent question of human rights discourse on dams induced displacement and resettlement i.e., is there a way forward? In our quest to develop and economic growth, state agencies have already caused irreparable damages to the ecosystems as well the life of the people affected due to these projects. While this quest does not seem that it will end in the coming years, there is a need to introspect

on some fundamental questions: What sort of development should we be aiming at? How can we ensure that this development involves the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens, opportunities and risks? How can we ensure that human rights are observed? How can we ensure that the ecosystems' limited ability to cope is taken into account? It further calls for collective learning and decision making to enable diverse stakeholders to work together to address issues at the earliest stages of planning and to find common ground without compromising individual values.

Though sincere efforts have been made to provide a critical analysis of the environmental, social and economic impacts of the development projects, I admit my scholastic limitations to discuss the issues in great depth. There is already a plethora of literature available on the issues concerning dam induced displacement as well as on the politics of development. I have tried to cite a large number of literatures covered on the issue concerned. There is a huge need for, and variety of, social science research on development discourse as well as on the human rights issues of those displaced during the process, not only from the scholastic perspective but also from the view point of subaltern groups, including those who got displaced by the projects as well as from the perspective of women and indigenous communities. It further calls for a serious deliberation on the human rights aspects of development induced displacement.

**SECTION I:**

**DEVELOPMENT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT  
AND RESETTLEMENT:  
RISKS AND RIGHTS**

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed an enormous increase in the number of internally displaced people across the world but more so in the countries of South Asia. Though various factors may lead to internal displacement including wars and natural calamities, there are serious human rights issues involved in these displacements. While people crossing their national borders are called refugees and are protected by a large number of international conventions; people displaced internally are considered the responsibility of the concerned state and hence, the issue stays out of the purview of international humanitarian law. Out of all the factors responsible for internal displacements, the development induced displacement has affected the largest proportion of the population. The displacement caused due to development projects is quite different from other forms of displacement. Displacement due to wars and natural calamities is temporary and people always have an option to come back to their native places, once the situation returns back to normal. On the other hand, the development induced displacement does not only take away their right to property but also leads to displacement which is permanent in nature. Secondly, displacement due to natural calamities and political, social or religious upheavals are generally sudden in nature, to some extent unanticipated and hence, the kick start of the resettlement process may take some time; however, displacement due to development activities is always well articulated and hence, the planning for rehabilitation needs to be made in advance and much before the occurrence of actual displacement. Besides these fundamental differences, each category of displacement may further be distinguished on their legal and administrative status as quantum and process of assistance vary on the basis of the nature of displacement.

Broadly, all development projects can be categorized into three types: industrial, which includes thermal power, mining and port projects; urban infrastructural, which includes highway, school and hospital projects, among others; and irrigation and hydroelectric power projects. The first two categories require land, though the displacement caused is much lesser in comparison to the displacement caused by dams and other irrigation projects

(Mishra 2014). While no reliable figures exist to indicate the scale of global resettlements, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's estimates of global resettlements suggests about 20 million people annually (Cernea and Maldonado 2018). According to another estimate, the total number of persons displaced due to large dams is pegged at 40 million (Negi and Ganguly 2011).

One of the reasons for the lack of consensus on the magnitude of dam induced displacement is the difference in the opinion on what constitutes displacement. The term displacement has two subcategories—direct and indirect. In direct displacement, people are directly displaced from their habitations due to commissioning of some development projects. This occurs not only from the inundation of reservoirs but from the installation of project facilities and associated infrastructure. They are dis-placed in a real sense. On the other hand, indirect displacement emanates, first of all, from a process whereby the functioning of a project continuously pushes up the consumption of the natural resources of an area, leading native inhabitants being deprived of their traditional means of sustenance. This leads to such people moving from the project site to other places for their livelihood (Das 2005). Cernea (2006) also discussed this expansion of the concept of displacement in terms of 'restriction of access'. This redefinition was introduced first in the resettlement policy of the World Bank in 2002 was later on replicated and introduced in the policies of other multilateral donors such as the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the African Development Bank, for their programs. According to this definition, the imposition of 'restricted access' to certain resources in protected areas is a form of involuntary population displacement. Besides this, it broadens the definition of 'displacement' beyond its usual acceptance as geographic relocation, to also include occupational and economic dislocation not necessarily accompanied by the physical (geographic) relocation of the local users (Cernea 2006:25).

'Development caused displacement has negative socio-economic consequences in countries characterized by a land-based economy and low employment flexibility, together with strongly rooted social stratification' (Terminski 2015:55). The inundation of land and alteration of riverine ecosystems affects the resources available for land and riverine based productive activities. In the case of communities dependent on land and the natural resources base, this often results in the loss of access to traditional means of livelihood, including agricultural production, fishing, livestock grazing, fuel wood gathering and collection of forest products, to name a few. Not only does this disrupt local economies, it effectively displaces people—in a

wider sense—from access to a series of natural resources and environmental inputs into their livelihoods. This consequently leads to a loss of their means of production and disruption in their existing socio-cultural milieu (WCD 2000). Though, in legal terms, such movement is considered ‘voluntary’ and is called ‘migration’; in true sense, these people have been displaced due to development projects, indirectly. Hence, internally displaced persons can be called ‘exodus within the borders’ and ‘homeless at home’. Therefore, a vast number of displacements by these projects pose a challenge before policy makers in tackling this menace.

## **Consequences of Displacement**

There is no denying the fact that displacement due to development projects invariably have an impoverishing experience for the displaced. A large number of ethnographic studies in the field time and again reaffirmed the adverse consequences of these projects on displaced persons. Failure to mitigate the resettlement effect often generates ‘new poverty’ as opposed to the old poverty of people before displacement (See Cernea 2000 and 2002; Downing 2002a and 2002b; Scudder 2005). The victims found themselves summarily removed (with insufficient compensation) to make way for projects that were imposed ostensibly in the wider ‘public purpose’ for a state to which they may have little prior knowledge or allegiance. These displacement inducing projects have strong structural bias, favouring the elites while millions of people pay the price without reaping the benefits (Parasuraman 1999).

The socio-economic impacts of a project are the likely consequences that a project may have on the social ordering and the economic sustenance of displaced persons. Vanclay describes social impact as changes in lifestyle, cultural and political systems, well-being, property rights, environment and aspirations (Vanclay 2003). In the Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment developed by the Inter-Organisational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment (1994:2), social impacts are described as ‘the consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society’. While these definitions offer a basis on which to understand social impact, the social variables contemplated by these definitions remain difficult to quantify. Indeed, Sairinen’s (2004: 510) assertion that ‘social impacts are [...] perceived differently by different people through socially-mediated understandings of what is “normal” or



“natural” or “to be expected” or even acceptable’, is a reminder that assessing this form of impact can be daunting. Economic impacts are more definite in that they relate to the material and financial resources for sustaining livelihood capacities (Adeola and Viljoen 2018) such as the loss of farming land, forests, grazing lands, fishing grounds or water sources undermining or destroying livelihoods and the means of subsistence, and the sociocultural features of rural communities (Koenig 2009). Furthermore, resulting in loss of income sources and kinship networks, leading to impoverishment as well as lost identity.

Michael Cernea (1998:48-53), by going beyond economic factors, attempted to study social, psychological, cultural and health parameters of displacement. He identified eight areas of impoverishment risks after studying displacement cases all over the world. These impoverishment risks are:

**Landlessness:** Expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which people’s productive systems, commercial activities and livelihood are constructed. This is the principal form of de-capitalization and pauperization of the displaced people, as they lose both physical and man-made capital.

**Joblessness:** Loss of wage employment occurs both in urban displacement and in rural areas, and those losing jobs are landless laborers, enterprise or service workers, artisans and small businessmen. But creating new jobs is difficult and requires substantial investments. The resulting unemployment and underemployment among resettlers lingers long after physical relocation.

**Homelessness:** Loss of housing and shelter may only be temporary for many displaced, but for some homelessness remains a chronic condition. In a broader cultural sense, homelessness is also placeless-ness, loss of a group culture space and identity, or cultural impoverishment.

**Marginalization:** It occurs when families lose their economic power and slide on a downward mobility path; middle income households do not become landless, but become small landowners; small shopkeepers and craftsmen are downsized and slip below poverty thresholds.

**Increased Mobility and Mortality:** A serious decrease in health levels resulting from displacement causes social stress, insecurity, and psychological traumas, and outbreak of diseases. An unsafe water supply and poor sewerage system increases the vulnerability to epidemics. The weakest of

the demographic segment—Infants, children and the elderly—are affected the most.

**Food Insecurity:** Forced uprooting increases the risk that people will fall into chronic undernourishment and food insecurity, defined as calorie-protein intake levels below the minimum necessity for normal growth and work.

**Loss of Access to Common Property:** Loss of access to common property assets belonging to communities that are relocated represents a major form of income and livelihood deterioration. Typically, such lost resources remain uncompensated by the government relocation schemes.

**Social Disintegration:** It tears apart the social fabric and the existing patterns of social organization. Production systems are dismantled, kinship groups and family systems are often scattered, local labor markets are disrupted, and people's cultural identity is put at risk. Life sustaining informal social networks of mutual help among people, local voluntary associations, self-organized service arrangements, etc., are dispersed and rendered inactive. This unravelling represents a massive loss of social capital incurred by the uprooted people, yet a loss that remains un-quantified and uncompensated.

Though Cernea provided a detailed illustration of how the oustees get trapped into the vicious circle of impoverishment due to faulty resettlement policies, various researchers have suggested the inclusion of some missing risks. While Mahapatra added educational risk (1999), Robinson suggested including other community services (2003) and Downing (2002a) considered violation of human rights to be a major risk. Rajagopal (2000) enumerated five human rights challenges that arise in relation to development-induced displacement: Right to Development and Self-Determination; Right to Participation; Right to Life and Livelihood; Rights of Vulnerable Groups; and Right to Remedy.

Whatever terminology we use to highlight the trauma of displaced people, there is no denying the fact that there is an urgent need to highlight that while development projects may create vulnerability through impoverishment; development induced displacement disproportionately affects certain groups, particularly indigenous groups and women. Similarly, the ecological impacts of large dams have been one of the less deliberated issues in the development discourse. These three often neglected dimensions of development induced displacement have been discussed below.

## **Impact on Indigenous and Tribal Communities**

Though a growing body of literature is available on development-induced displacement and resettlement; a disproportionate share of such studies focuses on the impact of these development projects on indigenous people, who undoubtedly are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized among all displaced (Hagen and Minter 2020). Kothari (1996) found that out of 110 projects studied, tribals consisted of around 50 percent of the displaced population. In India, 40-50 percent of those displaced by development projects were tribal people, who account for around 8 percent of the nation's one billion people (WCD 2000).

The current definition of development does not have the same outcomes for all social groups. The persuasion of this pattern leads to 'internal colonialism' of the people which are relatively isolated and culturally distant such as the scheduled tribes (Mathew 1996). On the one hand, the affected tribal people get impoverished, on the other hand, the advanced sections of society get enriched. The whole displacement process leads to the dispossession of tribals from ownership of means of production and deprivation of the products of their labor. The social effects produced by it are observed in the loss of their political autonomy, the breakup of their community and the devaluation of their culture. The political overtones of this development are articulated through the slogan of integration and assimilation which is eventually intended to destroy their identity and distinct status. This development virtually reduces them to a subhuman level of existence. In short, this paradigm of development essentially thrives on the progressive underdevelopment and destitution of displaced tribal people (Saxena 2008a). These people are not only alienated permanently from their traditionally inhabited lands but are also uprooted from their traditional cultural base and life system. Since very little attention is paid to rehabilitation, displacement results in bitter suffering and exploitation at the hands of officials, contractors, middlemen and others (Fernandes and Thukral 1989). The loss of land and traditional homes consequently leads to the loss of livelihood. They are left with no other option than to get connected to the larger market economy in place of their own forest-based subsistence economy. This dependency on the external market puts these tribal people socially in a disadvantageous position where they are engaged as menial workers of various kinds (Pattnaik 2013). The employer, conditioned by the caste mentality, often sees them as 'low caste'. Overtime, they themselves internalize a caste mentality and develop a low self-image of their own community (Debasree 2014).

The World Commission on Dams Report (2000) also highlighted that the large dams have had serious impacts on the lives, livelihoods, cultures and spiritual existence of indigenous and tribal peoples. Due to neglect and lack of capacity to secure justice because of structural inequities, cultural dissonance, discrimination and economic and political marginalisation, indigenous and tribal peoples have suffered disproportionately from the negative impacts of large dams, while often being excluded from sharing in the benefits.

### **Displacement from Gender Lens: The Neglected Dimension**

Women are an important component of the displaced population. Though there are studies that have stressed the need to focus on women's experiences of displacement (See Colson 1971 and 1999; Parasuraman 1993; Koenig 1995; Indra 1999; Mehta and Srinivasan 2000; Scudder 2005), inadequate attention has been paid to specific problems faced by women during displacement. For example, Jobin's *Dams and Diseases* (1999) has discussed the gender in displacement in regard to women's fertility only, while ignoring other aspects. Elizabeth Colson (1971 and 1999), in her study of the Kariba Dam, highlighted how women were exposed to physical violence, bad marriages, loss of property rights and the deterioration of status due to displacement. Similarly, various studies pointed out adverse economic impacts of displacement on women (See Parasuraman 1993; Koenig 1995).

Displacement adversely affects women's general welfare as well as their status within the household. The incidences of intimate partner violence as well as physical abuse from other male relatives increases as the sense of self-worth of male members gets undermined by displacement. Furthermore, women are psychologically, economically and socially disadvantaged due to two major reasons. Firstly, women's strong emotional bond with their homes leads to more stress due to physical removal. Women enjoy a sense of security in their native lands. As most of these displacements take place in the area where villages are small, sparsely populated and scattered, displacement creates a sense of uncertainty and insecurity among the women (Berreman 1963). Secondly, most of the resettlement policies are gender blind, and they totally ignore that job opportunities have to be created for women as well. This further widens the gender disparities among the displaced persons either by imposing a disproportionate share of social costs on women or through an inequitable allocation of the benefits

generated. Extensive research has documented gender inequalities in access to, and control of, economic and natural resources (WCD 2000). In Asia and Africa, for example, women may have used rights over land and forests, but are rarely allowed to own and/or inherit the land they use (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999).

The situation further worsens for tribal women. Tribal women fare worse than men do because their dependence on informal economy is greater. Three other aspects basic to the life of tribal women in particular, ensure their greater deterioration. Firstly, the natural resources from which land acquisition alienates them are the very foundation of tribal women's economy, culture, social systems and political structures. The woman had some control over them as long as they were community assets. Since they have less exposure to the external world than men, they end up in low paid unskilled jobs. Thus, the woman is denied economic independence. In land-based resettlement, land is allotted to an individual, almost invariably a man, considered the head of the family. It is then transferred to his son. Land is a symbol of social power. With no rights over land, the woman ceases to be economically productive and also stops being a decision maker in the family. This power is transferred to the man and from him to his son (Fernandes 2001).

Examining the relationship between gender and development, Bina Agarwal argues that gender should be used as a 'lens' and cautions about treating women merely as an 'additive category' or as a 'special focus or target group' (Agarwal 1994). When considering women and involuntary displacement, a similar approach is required. Involuntary displacement needs to be examined through the experiential lens of the women affected (Bisht 2009). There is no denying the fact that there are studies that narrate instances where dams have served as opportunities for reducing gender disparities, primarily among women in households or communities that receive access to project services. However, such success stories are few and rare. Although many countries and funding agencies have adopted specific gender policies in recent years aimed at mainstreaming gender issues in their development interventions, actual project planning and implementation continue to overlook gender aspects. An assessment by the World Bank of its own funded projects noted that the experiences studied 'were largely oblivious of the gender aspect of resettlement' (OED 1998:60). After the Asian Development Bank approved a gender policy in 1998, a review of its dam projects observed that the impacts on gender at the project preparation and implementation stages were often not considered (ADB 2003). Where planning is insensitive to gender, project impacts can

at best be neutral, and at worst aggravate existing gender disparities to the extent of radically affecting the pre-project gender balance. Scudder (2005: 59) rightly said that 'Looking to the future, women will continue to suffer until they are incorporated within the options assessments and decision-making processes to the extent that the necessary economic, social and political opportunities are also made available to them'.

## **Impact on Ecosystems**

The ecology-economics interface subordinates the environment to the primacy of economic growth. Nature is repudiated for the generation of wealth, goods, and services. The ecological degradation resulting from this distorted priority has emerged as a pervasive consequence of the pattern of development (Kothari 1996). The large dams were declared as part of a flawed paradigm that causes an increasing disconnection between the necessary environmental health of river basins and the current needs of people and governments for the provision of water, energy, and food (Scudder 2005). It further led to inequitable development and environmental degradation. Though the major ecological impacts of dams are known well, most of these are not fully understood nor, in most dam projects, fully assessed. Few studies are conducted to determine the ecological, economic and cultural importance of rivers before they are dammed. Similar is the case of long term environmental and social consequences of areas after the construction of a dam. River basins are renowned as the cradles of civilization and cultural heritage. Ancient and modern communities alike have depended on rivers for livelihoods, commerce, habitats and the sustaining ecological functions they provide. Throughout history, alterations to rivers—natural or human generated—have affected riverine communities in one way or another.

The immediate impacts involve the physical, chemical, and geomorphological consequences of blocking a river and altering the natural distribution and timing of stream flow. Secondly, it leads to irreversible damage to the primary biological productivity of ecosystems including effects on riverine and riparian plant-life and on downstream habitats such as wetlands. Thirdly, it leads to alterations to fauna (especially fish) caused by a first-order effect (such as blocking migration) or a second-order effect (such as decrease in the availability of plankton). Besides this, modifying the ecosystem changes the biochemical cycle in the natural riverine system. Reservoirs interrupt the downstream flow of organic carbon, leading to

emissions of greenhouse gases such as methane and carbon dioxide that contribute to climate change (WCD 2000:74).

The alternative uses of land interfere with all elements of the environment. They pollute and overdraw water resources, degrade quality of air and damage biodiversity. The soil in the vicinity is impaired affecting its productivity and even fertility. The incidence of reservoir induced seismicity is increased in many Dam projects (Kothari 1996). Development opens the environment for large-scale commercial exploitation which destroys its values besides generating social conflict with communities who use it for subsistence. The ecological imbalance destroys the existing symbiosis between people and their environment and threatens the survival of those dependent on it. It also leads to irreversible loss of natural genetic diversities evolved over the years. The shrinking of the resource base of an increasingly large number of people causes an imbalance in men-nature relationships. It forces people dependent on it to overexploit the reduced environmental space for survival which causes further degradation, reducing its utility for the very communities dependent on it. The deterioration in the local environment also leads to the spread of new diseases unknown to the area (Fernandes and Thukral 1989; Pandey 1998). Thus, environmental destruction and social injustice go together (Saxena 2008a). For sheer survival, impoverishment forces the communities that had till then treated forests and other natural resources as renewable, into destructive dependence on the same. Thus, it results not merely in poverty and ecological degradation but also in the weakening of the culture that ensured renewability (Fernandes 2001). What is more important is that even in cases where some of these may have been assessed, there is no comprehensive impact statement - each impact is studied on its own, in isolation. Further, there is little assessment of how the dam and its impacts interact with the rest of the environment (Dharmadhikary 2001). The ongoing struggle against the large dams across the globe challenges this dominant model of development that holds out the promise of material wealth through modernization but perpetuates an unequal distribution of resources and wreaks social and environmental havoc (Scudder 2005).

The development projects, because of their very nature, have not been able to create alternative sources of livelihood for the majority of those who were displaced (Mishra 2011). Therefore, displacement has a dual effect. On the one hand, it leads to conflict over land, and on the other, it signifies a radical shift in public policy towards a market-oriented approach. The process of displacement affects not only immediate displaced persons but even the host communities.

In brief, it can be stated that displacement is a deeply traumatic experience with multiple dimensions affecting production systems, social network, trade and market connections, and cultural bonding. In the case of tribal communities, displacement causes a loss of cultural identity which produces stress and mental disorders (Kothari 1996; Mahapatra 1999). Impoverishment remains a legacy of displacements from large dams which suggests that there are some basic flaws in the way involuntary resettlement is carried out (McDonald and Webber 2010). The WCD (2000) found that a lack of obligation as well as capacity to tackle displacement has led to the impoverishment of a large number of affected people and has consequently led to the opposition to these projects worldwide. Any developmental activity can be meaningful only when the deprived and displaced people are taken care of and adequately rehabilitated, which has not been ensured in most of the dams.

Development projects are usually undertaken with the expectation that they make significant and sustainable contributions to the society and environment through commitment to environment, social and economic benefit of society. While the direct objective with any development project might be obviously related to maximizing the benefits, there are also usually unintended consequences which such projects bring upon the society and the environment (Ashley and Hussein 2000). It is therefore very important and mandatory that the social, cultural, economic and ecological impacts of development schemes and projects must be assessed before they go ahead and thoroughly analyzed before damage is done on those impacted.



## CHAPTER 2

### DISPLACEMENT AND THE CRITIQUE OF NEOLIBERAL MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

*“The debate about dams is a debate about the very meaning, purpose and pathway of development as well as the role that the state plays.” (WCD 2000: 198)*

‘Development’ first emerged as a subject area in the second half of the twentieth century. The most basic assumption underlying the study of development, especially in the southern part of the globe, both in theory and practice is that the term implies, narrowly, to poverty reduction and by extension, accretions over time in overall well being for the mass of people; that is, an increase in ‘human development’. This was the fundamental assumption behind the emergence of development studies after the Second World War, when the concept of development first appeared on the international agenda. During the 1950s, the term development became more complicated with the emergence of large numbers of post-colonial countries (Haynes 2008).

Lewis (1954) stated that economic development is a process of capital accumulation. During this process, labor is transferred from low productivity agriculture and other traditional occupations to high productivity modern industry. The academic deliberations that dwelled upon Lewis’ framework of dualism subsequently emphasised the importance of raising agricultural productivity, along with industrial growth, to maintain stable terms of trade between agriculture and industry, crucial for an unhindered capital accumulation in the industrial sector (Jorgensen 1961; Dixit 1973). However, the emphasis was always on the accumulation of capital. This emphasis on physical capital accumulation shifted to human capital accumulation from the mid-1980s with the pioneering work of Romer (1986, 1990) and the emergence of endogenous growth models. However, neither of the two schools of thought, one emphasising physical capital and the other emphasising human capital as the main constraint to development, had visualised that land could become a serious constraining factor to the process of development. The underlying assumption was that land requirement

is negligible for industries and therefore can be safely ignored. At the macroeconomic level this was justified. If one looks at the physical requirement of land for building up industries, services and infrastructure like roads, townships, seaports, airports or bridges, the total requirement may not be very large compared to the total agricultural land in a less developed agrarian economy. There, however, exists a serious microeconomic problem (Sarkar 2007).

In the post-colonial era, development was perceived in terms of modernization, improved standard of living and industrial progress. The route to achieve it lay in the growth of Gross National Product which would generate wealth, raise incomes and create incentives for investment. This model of economic growth relied heavily on capital investment and advancement of technology to harness existing natural and human resources. All this required land which was usually procured through compulsory acquisition by the government. When land was acquired for the aforesaid purposes, it invariably entailed eviction of people from their traditional livelihood and surroundings.

The displacement of people subsisting on such land has therefore been considered as inevitable and unavoidable. This articulation of the development paradigm rested on certain assumptions. One was that development benefits people across society and leads to social welfare. The other assumption was that development and national progress were intertwined. As the pursuit of national progress has been the utmost priority, other aspirations and considerations should be superseded. With these assumptions, development induced displacement was considered both necessary and desirable. The sacrifice made by the displaced was presumed to be a small cost for achieving the higher national goals (Saxena 2008b).

Since the 1970s, the construction of large dams became—in the eyes of many—synonymous with development and economic progress. Viewed as symbols of modernization and humanity's ability to harness nature, dam construction accelerated dramatically. This can be substantiated by the fact that from 1970 onwards, on average two or three large dams were commissioned each day somewhere in the world. While the immediate benefits were widely believed sufficient to justify the enormous investments made (more than \$2 trillion), secondary and tertiary benefits were also often cited. These included food security considerations, local employment and skills development, rural electrification, and the expansion of physical and social infrastructure such as roads and schools. The benefits were regarded as self-evident, while the construction and operational costs tended to be

limited to economic and financial considerations that justified dams as a highly competitive option (WCD 2000:XXX).

Pushed by this development strategy, the construction of large dams has been justified on economic, social, and political grounds. The benefits highlighted by the government agencies were major and could not be overlooked by the general public especially in developing and less developed countries. During the late twentieth century, large dams emerged as one of the most significant and visible tools for the management of water resources. According to an estimate, 16 percent of the world's electricity is generated through dams (World Bank 2015).

In the neoliberal process, land is commodified and moved from local people to private companies and wealthy elites. Natural resources are appropriated, and alternative, indigenous, forms of production and consumption are suppressed (Renee and Minter 2020). This process leads to ever increasing levels of social inequality and instability, and is contingent on and promoted by policies of the state (Harvey 2003, 2007). As a development choice, large dams became a focal point for the interests of politicians, dominant and centralized government agencies, international financing agencies and the dam-building industry. In the early 1970s and 1980s, when dam construction was at its peak, few studies were being carried out to determine the ecological, economic and cultural importance of rivers before they were dammed. Similar has been the case of long term environmental and social consequences of areas after the construction of a dam. Involvement from civil society varied with the degree of debate and open political discourse. The dams were considered to be the most desirable option by policy makers when needs reach crisis or near-crisis propositions, ignoring the irreversible longer-term social and environmental costs of such projects. These large hydro projects provided an easy and sustainable solution available to deal with the rising demands of the expanding human population, which already has surpassed the carrying capacity of earth's ecosystem.

The ongoing struggle against the large dams across the globe challenges this dominant model of development that holds out the promise of material wealth through modernization but perpetuates an unequal distribution of resources and wreaks social and environmental havoc (Scudder 2005). The economically driven displacement of environmental costs is principally affecting the human rights of two constituencies: today's poor and future generations (Barry and Woods 2013: 390). By the beginning of the third millennium, there was an emergence of two polarized interpretations of what needs to be done to ameliorate development outcomes in developmentally

under-achieving countries in the developing world i.e., radicals and reformists (Rai 2005). The *Reformist perspective* totally ignores the debate on questioning the assumptions of the dominant development paradigm and reasserts that displacement is an inevitable outcome of economic development. This school of thought believes that displacement of some people is justified in order to initiate development activities. This approach ignores the political and ethical context within which displacement occurs (Dwivedi 2002). On the other hand, the *Radical perspective* is openly critical of the current development paradigm and advocates for alternative development paradigms (Ganguly and Dutt 2012). According to this approach, large-scale development projects and consequent forced displacement has been legitimized by the State to enhance the power of the state and private capital. It is also critical of the existing neoliberal phase of development which has further led to land being regulated by market forces (Jaysawal and Saha 2018). Most debates, however, about development and how to achieve it in the developing world feature an unresolved—often implicit tension—between these two viewpoints. As far as the major question of the development project of large dams is concerned, scholars are divided.

Dam construction has led to momentous social upheavals particularly in terms of displacement. Forced displacement symbolizes a perverse and inherent incongruity in the context of development (Nayak 2013). They raise major ethical questions because they reflect an inequitable distribution of development's benefits and losses. 'Nevertheless, the involuntary displacements caused by such programmes create major impositions on some population segments. It restricts population rights by state-power intervention. This raises major issues of social justice and equity' (Cernea 2000: 3659). For those displaced, such projects represent the antithesis of real development. Understanding the discourse from the perspective of Rawls' 'general conceptions of justice', these large development projects—such as dam projects—and its impact of displacement is a utilitarian nightmare. The projects, which promote greater good for a greater number, impoverish 'oustees' and compel them to sacrifice for the 'greater good', are intolerable. Rawls' general conception of justice enables us to recognize that 'an unsuccessful resettlement scheme creates new inequalities by depriving oustees not only of income and wealth but also of social goods in two other ways: liberty and opportunity and social bases of respect' (Drydyk 1999:1-8; Rawls 1971).

However, since the 1960s, practitioners have already started questioning, in fact, criticizing the undesirable and avoidable environmental and social impacts of dams. The large dams were declared as part of a flawed paradigm

that causes an increasing disconnection between the necessary environmental health of river basins and the current needs of people and governments for the provision of water, energy and food (Scudder 2005). At the same time, alternative perspectives on human rights and development are being more clearly expressed. The preamble to the Right to Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly (1986) argued that 'development is a comprehensive process aimed at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population'. More vocal criticism has mounted against the prevailing globalization process asserting that this process facilitates few forgings ahead, while leading to social exclusion of already vulnerable groups. It also emphasizes an equal distribution of resources to ensure better quality of life for all. As experience accumulated and better information on the performance and consequences of dams became available, the full cost of large dams has also begun to emerge as a serious public concern. Driven by information on the impacts of dams on people, river basins and ecosystems, as well as their economic performance, opposition began to grow. Debate and controversy initially focused on specific dams and their local impacts. Gradually these locally driven conflicts evolved into a global debate about the costs and benefits of dams. Global estimates of the magnitude of impacts include some 40-80 million people displaced by dams while 60 percent of the world's rivers have been affected by dams and diversions. The nature and magnitude of the impacts of dams on affected communities and on the environment have now become established as key issues in the debate (WCD 2000).

The displacement debate also sharply underlines the unequal power relations in society. The power structure these relations produce tends to concentrate decision making of the government in a small privileged class representing the dominant social and economic groups. The class constituting these groups has wide access to economic assets, knowledge creation avenues, creation and opportunities for advancement. It commands control over resources both economic and intellectual. Development policies and structures are a manifestation of this power. In contrast, the larger sections of poor, particularly the more vulnerable sections among them, are denied this access through a wide range of discriminatory and exclusionary practices. In such a situation, the decision making by the state whether for regulatory or developmental activities is controlled by this small privileged class. This enables decision makers to make decisions for the whole society which includes those who may be adversely affected by them. These decisions inevitably reflect the premises and logic of their costs and benefits as seen by the decision makers. The decision makers assume that the logic and assumptions influencing a particular decision are shaped by

others as well. That is why development decisions involving displacement never consider possible alternatives which avoid this consequence. Rather, they tend to justify them by arguing that the adversely affected people should make this sacrifice for the larger national progress and advancement of society. This self-serving logic is pursued precisely because they are not the ones who suffer the adverse consequences of decisions. This paradigm of development, therefore, very eloquently advocates inclusive participation in decision making by which this inequality of power distribution is neutralized. Those who are adversely affected also have an equal say in the decisions taken so that the conflicts of interests are adequately resolved without leaning in favor of any class. The alternative sought is for democratic and participatory decision making (Saxena 2008b).

There has been a generalized failure to recognize affected people and empower them to participate in the decision-making process. The World Commission on Dams in its report (2000) rightly pointed out that once a proposed dam project passed preliminary technical and economic feasibility tests and attracted interest from government or external financing agencies and political interests, the momentum behind the project often prevailed over further assessments. In any event, project planning and appraisal for large dams was confined primarily to technical parameters and the narrow application of economic cost/benefit analyses.

This discourse on development has also brought into sharp focus the iniquitous nature and impact of its activities across social groups. This is reflected in the prosperity and advancement for some, and the impoverishment and misery for others. The acquisition of land leads to its transfer from people who use it for their subsistence to more affluent sections of society who already have access to productive resources and other avenues of income. This is particularly true where the acquired land is used by corporate agencies for profit making and by housing societies for providing houses to the better off sections. This resource transfer is contrary to the ethos of a welfare state (Saxena 2008a).

In a society, characterized by wide social and economic inequalities, development like other political goals is a widely contested notion with sharply antagonistic meaning given to it. This is because development is not a neutral phenomenon with uniformly beneficial implications. Development activities have dissimilar effects on different social groups depending on how they are placed in society and what their interests are. Some may gain from them while others may lose. Therefore, the perception of what constitutes development is not the same with all social groups. Both the