

EXPLORING THE VOICES OF THE DAMS-INDUCED DISPLACED WOMEN

IN INDIA: A STUDY OF SELECTED CASES

ABSTRACT

India after six decades of planned development faces both an environmental crisis and a developmental crisis that interact to reinforce each other. While there seem to be no end to the problems of inequality, poverty and unemployment. On the one hand, environmental destruction, conflict related to natural resources threatens the very basis of existence of multitude of India's teeming millions, on the other. Besides, large scale development projects often result in massive displacement of population.

Assessments sponsored by the World Bank have estimated that in India, during the last 50 years nearly 25 million have been displaced by development projects. More specifically the impact has been felt heavily by the marginalized and vulnerable population, mainly the women. In India, one of the major sources of development induced displacement of women is due to dams and hydro power projects.

We all know that dams do not build themselves. Nor are they outcome of impartial decision – making by impartial political and economic actors responding to the pre – existing needs of society. The key players in this infrastructure are consultancies, construction companies, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, machinery suppliers, academicians, politicians, governments and NGOs. In this era of capitalist globalization, where profit making is the sole concern rather than establishing sustainable economic growth, all these segments of people play a very crucial role in dam constructing industry by investing mind, money and material. This result into economic development on one hand and disintegration and socio-cultural loss of livelihood of the rural people who are dependent on land, water and natural resources which creates their cause of displacement from their land, life and livelihood. Most affected are women. Their displacement and resettlement are qualitatively different from those of men.

Displacement not only results in physical dislocation but also in women's disempowerment, identity crisis and also jeopardizes and violates their human rights.

Resettlement policies and programmes in India have largely remained gender biased and fail to take into account the differential experiences of women, making resettlement a difficult process for them. In most of the cases, women fail to raise their voice for their rights, identity and existence in society. Voice, an effective apparatus of self – expression, allows an individual to challenge obstacles that interfere with his/her personal liberation, free will and other forms of autonomy. Conversely, the lack of this powerful tool ----- Voicelessness ---- is a handicap that impedes the acts of exploring ourselves, pursuing autonomous desires, and contesting various types of oppression. **This paper therefore aims to highlight on the voice of the oppressed women mainly the dams – induced – displaced women in India with reference to Sardar Sarovar Dam construction which was dramatically highlighted during the agitation led by Narmada Bachao Andolan.**

. Therefore, it is found that laws, policies and government procedures often discriminate against them. When development is necessary and displacement becomes unavoidable, steps should be taken to protect the victims during displacement and proper resettlement and reintegration should be provided. Safeguards should be in place to facilitate women full access and enjoyment of all project including compensation and R &R. It is found that dams are built, people are uprooted and the Project is abandoned. So the planners of our country must think and the need of the hour is to evolve a people friendly model of development. Above all we need a humanistic approach to understand the physical as well as psychological trauma of the displacees specifically women, the most victimized who are often overlooked by the people in power. **So the relevance of the paper perhaps lies in addressing the tragedy and brutality face by these women and also exploring how they are able to raise their voice in form of protest in few cases at one end and also in most cases how they are disempowering them by remaining silent.**