

Development induced displacement of Orissa: A profile of respondents from VEDANTA project of Kalahandi district

Ranjita Behera

PhD Scholar, Dept. of Women's Studies, Women's Studies Research Center, Berhampur University, Odisha

***Corresponding Author:**

Email: dr.ranjita777@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Woman has not even been referred to in any of the state policies. Only through the court can she file for claim in the monetary compensation received by her husband. She will not be titled to a separate package. A deserted woman with three India has been undertaking development project to improve the quality of life of its people through "planned development" under the successive five-year plans. Such projects include dams, power, mining, industrial and allied infrastructures, transport network, urban development, commercial forestry and other projects. Some of these projects have brought adverse effects in the form of displacement of people from their original place of habitation due to large-scale land acquisition. My study is to focus on women's plight and suffering caused due to development induced displacement in mega projects such as Vedanta in Lanjigarh of Odisha. Some specific objectives are analyzed in the context of globalization vs development projects its impact on women on this paper.

Keywords: Tribal Women, Displacement, loss of livelihood, Rehabilitation, Common Property.

Introduction

Development induced displacement in the country has brought several economic, social and environmental problems to the displaced people. Magnitude of people displaced and severity of the problems due to multipurpose dam projects is too high as compared to other projects in the country. They also lead to submergence of high quality of land, destruction of the watershed, disturb the delicate ecological balance and distort the surrounding environment, loss of wildlife and precious irreplaceable flora etc and most notorious problems of flooding, water-logging and salinity. Feminist perspective is to be pursued through the ongoing debate between development and displacement role of state; civil society and NGO need critical analysis in relation to situation of the displaced women. Gender neutral perspectives are to be searched in the policies of Resettlement and Rehabilitation, PESA and tribal sub-plan. Question of loss of livelihood, common property resource and environment require an assessment from the point of view of gender perspective. Cultural and psychological dimension of displacement are to be studied. Political assertion of women in the form of protest, resistance, and movement are to be documented. The main objective of our study is to document the voices of women in revolutionary struggle against proposed Vedanta project at Langigarh in Kalahandi and POSCO project at Paradeep of Gajasinghpur. Development Induced Displacement is a subject of much debate around the world. In India the development projects starting from construction of Dams, Industrial units, mining's etc. Displacements due to these projects are numerous and vast. People have left their houses and hearth. They

have lost their source of livelihood such as agricultural land, fishing sources and other earning properties like, Common properties recourses (CPR).

Women have comforted a lot many problems due to displacement. Displacement for man and women are different. Losing a home may be a simpler issue for men but it is a survival and an issue of shame for women. Without a house men can stay outside and may be in the camp without any basic facility. But women can't stay like that even for few days. They may be vulnerable in various ways. Children including girls may face dangerous situations. They are study and school used to disrupt frequently. Many times the practices say that Resettlement and Rehabilitation colony are usually placed on a barren land away from people's habitat and they don't get fertile cultivate land as compensation. Generally cash is given in the name of elderly male persons of the family. Cultural land social aspects are not taken care by the government.

Vedanta project area is situated in Kalahandi district. All are divided houses, divided between industrialization and agriculture; divided between tribes and heartless urban bureaucrats; divided between ambitious global companies and tribes who are suspicious of such ambitions. Tribals living in these parts find much to their consternation, that their fertile land has vast reserves of iron ore and bauxite. Companies want to mine them. The Orissa government wants the economic activity spurred by these projects. But invariably, it would mean the tribals would lose their land, livelihood and culture, like Kalahandi and Dinkia. All are divided houses from these areas. Divided between industrialization and agriculture; divided between tribes and heartless urban bureaucrats;

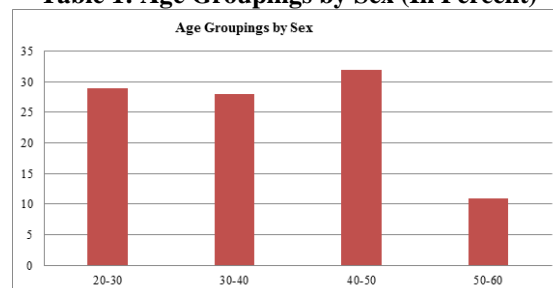
divided between ambitious global companies and tribes who are suspicious of such ambitions? Tribals living in these parts find much to their consternation, that their fertile land has vast reserves of iron ore and bauxite. Companies want to mine them. The Orissa government wants the economic activity spurred by these projects. But invariably, it would mean the tribals would lose their land, livelihood and culture. For generations, indigenous people from the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondha and Jharania Kondha tribal groups have lived in the lush forests of Niyamgiri Mountain, in Kalahandi District, Orissa, India, by foraging in the forests, raising chickens and growing vegetables and rice. Now, local tribal families are living in fear for their future due to the arrival of a combined bauxite mining and alumina refinery project in the heart of their ancestral domain by an Indian subsidiary of the UK mining and metals company, Vedanta Resources plc. Over the past three years, villagers claim to have been involuntarily displaced from their homes and refused compensation for their lost land. Their protests about the threat the project poses to the forests they depend upon for their livelihoods have been repeatedly ignored by officials and the company. They also have deep concerns about the impact of mining on Niyamgiri Mountain, from which they derive many of the religious beliefs and cultural practices that define their tribal identity. Niyamgiri Hill in Lanjigarh, Orissa is home to several 'Primitive Tribal Groups' that have special status in the Indian Constitution as among the most vulnerable indigenous communities with distinct culture and customs. The Dongria Kondhs, Kutia Kondhs, Majhi Kondhs and Jharania Kondhas live here in about 200 villages near the forest and the streams. The mountain is a living God for them. This is the same mountain where Vedanta plans to mine bauxite. Local people say they will not be able to withstand the loss of their sacred land and traditional way of life.⁽¹⁾

The people have been displaced from their houses through physical eviction by the district administration. Many were beaten up by the employees of M/s Vedanta. The National R&R policy requires that land for land should be given after due process of consultation, particularly in the case of the tribes. Contrary to the above cash compensation was offered to them and which was not acceptable to many. The tribal people living on the plant site are mainly Kondhs who are illiterate and depend completely on their agricultural lands and forest for their subsistence. They have deep spiritual and cultural attachment to their ancestral lands and settlements. The displacement was opposed vehemently by them despite being offered large cash compensation by M/s Vedanta. In the face of resistance, the District Collector and the company officials collaborated to coerce and threaten them. An atmosphere of fear was created through the hired goons,

the police and the administration. Many of the tribes were badly beaten up by the police and the goons. After being forcibly removed they were kept under watch and ward by the armed guards of M/s Vedanta and no outsider was allowed to meet them. They were effectively being kept as prisoners; Apart from the land acquired by the District administration from the large number of tribes and the harijans of Bandhagunda and Rengopali villages, land was also illegally taken over by M/s Vedanta for which neither acquisition notice was served nor was compensation paid. About 64 households of Jaganathpur Village, most of who are Kandha tribes have been cultivating for generations Khasra No. 186 – a revenue land. Encroachment cases have been filed against many of them. These tribal families were evicted by force from the land being cultivated by them for generations without any compensation or any shelter thereby taking away their main source of livelihood. This has taken place even though these cultivators have been officially shown to be in possession of this land and cultivating. The eviction has taken place without any process of verification and is in violation of the special protection provided to the scheduled tribes. Though they approached the District Collector against the forcible eviction, no action was taken by him.⁽²⁾

We have collected socio demographic data from the Vedanta and POSCO area relating to our study title profile of the displaced people of Vedanta project are analysed below as per the sample size. From Vedanta project area we have taken the interview of 100 respondents'. From this area we have collected the information from 50 men and 50 women.

Table 1: Age Groupings by Sex (In Percent)



Source: All field Data collected & compiled by the scholar.

Above table 1 reflects that mostly our respondent are within 40-50 years of age (32 %), 20-30 years of age (29%) and 30-40 years of age (28%). Only 11 percentages belong to 50 to 60 years of age group. It shows the respondents are all adult who can take decision on the question of displacement project.

Caste structure is reflected in above table; where we find mostly our respondent belongs to S.T category

that is from dongaria, Kutia, JharniaKondha and they form 46 percentages. Dalit people constitute 37 percentage of our sample that belongs to adivasi, harijan. Only 6 percentages are OBC and 11 percentages belong to general caste category. This random sampling of our respondent also reveals that tribal people constitute majority section of the population in Vedanta project affected area (See Graph 1).

Graph 1: Caste Structure of Respondent (In Percent)

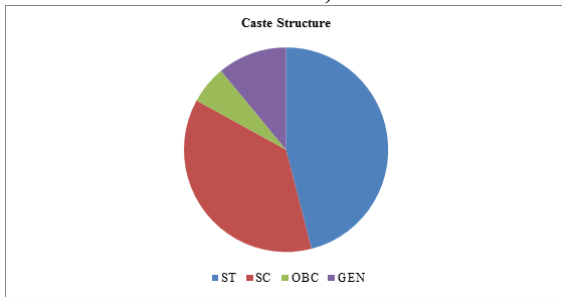
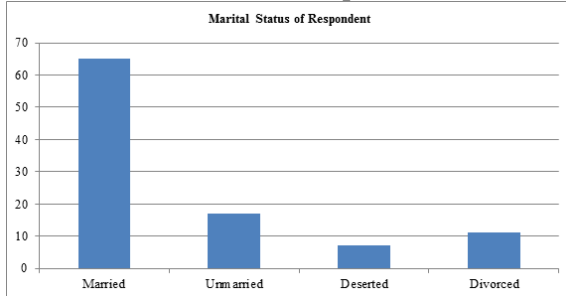


Table 2: Marital Status of Respondent (In Percent)



Our respondent are mostly married which constitute 65 percentage and 17 percentage are unmarried, 7 percentage are deserted who are widow and are 11 percentage are separated. This table says people were living happily in and around Vedanta project area along with their family members. Their health and life were in danger and under threat due to the upcoming Vedanta project. (See table 2)

Table 3: Literacy v/s Illiteracy Trend (In Percent)

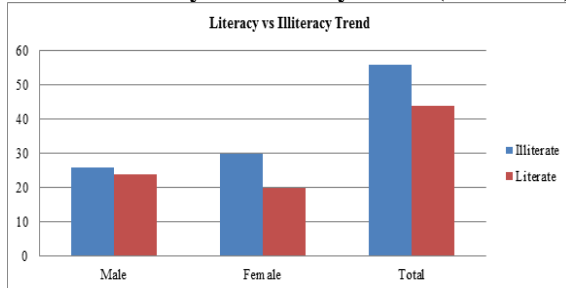
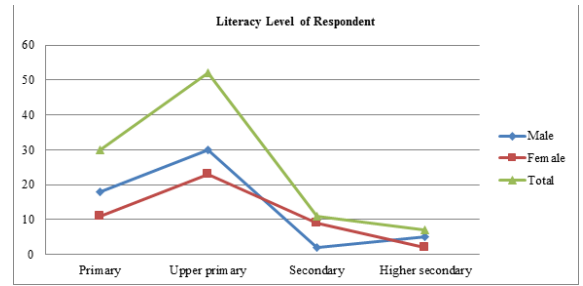
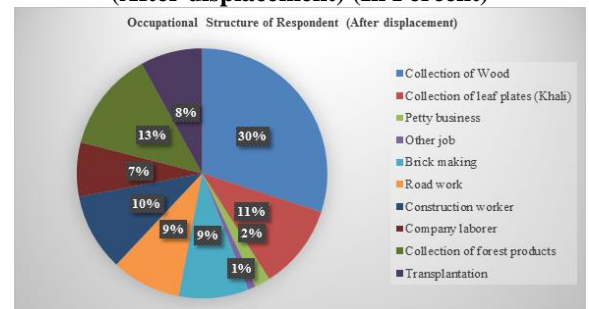


Table 4: Literacy Level of Respondent (In Percent)



Our respondent were mostly illiterate constituting 56 percentage of the total sample (See table 3), only 52 percentage studied up to upper primary level and 32 percentage studied up to primary level. This shows very well the lower level of education among respondent in the area. Only 11 percentages had education up to secondary stage and 7 percentages up to higher secondary stage. Out of total illiterate persons, women constitute 30 percentage and men constitute 26 percentage. Out of total literate 82 percentages were concentrated within primary and upper primary level. While going up on the ladder from Male are more in primary level (18%) and female are more upper primary level (23%). While going up the ladder of education, the percentage of men and women both have declined, but there is sharp decline in education of both men and women from secondary level up to higher secondary level. Our respondents are all adult between 20 to 60 and above year of age. All have left their study long back within their career in between primary to higher secondary level, when they were within the age of 5 to 18 years. May be due to acute poverty families could not afford for higher education. (See Table 4)

Table 5: Occupational Structure of Respondent (After displacement) (In Percent)



Project affected people and Lanjigarh block were mostly depending on agriculture and minor forest product collected from forest area before displacement. Table 5 shows the occupational status of respondent after displacement. After displacement almost all respondent were deprived of their agriculture source of income as their agricultural land were forcibly taken away by the company. The respondents were depending mostly on forest resources, 30 percentage of total

respondent said that they were earning their livelihood by selling fire wood being collected from the forest. Around 11 percentages revealed that they were earning their income by selling leaf plates being prepared from Sala leaves which were procured from the nearby forest. Only 2 percentage were busy in petty business such as selling leaf plate etc and only one person was a teacher in UP school working as “Gana Sikhyaka”, earning a contractual salary of rupees 3,000 per month (in 2010). This table also shows that 13 percentages were busy in collecting “jhuna” and “lakha”, 10 percentages were as construction worker and 9 percentages each were working in brick lanes and construction of road. Only 7 percentages of people in the area were engaged in Vedanta Company as peon etc. After displacement and being deprived from their agriculture land the cultivation were formed in to agriculture labourer with as less as 8 percentage of the total sample.

Epilogue

A large number of development projects have been taken up in the state of Odisha since independence to achieve speedy economic development. Women in general, irrespective of the ethnic groups appear to be the most marginalized section among the displaced people. They face the adverse effects of the projects resulting in displacement in a number of fronts impairing their ability for social reproduction and marginalizing them further within the new set up and the household. With physical dislocation, the women in particular inhabit in a new & unknown area. The State saw the setting up of large development projects like multipurpose river valley projects- Hirakud Dam, Rengali, UpperKolab, Indravati, Subarnarekha etc. Large industries — Rourkela Steel Plant, NALCO, HAL and the like. Besides several private sector projects have either set up or signed MoUs with the State Government to start their units which include industrial giants Tata, Jindal, Birla, POSCO and others.

While very small children are coming to the spot with their mothers who are participating in the Dharanas, the elder children even from class 2 onward have developed the understanding of what they are going to lose in case the company comes. They have been witnessing the struggle by their parents and the torture by the police. There is no denying of the fact that it has ignited the young minds with vengeance and determination. When they feel that any time their parents may be beaten up and house may be burnt, their love to their parents and homeland has taken a shape of a determined struggle. They have been grown up in the environment where they have seen and learnt the struggle knowing well that that’s their life –If they do not struggle, they will be thrown out of their land. That’s been part of their socialization process. They are

left with the options of “do or die” of which the children have preferred to “fight and live than die”.

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