Chapter 14
Missing Gender Concerns in Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement:
The Case of India

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ABSTRACT

Displacement and its impact on the social, cultural, and economic lives of the affected people is a huge discourse in contemporary India, but very little empirical data is available on the issue of displacement from a gender perspective. By law and by custom, women in India have been largely excluded from owning or inheriting property. The lack of ownership makes women vulnerable, dependent, and at a greater risk of being excluded from the decision-making process during displacement because in most cases it is this "ownership" of land that governs one's entitlement to compensation. The concerns of livelihood loss are also closely related to land. Displaced women are often forced to bear a greater burden. In this chapter, how development-induced displacement impacts women differently and how gender-blind resettlement planning and policies can reinforce gender disparities that already exist in society are examined.

INTRODUCTION

One has been listening about forced migration for ages. Some were due to natural causes and other due to socio-political situations. Displacement is not a recent phenomenon but with the onset of globalisation in 1991, it has assumed larger proportions making it a serious concern of national significance. Dislocation due to displacement has an irreversible impact on the social, cultural and economic lives of those displaced. Development projects and conflicts have led to large-scale displacement of population since times immemorial. In the present times, though, development projects are one of the biggest culprits which result in massive displacement of people from their soils and it is invariably the weaker

sections that are sacrificed again and again at the "altar of development" (Kothari, 1996; Fernandes, 1996; Roy, 1999).

Development projects like dams, mines, thermal power plants, industries, roads, railways, ports, national parks, tourist resorts and the like necessitates the acquisition of private and community resources as government lands(waste or non-waste) are not always available in the areas where the project is supposed to be implemented. This acquisition deprives the family of the common property resources (CPRs) and forces people to move out of their home affecting their very life sustenance. In order to conceal the trauma displacement causes to the affected people, policy makers and international financial institutions like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc. use the term '*involuntary relocation'*, though in reality, it is nothing but 'forced eviction'. It is ironical that ones who suffer the most from the project are called beneficiaries. The policy makers justify displacement by arguing that "some people will have to suffer if the Nation has to prosper" (Hemadri et al, 1999).

There is centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few, dispossessing the public of their wealth or land which, Marxist-geographer Harvey (2004) calls 'Accumulation by dispossession'. He argues that these neoliberal policies are guided mainly by four practices: privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions. Most of the development projects have brought adverse effects in the form of displacement of people from their original place of habitation bringing severe economic, social and environmental problems to the displaced people, the brunt of which is suffered by women the most.

Indian society is intrinsically patriarchal and the travails of displaced women basically stem from the already existing gender inequalities within the Indian society and family. Gender rarely receives a mention in developmental policies, either of the state or donor agencies. It is not just policy makers but studies on displaced people have also committed a major fallacy of treating the displaced as homogeneous, thereby ignoring the cultural and social variability amongst them. As a result, these studies are of shallow depth throwing little light on the intricate relationship between social life and displacement.

In the available literature on displacement and resettlement, issues of rights and resource access and control are acknowledged but not in relation to gender. Does this silence imply men and women can be treated as identical actors in the process of displacement? Are they similarly affected by such action? Are they a homogenized group or people with different backgrounds and different needs? With these pressing questions, primary idea behind this chapter is to locate and examine the gender component in displacement and resettlement, to assess the differential impact of state and donor agencies, policies and programs on the affected population; to bring into forefront the experiences of women affected by different projects but having faced similar fates. Since the projects are scattered all across the country, this chapter is based on available secondary literature, so a pan-India outlook could be evolved rather than limiting the study to one project or region.

WOMEN'S QUESTION IN DISPLACEMENT DISCOURSE

Men and women have differential opportunities and challenges in relation to development and displacement. Marginalization of women has been the inevitable result of most development programs and projects (Thukral, 1992; Parasuraman, 1993; Colson, 1999; Mehta, 2009; Bisht, 2009). Development projects places extra burden on women and are often denied equal access to land and resources. With the takeover of common lands by industries, mines, thermal power plants, etc, their loss goes beyond

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