

Contributing Paper

Dams and Tribal People in India

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DAMS AND TRIBAL PEOPLE IN INDIA

by
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The present paper attempts to provide a broad overview of impacts of large dams on the tribal people in India. Before entering into the main theme, it needs to be stressed that India is a country with vast cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity. People belonging to different religions, races, speaking more than thousand languages have been residing in this land for centuries. Diversity gives India her unique character, both in terms of its cultural wealth and complex web of social problems.

Another important feature of Indian society is its stratified structure which is based on the caste groups. The caste system divides and organizes the society in hierarchic caste groups, membership of which is solely determined by birth. Traditionally, tribal people of India have been outside the purview of the Hindu caste system. Tribal communities interacted with the non-tribal, caste Hindu communities but largely remained separate from the social structure. Caste groups which were at the lowest end of the caste hierarchy – the Dalits or untouchables (referred as Scheduled Tribes in the constitution) are the ones who were at the receiving end of the system. These communities were denied access to education, could follow some lowly occupation and suffered maximum injustice due to social stigma attached to their caste. Though primary focus of this paper is on the tribal communities of India, an attempt is made to integrate the concerns of Scheduled Castes, given their special vulnerability.

Tribal People of India: A Broad Overview

‘Indigenous’ people is the term which is more widely used and accepted in the international circles. That term has been deliberately avoided in this paper. In the Indian context, tribal or *adivasi* people of India do not necessarily precede their settlement in this country to all other communities. It is difficult to establish who were the original dwellers in chronological terms. Tribal communities in India have lived along with non-tribal communities belonging to different religions and cultures for several centuries. Beteille (1986) has pointed out,

“Western civilizations presented these areas in modern times, and tribe and civilization stood opposed in every particular of race, language and culture. In any parts of the old world the situation was different. The tribe and civilization had coexisted for centuries if not millennia, and were closely implicated in each other from ancient to modern times (Beteille, 1986; p. 298, 299).

This was the case in India. Therefore, they cannot be compared with the aboriginal or indigenous people of Australia, New Zealand or America. This difference has to be recognized and understood.

Tribal people never lived in complete isolation from the rest of the society. But their nature of contact was substantially limited. References to communities – *vana jatis* – living in the forest are found in ancient texts. Official recognition of *adivasis*, as a category distinct from the rest is found in the census during the British rule, mainly

because tribal people did not conform to the general pattern of the Hindu caste structure and religious belief system. The Indian constitution gives the status of “Scheduled Tribes” to over four hundred communities¹. Relative isolation, largely self sufficient lifestyle with minimum specialization of functions, social system with no hierarchy and strong sense of belonging to their habitat are main social and economic features that define tribal communities (Sharma, in press). It is on the basis of these socio economic features that one can regard tribal people of India similar to the indigenous people in other parts of the world, not necessarily due to their chronological precedence.

About 8.08 % of the Indian population belongs to the Scheduled Tribes². 461 tribal communities have been identified in India³ which are unevenly spread across the country. A large concentration of tribal communities is found in the Central provinces of India, the middle belt and the North eastern states. About 92 % of the tribal people in India live in rural areas (Government of India, 1991), almost all of them in areas which are either dry, forested or hilly (Shah, Banerji, Vijayshankar & Ambasta, 1998). Most of them depend on agriculture and minor forest produce to sustain their life.

As pointed out earlier, tribal and non-tribal communities in India have co-existed for centuries, influencing each other in different ways. But the level of contact has been limited. During the British rule, policy of isolation and non-interference was adopted⁴. Administratively, tribal belts were classified as ‘excluded’ or ‘partially excluded’ areas. None of the legislative acts applied to these areas, unless specifically directed by the Governor, who, in consultation with the Governor General had to make regulations for ‘peace and good governance’ of these areas. As a result of this approach, the traditional tribal system of governance remained largely uninterrupted. But at the same time, it was the colonial regime which systematically introduced the concept of individual property ownership of land and other natural resources. Indian Forest Act of 1878 established absolute propriety right of the State over forest land and Land Acquisition Act came in operation in 1894. These acts served the principle of the ‘Eminent Domain’ giving supreme authority to the State to control and own all the property within the country’s territory. But this intrusion was not meekly accepted by tribal communities. Rebellion in the tribal belts and stiff resistance of adivasis across the Central province to British rule resulted in legislation like Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act or Central Province Land Alienation Bill, 1916 which aimed at restricting alienation of land from adivasis to non-

¹ Scheduling has been criticized for not having a systematic and sound basis (Beteille, 1986; Baviskar, 1995). Some communities who possess characteristics mentioned below are not included in the list of Scheduled Tribes, while some groups who do not possess those characteristics, but are politically powerful, have been included in the schedule, enjoying the special constitutional benefits. While recognizing these problems, for the purpose of the present paper, we will not go into this debate and the related problems.

² About 16.48 % belong to Scheduled Castes. Together they constitute one fourth of Indian population (figures based on the 1991 census of India).

³ This is based on the Anthropological Survey of India, People of India Project (Singh, 1993).

⁴ Researchers have argued that apart from wanting to “protect” tribal people, which was the officially stated reason for adopting this policy, absence of economic benefit (Misra, 1998), deflecting rebellion and achieving political consolidation without having to attend to the difficulties and costs of administration (Sundar, 1997) were the reasons behind British government’s choice for the policy of isolation.

adivasis. But because of legislative, administrative loopholes and the State's unquestioned right to acquire land for public purpose, land alienation continued⁵.

“One of the most tragic consequences of the break down of isolation of tribal regions in the name of development, and the introduction of alien concepts of private ownership of property and state ownership of forests, was massive and steady alienation of lands held in the past by tribals into the hands of non-tribals” (Mander, n.d.; p.25)

In independent India, excluded and partially excluded areas were transformed into sixth and fifth schedule areas respectively. The main difference was that the executive powers of the state automatically extended to the schedule areas, unless directed by the Governor⁶. The Land Acquisition Act formulated in the British era, is used even today with only minimal alterations serving as the main tool to “acquire” land from people for a “public purpose”. What is public purpose is not legally defined. The decision lies with the State. The State is supposed to protect its people and to know what is best for them. Hence, its decision regarding public purpose is not to be questioned.

After independence the policy stresses the need to recognize tribal rights over land and forest and to let them “develop along the lines of their own genius”⁷, but in reality, tribal communities have been progressively alienated from their traditional rights over natural resources like land, forest, river and that has eroded the very basis of their existence. While 40 % general population lives below poverty, 58 % of Scheduled Castes and 94 % Scheduled Tribes live in poverty according 1983-84 figures of the planning commission (Savyasaachi, 1998). Thus, despite constitutional provisions like protective discrimination and reservations, on most development indicators like health and literacy tribal communities continue to lag behind, even after 50 years of India's independence.

The Notion of Development:

In independent India, national development has been largely equated with economic growth and surplus. Large, centralized industries, irrigation projects have been symbols of such development, which through the process of industrialization promised to set India on the path of modernization and development. One of the inevitable outcomes of this has been massive environmental degradation and ‘development induced displacement’.

Immediately after independence, a series of large dams were planned and built on some of the major rivers in India. Large dams promised to solve the problem of hunger and starvation by providing irrigation and boosting food production, controlling floods and providing much needed electricity for industrial development. It was this grand promise that prompted Pandit Nehru, our first Prime Minister, to call dams “secular

⁵ One clear indication of this process is reflected in the census figures. In Madhya Pradesh, like in other parts of the country, number of tribal people cultivating land has gone down from 76.45 % (1961) to 68 % (1991) while the number of tribal labourers have gone up from 17.73 % (1961) to 25.5 % (1991).

⁶ The Governor has special powers to amend any law in the interest of tribal people, as they need protection, but these special powers have almost never been used. (Sharma, in press).

⁷ Nehru stated this in the foreword that he wrote for Elwin's book – A Philosophy for NEFA (1960). He charted out five general principles known as “tribal *panchashel*” which should guide the policy towards tribal people. He envisaged that tribal rights over land and forest should be preserved, tribal areas should be administered by trained adivasis, so that they can develop along their own genius, without imposition of alien values.

temples of modern India”. Environmental and social costs of such large dams were thought to be an inevitable price that one had to pay for such development. Socio ecological costs of large dams were grossly underestimated and largely ignored. When recognized in passing, they were justified by invoking utilitarian logic of “few people have to sacrifice the greater national good”.

Dam building in India has been regarded as the sole responsibility of engineers and technical experts. People’s movements and researchers have brought the social, ecological and political considerations in large dams to the forefront, but in the dominant view, participation of people in the process of planning development projects is still thought to be irrelevant. Sundar (1997) in her interview with the Collector of Bastar⁸ about a proposed steel plant got a response which is fairly representative of what bureaucrats think about people’s right to know and participate in the process of decision making.

“(the collector) argued that there had never been any precedent for informing the people beforehand about impending displacement. ‘If people were consulted beforehand and asked for permission, inherent in this is the possibility that they might refuse. And then where would the government be?’...(besides) the people were ignorant and once the experts had decided where a project was going to be located, there was nothing more to be said...the government was doing the adivasis a favour by uprooting them because long occupation created stagnation and stagnation was a form of death” (p. 257, 258).

Thus, it is common to believe that (a) affected people cannot and should not play any role in the process of planning a project – whether it should be built or not, its location and size (b) displacement is a “development opportunity” for tribal people who are backward, ignorant and stagnated. This brings us to the popular assumptions regarding tribal life, which serve as the basis of choosing and justifying a particular approach to tribal development.

Anthropologists like Elwin and Furer Haimendorf, who also played a role in shaping the post independence policies regarding tribal development, stressed the strengths of tribal communities, their sustainable life style, as well as their special vulnerability. They made a case for protecting them from unbridled contact with the non-tribal society, as the contact had been largely exploitative. There were other sociologists like Ghurye who argued that tribal people were “backward Hindus” and hence they needed to be properly assimilated into the Hindu mainstream society (Ghurye, 1963). Framing the debate in mutually exclusive, polemic categories of preservation or assimilation has little relevance in understanding the reality which is much more complex. But, the old debate is revived in a case like Sardar Sarovar dam where a large number of adivasis are fighting against the mega dam.

“Proponents of the dam argue that for their own good, the ‘backward and savage’ adivasis need to be assimilated into the modern mainstream. Under the present circumstances, adivasis are condemned to a life of impoverishment and exploitation, their salvation lies in ‘emerging’ from the forest and becoming a part of ‘modern’, developed society. Those who respect tribal autonomy and view their culture as a contested terrain where adivasis are fighting for the right to

⁸ Tribal area in central India inhabited by people belonging to Gond tribe.

choice are accused by pro dam sociologists of wanting to preserve adivasis as museum pieces” (Baviskar, 1997, p. 106).

The impact of large dams on the tribal communities, their lifestyle and identity, needs to be understood on the back drop of the long standing and yet unresolved debate about the tribal life – whether it is seen to be worthy in its own right or viewed as something inferior, worth discarding. This paper views tribal life and culture, as worthy as any other culture. Displacement cannot be a precondition for the tribal people to get access to basic public facilities like health care, education or transport. It is their right as citizens, to get these facilities wherever they are. Besides, it needs to be stressed that experience of the last 50 years has demonstrated that despite protective legislation and special constitutional provisions for tribal people, increased contact with the mainstream has alienated them from their natural resource base and its impact on tribal communities has been devastating.

The Human Consequences of Large Dams: Who has Paid the Price?

India is one of the largest dam building nations in the world. There are 4291 dams in India. 3596 have been built and 695 are under construction⁹. One of the appalling facts about dam building in India is the absence of reliable data base on the performance and impacts of large dams. Major and medium irrigation projects have consumed almost all the irrigation budget of independent India which is over Rs. 80,000 crores (Kothari & Thakkar, 1998). Even when India has invested enormous capital, effort and resources in building large irrigation projects, there is total absence of systematic evaluation to ascertain if the investment is justified, if dams have delivered what they initially promised? How efficiently? At what cost?

Official data base is particularly dismal when it comes to reliable number of people who have been displaced and affected by dams. Lack of authentic official data-base is itself indicative of the lack of concern of the State towards displaced people and it reflects the dominant attitude of neglect. This forces us to rely on independent estimates. Estimates of people displaced by different development projects range from 2 crore 13 lakhs (Fernandes & Chaterji, 1995) to 5 crores (Saxena, 1999)¹⁰. Though estimates vary significantly, there is an agreement that dams are the single largest cause of displacement accounting for about 75 to 80 % of the total displacement. This means about one lakh 64 thousand to 4 crores persons have been displaced by dams since independence. Needless to say that by any standards, these numbers are substantial. Only 25 % of those displaced by development projects have been rehabilitated which leaves a huge backlog of millions (3 out of 4) who have not been rehabilitated (Fernandes & Chaterji, 1995).

It has been pointed out that a large majority of those displaced belong to poor, deprived classes. Almost 40% of those displaced by dams belong to the Scheduled Tribes (Government of India, 1990, SC –ST Commissioner’s report; Kothari, 1995) and another 20 % belong to the Scheduled Castes (Fernandes & Chaterji, 1995). [See appendix I for an independent estimate of total number of persons displaced by large dams between

⁹ These are the most recent available figures taken from Agrawal, Narain & Sen (1999) State of India’s Environment. The Citizen’s fifth report. New Delhi: CSE.

¹⁰ Based on the figures quoted by Dr. Saxena, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, in a meeting on land acquisition, Delhi, January, 1999.

1950-1990, number of persons who are still to be resettled and the share of tribal families in the same.] Thus tribal communities which account for just 8 % of India's total population constitute about 40 % of the displaced persons. Numbers reveal just part of the picture, but what they reveal is fairly clear and serious. Tribal and Dalit communities are socially, economically and politically the weakest and the most deprived communities in India. Independent India promised to give equal opportunity to all her citizens by providing special protection to the weak. But it is clear that poor, marginalized communities have been further impoverished in the process of 'national development'. They have been uprooted from their ancestral land, often forced to migrate to urban slums in search of employment or become landless labourers. They have paid the price for "development" of the urban areas and large farmers, by providing irrigation and electricity. In an unequal society like India, dams have served as yet another instrument of dominant classes for appropriating the two most important natural resources – water and land – from less powerful communities like adivasis. Besides, in many cases, like for example Surya dam in western Maharashtra, dams have been built in the name of tribal, deprived classes and eventually served the important cities like Mumbai (Singh, 1998). Most tribal people live in rural India, mostly in remote forest regions, which do not have basic civic amenities like transport, roads, health care, safe drinking water or sanitation. Tribal people have almost never shared the benefits of the projects which have displaced them, be it irrigation or electricity. Machkunda dam in Orissa generates 720 MW of electricity annually but families displaced by the dam live in darkness (Sainath, 1996). Unfortunately the story of Machkunda is not an exception.

Permpongsacharen, (1998) has pointed out that "development" has replaced war as the main cause of dispossession in South East Asia.

"...while dispossession because of war may ignore social economic class distinctions, ...the violence of dispossession because of "development" is overwhelmingly borne by people who are to a large degree nature-based, and who are relatively powerless in terms of their economic, political and social place in their societies" (p. 3).

This is exactly what has happened in case of the impact of large dams in India. Singh (1997) states,

"...displacement caused by large dams has actually resulted in transfer of resources from the weaker sections of the society to the more privileged ...large dams do little to alleviate the existing social inequalities, on the contrary, they further aggravate the already skewed social structure in favour of socially, economically and politically powerful" (p. 203).

Nature-based, largely self sufficient economies of tribal people are sustained and nurtured through their life which is in close proximity to forest, river and mountains. These are the resource rich areas which consequently are most likely to be dammed or mined. Many tribal belts have been identified as "development sites" ideally suited for building large multi purpose river valley projects like mines, thermal power stations or paper factories. As pointed out by Fernandes (1991), comparatively smaller proportion of dams built immediately after independence were located in tribal areas, but the trend changed in 1970s. Once the resources in more accessible areas were exhausted, in the later phase more and more dams were planned in tribal areas, naturally displacing a large number of tribal people.

“Of the 32 dams of more than 50 m height completed between 1951 and 1970 only nine (22.13 %) were in tribal areas. Between 1971 and 1990, 85 additional dams of similar size were under construction. However, by now not only were they taller and more sophisticated, but around 60 % of them were in the tribal regions. A recent official report on the rehabilitation of tribals, based on a comprehensive study of 110 projects concludes that of the 1.69 million people displaced by these projects, almost 50 % (.81 million) were tribals¹¹” (Kothari, 1998, p. 41).

Geographic location of tribal habitats is one major reason why such large number of adivasis have been displaced. But that is just one reason. In a highly stratified society like the one in India, distribution of costs and benefits has, to a large extent been determined by the social distance between the poor and the rich classes, marked so starkly by skewed distribution of power and resources. Displacement has aggravated the process of alienating small and marginal farmers and adivasis from their natural resource-base. [See appendix II for the estimate of tribal people affected by dams in selected 30 cases.]

Process of Displacement and Policy Issues:

Displacement is often regarded as a one time phenomenon by which a person is forced to leave his / her original location and go elsewhere. Displacement needs to be viewed as a “process” rather than an “event” which starts much before the actual physical displacement and continues for a long time after uprootment has taken place. According to Baxi (1989)

“colonial law...conceives of displacement as a ‘single’ moment, whereas in real life it signifies a multitude of moments. ‘Displacement’ is not one event, but a series of happenings, affecting human lives in myriad ways” (p. 168).

In most cases, there is a gap of not just years but decades between the first announcement of the dam and its completion. As a consequence, areas slated for submergence stop getting funds for building or maintaining infrastructure (Thukral, 1994); government itself encourages deforestation in the catchment areas, as in the case of Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat. This period is likely to be marked with uncertainty and fear as systematic information about the date and extent of submergence is almost never imparted. Displacement, by definition is involuntary, but the actual act is often accompanied by brutal force, police action and violence. In Sardar Sarovar, in order to break people’s resolve of “drowning rather than leaving their homes” (*Doobenge par hatenge nahi*), all sorts of tactics have been used¹². The first submergence came in 1993, but from 1991 itself police camped in the remote tribal villages of Maharashtra in the monsoon. People were given bribes, beaten, arrested repeatedly in order to accept rehabilitation,. Manibeli, the village in Maharashtra in the immediate vicinity of the dam had more police than all the village population put together. The first ever road in this village was built in order to evict the people. That was strongly but peacefully opposed by the people, leading to arrests every day for months together. Budhiben, a tribal women from Antras village, who refused to leave her village was threatened and raped by police.

¹¹ Based on Government of India working group on development and welfare of Scheduled Tribes during the 8th five year plan (1990- 1995), New Delhi, 1993.

¹² See Bhatia, (1997), Narmada Bachao Andolan, (1998), Srinivasan, (1996) for details.

Rehmal, a tribal youth was killed in Chinchkhedi village in police firing. It was under such pressure that government managed to evict some families to rehabilitation sites which Gujarat government claims are the best in the country.

In India, though a very large number of people have been displaced by large dams there is no National Policy on Displacement and Rehabilitation till date. The Draft National Policy for Resettlement and Rehabilitation, 1998 has been stalled at the cabinet level (Fernandes, 1999). Government's draft has incorporated parts of policy prepared by National Working Group on Displacement¹³, 1988, initiated by independent researchers, social activists and policy makers, but there is no uniform national policy that governs the process of displacement and rehabilitation even today. Some state governments like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka have their state level policies or else specific projects have their own rehabilitation package.

In an excellent critical analysis of present legal and policy framework, Usha Ranganathan (1995) has pointed out how law takes displacement for granted.

“The power of the state to take over properties for public purpose is a theme that runs through the law. This power of ‘eminent domain’ has been described as ‘the highest and most exact idea of property remaining in the Government’... The abolition of the fundamental right to property has reinforced this power further, and the courts have endorsed the need for its continuation” (p.43).

“In reinforcing the power of eminent domain, in narrowing down the understanding of persons interested in the event of acquisition, in reducing every right and interest to a claim, in monetising compensation, and in making compensation the only logical response within the scheme of acquisition, the law effectively reduces all issues to fit this frame. There is little space in this understanding for locating displacement, even less for resettlement” (p. 44).

“It is not that there is no area that recognizes the unique nature of the lives and subsistence of certain communities of people who may need the protection of the law. The constitution has, for instance a special position for scheduled tribes, and for protected communities inhabiting schedule areas... Yet, when a project submerges a schedule area; as is happening in the Sardar Sarovar Project, or it disperses the tribals amongst the rest of the populace, the protection fragment and are allowed to disappear” (p. 44, 45).

“... the state in its legislative role, enacts protection for the tribal in the matter of alienation of land,... (but) the state retains the existence of a, perhaps unspecified, public purpose ... The neglect and even perversion of protective laws, is all too often the result” (p. 45, 46).

Overall legal framework pertaining to displacement and rehabilitation rests on the principle of eminent domain, the supreme authority of the state over all the property. The same state that “acquires” land has the responsibility of protecting people living in the scheduled areas against land alienation. In this duel, often contradictory responsibility, the principle of eminent domain has always preceded all other legal provision and protective measures.

¹³ This group functioned under the joint convenership of Medha Patkar and Smitu Kothari. Girish Patel. B D Sharma, Vasant Palshikar, Bittu Sahgal were some of the other members who drafted this document which was widely discussed in smaller groups through participatory process of consultation.

The provisions of the Panchayat (Extension of the Schedule Areas) Act 1996, is seen as a major step forward towards tribal self rule (Sharma, 1998).

“4 (d) every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the tradition and customs of the people, their culture identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution.

4 (I) The Gram Sabha or the Panchayat at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas.”

While the provisions are no doubt a significant move in the direction of recognizing tribal autonomy and self rule, given the continuation of the general legal framework, administrative structure and approach, to what extent provisions of this Act will be utilized is yet to be seen.

- **Compensation: its nature and assumptions**

A person whose land or other means of livelihood are destroyed in the process of displacement, is entitled to get just cash compensation under the Land Acquisition Act. Which means, that land, natural resources, means of livelihood, social and cultural loss resulting from displacement can be ‘quantified’ and ‘compensated’ in monetary terms. Non-quantifiable nature of numerous human and ecological costs are not even acknowledged¹⁴. Government documents recognize the problem associated with cash compensation, particularly in case of tribal people.

“In tribal areas, where the displaced persons are given only cash compensation, the tendencies to spend the compensation amount by buying consumer goods and becoming destitute are common... In most of the projects, the tribal oustees become listless wanderers without a mooring” (Government of India, 1985, cited in Kothari, 1998, p.41).

Despite such a clear recognition, the practice of paying cash compensation, that too in an extremely ad-hoc manner, continues. Besides, in whatever form the compensation is paid (cash or land) , it is the tribal people who are most likely to suffer. In most tribal communities, land and other natural resources are means of livelihood, not property (Government of India, 1990, SC-ST Commissioner’s report). Utilizing forest produce as well as worshipping nature is both part of their culture and way of life. Legal ownership of property that is privately owned is an idea which is fairly alien. Given that tribal areas are usually remote, lacking in basic infrastructure and under administrated, land records are far from accurate. They are rarely updated and usually do not reflect the actual pattern of land possession¹⁵.

The draft national policy on rehabilitation mentions that land should be given to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people on a preferential basis, but that has not really been followed. Because tribal people’s customary rights over the land that they have been

¹⁴ According to the proposed amendment, “It is not compulsory to give compensation prior to possession of land acquired... The displaced have to “seek” compensation rather than a comprehensive due process to identify all those eligible for compensation and settling all claims, the amendment continues to shift responsibility to the affected persons” (Ranganathan & Kothari, 1999, p. 11-12, emphasis mine)

¹⁵ See Baviskar, (1995); TISS, (1993a); Morse & Berger (1992), for information related to Sardar Sarovar. Also see Fernandes, (1991); Viegas, (1994); Banerjee, (1998) for articulation of similar problems in case of other dams.

cultivating are not recognized, these original owners and cultivators become illegal “encroachers” on the government land. If that is their status in the eyes of law, there is no question of “compensating” them for the assets and resources that did not belong to them in the first place whether in the form of cash or land¹⁶. That is why they suffer more than non-tribal peasants, who are more likely to have a legally recognized claim over the land they cultivate. In Maharashtra, under the 1987 modification in the rehabilitation Act¹⁷, 10,147 tribal families were eligible for land. Only 15.18 % were granted land compared to 31.4 % of non-tribal families (Fernandez, 1990).

Further, common property resources continue to be unaccounted for in the process of displacement (Ranganathan & Kothari, 1999). It is mainly the tribal, marginal farmers, landless labourers who depend on these resources to support their livelihood. Whether it is fishing in the river, cultivating the draw down land on the banks of the river or using forest produce, it is the Kewat, Kahar and adivasi communities who depend on these resources for their very survival. Even if a person gets land for land, community resources and common property are not compensated as they are not individually owned. As we saw earlier, the law compensates individual claimant, not the multiple sources of livelihood that makes the life of a community possible. Access to river, forest wasteland are not recognized as important sources sustaining life in hard circumstances, erosion of which can make the very survival impossible. Several people in Upper Kolab, Hirakud, Sardar Sarovar, Rihand, Bargi have returned to their partially submerged villages on the periphery of the reservoir, at times encroaching on the depleted forest land, as life in the rehabilitation sites provided by the government without the support mechanisms of social network and natural resource-base has been simply impossible.

- **Justifying displacement:**

The onus of justifying displacement and other costs of a project by proving or demonstrating that the project is the least displacing option to meet well defined and justified public purpose, does not lie with the State. The State decides public purpose and technical experts and engineers plan development projects like dams with “no” consultation with the affected people. The point at which the affected people come into picture is when they are asked to vacate their lands. Land acquisition law has some provision for people to raise objections within a stipulated time period, but they do not have the right to question the very purpose of the project. In any case they are not party to the decision of planning the project. In most cases, the government does not serve even individual notices of slated submergence in a proper manner, leave aside “justifying” a project which involves forceful eviction on a large scale. Even after “asking” for basic information on the project – its costs and benefits, schedule of construction and submergence that information is never granted¹⁸. Under such circumstances, meaningful

¹⁶ Few rehabilitation packages like Gujarat’s package in Sardar Sarovar do not discriminate against “encroachers”, at the level of policy discrimination would not affect the tribal people adversely, but these provisions are exception rather than rule and hence the problem.

¹⁷ Maharashtra is the first state to formulate rehabilitation policy in 1976, which was modified in 1987. Not surprisingly, this is the state with largest number of large dams in the country – 1529 out of 4291 and also the longest history of struggles of displaced persons starting from the 1921 Mulshi satyagraha.

¹⁸ Neglect of the right to information is a major problem in India. Several people’s movements and groups, particularly, Khedut Majdoor Shakti Sangathan in Rajasthan have launched a campaign for people’s right to know and be informed. Despite the partial success of such campaigns, even in cases like Sardar Sarovar

participation of the affected people in the process of planning and implementing a project that affects their life, has no scope.

The politics of representation also has its own problems. The State, elected representatives, non governmental organizations (NGOs), affected people or their organization are all different from each other. In an attempt to respond to the popular stress on “people’s participation”, government has incorporated the rhetoric of participation by “involving NGOs”. While non governmental organizations can play an important supportive role they cannot substitute the voice of the affected people, nor can they replace what is the basic responsibility of the State¹⁹. Many NGOs are funded by the government itself which often puts limits to their independence and the ability to speak in opposition to the government line. In any case, meaningful participation of people is a difficult and complicated process which needs meticulous planning, strong will and respect for people’s voice²⁰. Unless the policy makes a conscious effort to create space for genuine participation at different stages, by building into the process, the modalities for participation and consultation, it will not become a reality.

- **Policy: on paper and on ground**

Lack of proper national policy and lacunas in the existing policy documents is a major problem. Apart from that, there are serious problems at the level of implementation as well. In most cases, there is a wide gap between the framed policy on paper and what gets translated in reality²¹. For example, the policy at times has a provision for a “choice” between cash or land for land compensation. But Project Affected Persons (PAPs) as in case of Narmada Sagar, Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh are not informed about provisions, thus forcing the people to take whatever is offered, under the threat of impending submergence. The state policy in Madhya Pradesh has a provision for the affected people to get land in the command area, but, there is not a single case where this clause has been invoked for, rehabilitating people in the command area of the project. Most state level policies or the National policy in the making, have provisions for land for land compensation, but due to several loopholes affected people, in many cases are just given arbitrary cash compensation. Despite the provisions in the Madhya Pradesh Act, in two major projects – Hasdev Bango and Bargi, where displacement occurred after the enactment of the Act, people were given some scanty compensation sum, and no land (Banerjee, 1997).

Rehabilitation of people displaced by dams like Hirakud, built way back in 1950s is not yet complete. Compensation amounting to Rs. 154,146994 was not paid after years (Mahapatra, 1990). When the compensation was paid to some people, cash was distributed to PAPs in their original village and signature / thumb prints were taken. Some money from this was pocketed by the official. People remembered this sense of

where the case is being heard in the Supreme Court – basic minimum information is not shared with people. Lack of information on the slated submergence in the 1999 monsoon in the Narmada valley is a case in point.

¹⁹ The draft National Policy on Rehabilitation and Resettlement suggests that NGOs can take the responsibility of spreading a word about the project. This can not be ‘in place’ of government carrying out the systematic process of informing and consulting affected people.

²⁰ It is worth remembering what the Collector of Bastar had to say on this matter (see page 3 of this paper)

²¹ For a comprehensive analysis and critique of available policies and acts related to rehabilitation, see Fernandes & Paranjpye, (1997).

humiliation 30 years after, when they were struggling for survival (Viegas, 1994). In Sardar Sarovar, Gujarat has one of the most progressive rehabilitation packages²², but resettling 25 % of the families displaced by the reservoir has taken 15 years and there is a wide gap between the tall promises and the ground reality (Bhatia, 1997; TISS, 1993, Dhawan, 1999). Once people are shifted from the submergence villages, officials do not bother about their complaints and the oustees are often left to fend for themselves.

- **The changing context:**

“ With the advent of the New Economic Policy, it is expected that there will be large scale investment, both on account of internal generation of capital and increased inflow of foreign investments, thereby creating an enhanced demand for land to be provided within a shorter time-span in an increasingly competitive market ruled economic structure” (Government of India, 1994).

This is the opening remark in the draft National Policy for Rehabilitation.

Government’s policy as reflected in this statement, is responding to the new economic policy and the context of globalization, rather than the struggle of the displaced persons. India’s move towards privatization, inviting multinationals if anything will intensify the threat to tribal communities, living in resource rich areas. ‘Public purpose’ has been invoked even when national or multinational companies come merely, to make profit. The State, instead of safeguarding the rights of the citizens, has been acting as an ally, protector or promoter of the private companies. This has been demonstrated in the Kokan in case of the Enron or in Maheshwar where the S Kumars are building a dam. Profit making companies are provided with all the ready made infrastructure, government security and the administrative assistance while the voice of the affected people is suppressed even , by resorting to repression and brutal police action²³.

India has ratified some of the ILO conventions²⁴ on ‘Indigenous and tribal people’ including convention no.107. International bodies like ILO, UN have played a role in protecting vulnerable groups in society, including the tribal people. Unfortunately impact of such bodies, in ensuring justice, equality and protection of their special rights has been fairly limited in case of India. India, has its own set of special provisions within her own constitution for tribal communities. But, as explained in the beginning of this paper, much of these protective measures have been ineffective.

Greater purchasing power of the multinational companies, government’s record of protecting them rather than the affected people, the proposed amendments in the Land Acquisition Act, which makes the process of acquisition easier and rejection of the draft National Policy for Rehabilitation which recognizes at least some basic rights of the displaced people, all point in direction of giving preference to investment and economic gains at the cost of affected people (Fernandes, 1999). This has resulted in enhancing the process of reducing natural resources to mere commodities, rather than recognizing their importance as means of livelihood for several communities. It is in the light of these

²² This is due to the strong people’s struggle, early NGO initiatives and involvement of the World Bank. (See Parasuraman, 1997).

²³ Examples will be found in every case where people have mobilized and raised their voice be it in Sardar Sarovar, Bargi, Maheshwar, Koel Karo, Hirakud, Chandil or Mulshi.

²⁴ India has not yet ratified convention no. 169.

developments that we need to understand the present and the future course of displacement in India.

Impact of large dams on tribal people:

Impact of displacement on tribal people affected by large dams has been overwhelmingly negative in India. As summarized by McCully, (1996)

“In almost all of the resettlement operations for which reliable information is available, the majority of oustees have ended with lower incomes; less land than before; less work opportunities, inferior housing; less access to the resources of the commons such as fuel-wood and fodder; and worse nutrition and physical and mental health” (p. 77).

This is how the Indian experience, particularly of the tribal communities can be stated. We will try and take a broad overview of the available evidence from empirical research experiences of the affected people and various issues which emerge from the Indian experience of displacing and rehabilitating adivasi communities.

• Who are the project affected persons?

PAPs – project affected persons is a broad term which includes all those who are adversely affected by a project. In case of irrigation projects, the only clearly recognized category is of people who are physically displaced by the reservoir of the dam. Official reports, wherever available, treat persons displaced by the reservoir as the only category of people affected by a dam. Even those figures are incomplete and vary widely²⁵. There is almost no case where proper surveys of submergence villages were done well in advance. As a result of that persons, in many cases major sons, who are displaced, have not been recognized as PAPs. In a sample survey of 400 people displaced by Upper Kolab, 21 % respondents claimed that they were not considered to be PAPs (SOVA, n.d.).

Apart from this problem arising due to lack of authentic baseline information, a large number of people who are affected by some component of the project other than the reservoir, are almost never given the status of “project affected”. Lets take an example of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). SSP reservoir is going to displace about 41,000 families from 245 villages of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. These are the people who are considered as PAPs. But apart from them, some 1,40,000 land holders will be affected by the huge network of canals in Gujarat. Out of them about 1,100 land holders will become landless and about 25,000 will be left with less than two hectares of land and hence will become marginal farmers. More than 100 villages will be affected by the expansion of the Shulpaneshwar sanctuary – whose access to forest will be severely curtailed²⁶. Nine villages will be affected by the Garudeshwar weir and six by the power station. Since 1960s six villages were displaced in the building of Kevadia colony for engineers. Large amount of excess land acquired during that time has not been returned to the people. Several thousand fisher folks living downstream of the dam will be affected, due to reduced water flow in non monsoon months. There is almost no estimation of the number of people affected by compensatory afforestation, catchment

²⁵ In Hirakud, the number of persons displaced varies from 1.1 lakhs to 1.6 lakhs (Viegas 1994, Mahapatra, 1990). There is wide variation in official and independent estimates in numerous cases.

²⁶ On 1st July 1999, 400 people affected by the sanctuary, organised a protest march.

area treatment, and secondary displacement. Thousands of hectares of standing forest was cut down for providing land to reservoir affected people of Maharashtra. Apart from the irreversible ecological damage due to loss of forest cover, adivasi people in Taloda who depended on that forest for sustenance (but had no legal claim over the forest) were adversely affected. All these people are affected by different components of the same project. But, NONE recognized as project affected²⁷.

Several categories of affected persons in the case of SSP have been enumerated in detail, to illustrate a generic problem. In case of SSP, at least some data, estimates are available, making it possible for us to provide this broad overview. For most other projects, similar information is not available. But canal, infrastructure facilities such as roads and residential colonies are built in most projects, all of which requires land, affecting many more people than the ones displaced by the reservoir.

In case of Balimela project in Orissa, Sainath (1996) notes that the official figure of PAPs "...ignores many thousands outside the designated submergence zone who were devastated when their life support systems were literally drowned. It also disregards those in the cut-off area who suffered all the adverse effects of displacement without being evicted" (p. 130). People who live on the higher level, in a hilly area are not submerged due to the dam, but are totally cut off from the rest of the area, once the reservoir is filled. The problem of *Tapu* land, areas which become islands or 'locked in' due to surrounding water has not been adequately recognized.

The actual number of people affected by a project will vary from case to case, but it needs to be stressed that a very large number of people whose lives are adversely affected by a project are not even recognized as PAPs, let alone mitigation of these impacts. This has led to a gross underestimation of the human cost of large dams.

- **Standard of living: Before and after displacement**

Most tribal people in India lead a hard, materially poor life. That is a fact, but multiple natural sources along with strong community ties makes life possible, even under difficult circumstances. Displacement destroys these two important bases of individual's life – natural resources and the community. Adivasis largely depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. But, minor forest produce, fish, cattle supplement their income and means of livelihood in numerous ways.

"We of the river bank, never go to work as wage labourers... The forest is our moneylender and banker. From its teak and bamboo, we built our houses. From its riches we are able to make our baskets and cots, ploughs and hoes. From its trees, leaves, herbs and roots, we get our medicines. Our cattle and goats, which are our wealth, graze here freely as they have always done. For all these, we would have to pay money in Gujarat", said Bava Maharia (Sainath, 1996; p. 106, 107) who lives in Jalsindhi, one of the villages in the submergence area of SSP.

It has to be recognized that even a relatively liberal rehabilitation package cannot "compensate" for the loss of forest, river, ancestral land, which is intricately woven in the social, cultural and religious practices of a community.

"Only after we pull water ten to fifteen times from the well, is it enough for our cattle to drink. There is no water for them to bathe in. We are waiting for the rains when small puddles will form and our cattle will be able to drink and feel the

²⁷ Source: NBA's writ petition in the Supreme Court (1994); Morse & Berger (1992).

wetness of this pond like they used to enjoy in the Narmada”, said a women at Chametha rehabilitation site of SSP in Gujarat (Bhatia, 1997; p. 314).

What the women in rehabilitation site said, reveals just one of the several ways in which small pleasures of people and animals are snatched away due to displacement. Common property resources are not compensated in the process of rehabilitation. Lack of grazing land and fodder forces people to sell their cattle, or a large number of them die in sites, robbing people of their important asset which provides them nutrition, organic fertilizer, farm assistance and cash in hard times.

Particularly in cases where adivasis have been given cash compensation, that has led to total pauperization of entire communities. In Bargi, number of displaced farmers have been forced to migrate to Jabalpur city in search of employment and ended up as rickshaw-pullers or construction labourers.

“It has killed our pride, living like animals here. Our children will never believe we were once thriving farmers. All they have seen is this filthy living” says Omkarnath whose father owned 12 acres of land in Gumti (Yeshwant, 1993, cited in McCully, 1996).

Basantibai, another person displaced by the Bargi dam has a similar story to tell. “We used to have ornaments covering each part of our bodies. We could not do without *ghee* and milk. We used to have 36 kinds of grains. Today there is nothing. Forests used to be our mainstay. Till we experienced submergence, we have never visited or even seen a hospital. Medicines came from our forests and homes. All our medicines have been drowned now. There are no hospitals either. Where do we go if we fall ill? A serious illness means certain death. If somebody has gone for mazdoori, and the children fall ill, that’s the end” (Srinivasan, 1996; p.151).

In less known cases like Karanjwan and Haranbari in Maharashtra, or slightly more studied projects like Bargi, Ukai, Nagarjunsagar, Upper Krishna or Mahi Bajaj Sagar, displacement has led to large scale migration. A large number of people displaced by Ukai dam in Gujarat work in cities or on sugarcane farms as labourers. Mankodi (1992) noted,

“...A regular cycle of seasonal distress migration under which between half and more then three-fourth of the population of the resettled villages migrated for work outside the area. This had serious repercussions on the development of the economy and on education in the affected area” (p 98)

Migration simply indicates, inability of displaced people to sustain themselves in the rehabilitation site . Lack of basic civic amenities in rehabilitation sites, absence of land or its poor quality, lack of employment avenue results in stark decrease in standard of living after displacement. Even in case of Upper Kolab in Orissa a large number of people migrated to cities, earning a livelihood as construction labourers or rickshaw-pullers. Children, sucked into the labour force worked as servants. (SOVA, n.d.) As many as 68 % of those who were original cultivators had become wage labourers. Similar is the story of Muddavat Chenna, who was displaced by Nagarjunsagar.

“ Muddavat Chenna is a migrant labourer, one of the 28,000 people displaced by the Nagarjunsagar dam in Andhra Pradesh. In 1962, Muddavat, along with 50 families from submergence village Guvalagutta, was given a house plot in Mutkur. The 5 acre holding given to these families was 25 to 30 kms. away in

Mursapenta hamlet of Kandlagunta. The distance between the houses and their lands obviously made it difficult for the new occupant to protect their lands from encroachment by the local population. For six years they continuously pursued the matter with the tehsildar of Macherla and the Collector of Guntur. The ousted families spent their compensation amount running from one office to the other without being able to retrieve their encroached lands. Muddavat Chenna and the other 50 families soon joined the vast category of landless labourers and now work for daily wages” (Singh & Samantray, 1992; p. 54-55).

Apart from people who migrate to cities, there are many who attempt to resettle on the banks of the reservoir. In Upper Kolab, out of 5,0771 families displaced by the dam, only 14 % went to rehabilitation sites. 86 % people did not or rather could not resettle in the sites. Similar is the case of Surya dam oustees in Maharashtra. In case of Hirakud, Pattanaik, Das & Mishra, (1987) have noted,

“The policy adopted in resettlement was to give land for land. Originally it was planned to reclaim 80,000 acres of land for settlement of people from the submergence area. But in actual experience, it was found that most of the people preferred to settle in old established villages rather than taking land in reclaimed area because the reclaimed area was on a hilly slope and near the forest, it was alleged that the area was full of tree stumps and unsuitable for cultivation” (p. 55).

Migration to urban areas or partially submerged villages both indicates a total failure of the process of rehabilitation, which does not ensure that people are able to reestablish their livelihood in a new environment and regain their standard of life, if not improve it. It is bad enough to be uprooted from a place once in a life time, but there are instances in Mirzapur where people displaced by the Rihand dam have had to move several times due to coal mines and thermal power station and have been caught in a spiral of impoverishment (Prem bhai, 1990).

- **Impact on Health:**

Apart from economic status, mental and physical health is a major indicator of the standard of living and well being of people. Studies suggest that stagnant water in the reservoir has led to increase in water borne diseases like malaria, diarrhea, dysentery in case of Hirakud (Pandey, 1999; cited in Mahapatra, 1999); crippling bone disease called knock knee in Nagarjun Sagar (Singh & Samantray, 1992). Increased morbidity is another feature noted in different projects. 150 people died in Bargi in a single year of 1996 (Bargi Bandh Visthapit Sangh, 1998); or there was a sharp increase in infant mortality rate in Parveta site of SSP (Parasuraman, 1996).

Recently, in April, 1999, there were sudden deaths in Rameshwarpura site of SSP in Gujarat²⁸. Seven persons including three children (3 to 10 yr.) and four old persons (60 to 70 yr.) died all of a sudden. Doctors diagnosed the death of 7 persons and illness among several others as caused by severe malnutrition. “Death” makes the event appear serious and sudden, but what happened in Rameshwarpura is indicative of the problem that is deep rooted and pervasive. Despite the land for land rehabilitation policy provided in SSP, 5 acres of low quality, unirrigated land is hardly enough to sustain an entire family. Besides, people’s diet in their original villages was supplemented by occasional

²⁸ News item in The Statesman newspaper.

consumption of fish, meat, vegetables and fruits from the forest and a variety of food crops which were consumed rather than sold. Forced to live in a monetized economy, where every little thing has to be 'bought', where there is no forest and river to depend upon, nor any fodder for the cattle, nutritional intake of Nayak adivasis has gone down. Government's response to the deaths was, to commence distribution of milk and biscuits in the Rameshwarpura site which shows how the problem is trivialized. Root cause of the deaths and problems of others who are merely surviving, has to do with the poor quality lands, destruction of natural resource base, means of livelihood and support systems which have not been sufficiently replaced after forceful eviction.

A comparative study was conducted by Ramaiah (1998) in rehabilitation sites of eight projects (2 coal mines, 2 thermal power stations and 4 hydroelectric projects) in six different states. The study indicated that the health of young children was most severely affected by the displacement. Mean energy intake of children below six was low. They were underweight and had greater incidence of acute illness. Changed dietary practices, mothers forced to join the labour market and hence discontinuing breast feeding were the main reasons identified.

Concrete data on mental health and illnesses is not available, but the World Mental Health report (1995) recognizes dislocation / displacement as one of the major factors contributing to mental ill health.

"The common consequences of dislocation include impoverishment, malnutrition, increased morbidity, dependency and the breakdown of community norms and mutual support systems. Dam and resettlement projects mean not only a loss of home and the identity that comes from a sense of place; they can obliterate generations of practical cultural knowledge and effort. To this is added insecurity, nutritional deficiencies, sanitation risks, poor water supply, insufficient or infertile land, alcohol abuse, increased risk of illness and barriers to health services" (Desjarlais, Eisenberg, Good & Kleinman, 1995, p. 138).

Good (1996) elaborates that, "...the literature suggests that resettlement leads inevitably to psychological distress and to increased levels of neuropsychiatric illnesses...(and) a broad range of behavioural pathologies have often been associated with dislocation and resettlement process, especially when visited upon indigenous communities with few resources to adopt to 'civilized' societies" (p. 1507).

Though empirical studies in the Indian context are scanty, several researchers have noted numerous psychological and social problems emerging after displacement. For example, increase in alcoholism, crime, suicide in case of Subarnarekha (Areeparampil, 1987), forced idleness in Ukai (Viegas, 1992), tension, anxiety and fear in Polavaram oustees (Rao & team, 1987) to name a few. Thus, displacement not only affects nutrition and physical health, but also psychological well being. Naudascher (1996) has written,

"The most shocking revelation from my own research into social, environmental effects of development was not the aspect of poverty, but the loss of self reliance, creativity and initiative, sometimes observed among those we consider poor. This causes them to not only lose their means of existence but also their dignity" (p. 30).

- **Social and cultural impact of displacement:**

“The dismantling of communities’ social organization structure, the dispersion of informal and formal networks, associations, local societies etc. is an expensive yet unquantified loss of social capital. Such ‘elusive’ dis-integration processes undermine livelihoods in ways uncounted and unrecognized by planners, and are among the most pervasive causes of enduring impoverishment and dis-empowerment” (Cernea, 1995, p. 267)

As pointed out by Cernea, impact of social disintegration and loss of culture are perhaps the most serious but invisible and unquantified impacts of displacement on tribal communities. Palit and Mody (1992) have argued that,

“ The tribal's entire way of life centers around his / her community. This extends from the basic agrarian work to support in times of trouble. Any displacement and scattered rehabilitation will destroy this collective welfare system that binds them together and will render every aspect of their economic, social and cultural past as unviable and therefore redundant”.

Work sharing, based on social reciprocity is a characteristic feature of most adivasi communities. Detailed ethnographic studies of Bhil, Bhilala adivasis in Alirajpur region, illustrates this point (Baviskar, 1995; Palit & Mody, 1992). Collection of cash for bride price, collection of firewood for the funeral, gathering firewood, building a house, conflict resolution on a consensus basis are some of the important activities which are carried out within the community, jointly. Sense of community and kinship bond is one of the most important elements of the socio-cultural life of adivasis. Breakdown of community destroys many of these support systems which makes living meaningful and viable.

Besides, integration into a new community is a long and arduous process. Conflict with local adivasis surrounding rehabilitation sites has been so acute in places like Taloda where some SSP oustees have been rehabilitated, that it has led to two murders and tremendous tension between communities. If the host community belongs to a higher social caste/class, displaced people are likely to find the process of adjustment even more difficult. Baboo (1991) has observed that ‘oustees status’ for people affected by the Hirakud Dam was a major social stigma. Tribal culture, way of life is often thought to be inferior and backward. Constantly confronted with that view, adivasi people start internalising the image of backwardness, regarding their own language, culture, religious practices as ‘inferior’²⁹. Based on his anthropological work among the Paraja adivasis displaced by Upper Kolab in Orissa, Patnaik (1996) makes similar observation. Mahapatra (1999) elaborates,

“...Social networking, dignity, self assurance, and command over their resources that characterized the people of Paraja before displacement by the Upper Kolab Project (contrasts) with the sense of inferiority, insult, impoverishment, and powerlessness that overwhelmed them when they shifted to resettlement colonies and found themselves subservient to the host tribal group and to the Bhatra and Hindu caste groups of the locality. As the Paraja were beef eaters and killed cows, they were felt to be ritually impure, bringing defilement to the community. In all senses the displaced Paraja were completely unwelcome immigrants into the area. They had already lost their social base and power and dignity during the

²⁹ Based on MPhil field notes of Patwardhan (in process).

displacement, and now they were denied a social anchor and articulation with other groups in the resettlement area, which might have been extended to other ethnic groups more acceptable to the Bhatra and Hindu castes” (p. 210, 211). Adivasi culture, way of life, folklore, religious practices are inextricably linked with their relationship with nature. Culture which is rooted in a particular place, cannot be easily ‘reconstructed’ in another locale.

“... integral aspects of Maria culture simply cannot be readily moved, since the tribal's social organisation is not merely linked to the forest but rather to specific parts of forest. Maria social and economic life is ordered by its ceremonial and religious activity. Each clan has its own clan God who in Maria belief is the true owner of the land, which is not transferable. Megalithic monuments erected to the dead connect the clan direct to the soil” (Colchester, 1986; p.250).

It is not surprising that in the tribal belt affected by SSP, Morse Committee members were told “Our Gods cannot be moved from this place, so it is difficult also for us” (Morse & Berger, 1992; p.69). Most Bhil adivasis in Kadana did not carry their Gods to the rehabilitation sites, few who did reported that

“... by displacing the stone images of their ancestors from the old villages they had committed a blunder and a sin and they have become the victims of their ancestors’ fury. They believe that as a result of their action at least 50-60 human beings and over 200 cattle have died. Children have been worst hit ... To appease the deities, they erected new temples of Goddess Kali, Khodia Mata and Hanumanji” (Sekhar , 1995; p.73).

Adivasi communities have their distinct identity which is different from the mainstream society. Displacement often leads to a sudden onslaught of dominant values threatening the very basis of their cultural identity. While “re” settlement suggests that it is a process of continuing life in a new locale, in reality for many adivasis it is a process of discontinuation of their life, culture and belief system.

Women in Manibeli who were rehabilitated in Parveta said, “When we first saw the hand pump being operated at Parveta we did not know what it was. Water was for them something that flows, it was a resource on which their lives had been built for so long. They could not comprehend how water could be controlled like this. They were not prepared even to touch the hand pump. That water could be tapped and brought to them like this was a traumatic thought”. (Dhuru, in Srinivasan, 1996; p.43).

Such a ‘worry’ might seem strange and exaggerated to some of us, accustomed to certain way of life, which one tends to regard as universal. Experience of the women in Parveta just indicates, how a way of life, a belief system that characterizes a community, is made irrelevant in the process of displacement and how such a process is likely to be much more acute in case of adivasis.

TISS study warns “... People have been co-opted by the more powerful culture into which they have been jettisoned. This leads inevitably into the destruction of the parent culture without it being replaced by a comfortable acceptance of new (p. 6)... Ridicule directed at what they perceive to be an inferior culture is another powerful mechanism by which persons of dominant culture induce change in other ” (TISS, 1993b; p.67).

It is this loss of sense of worth and dignity about ones own culture that is one of the most worrying outcome of displacement.

- **Differential impact on vulnerable groups:**

It has been pointed out that women, children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable for suffering due to displacement.

- **Women:**

In rehabilitation sites, if drinking water, flour mills etc are provided, that reduces some work load for women thereby saving their time and energy. Other than these gains impact of displacement on women has been particularly negative. Male out migration, longer hours of work, malnutrition and ill-health take a toll on women who are already overworked and poorly fed (Menon, 1992). In several cases displacement, resulting anxiety, idleness and insecurity has caused increase in drinking, wife-beating and domestic violence (Fernandes, 1998), again adversely affecting women.

Rehabilitation packages do not give equal status to women. Compensation (cash or land) is given in the name of men rather than in their joint names. It has been stressed that rehabilitation should be used as an opportunity to improve the status of women in terms of land possession and their share in property, if one has to ensure that their social and economic status improves rather than deteriorates. Unless such provisions are consciously made and implemented, there is a threat of further marginalization of women in the process of displacement (Thukral, 1996).

Disruption of social, kinship networks is another important area which needs some attention.

“Easy access to their natal homes gave most a sense of security at their original villages. At resettlement sites that security has been shattered. The Government says that we have given adivasis the benefits of civilization by resettling them close to roads and bus routes. But this supposed mobility does not mean much when people do have busses at their doorsteps but have no money for the fare...women do not commute by buses for fear of sexual harassment. No woman can sit in these buses and go to their natal homes 50 kilometers away” (Dhuru in Srinivasan 1996; p. 44).

It has been observed that most tribal communities are patriacial and patrilocal but compared to the mainstream society they allow greater freedom to women. Bride price instead of dowry is one indication of the fact that women’s labour is respected and sought after. Widow remarriage is allowed and women do not have as many social taboos (for example on smoking) as found in non-tribal societies. After displacement many of these things change. As the process of Sankritization accelerates, tribal communities adopt customs and traditions of the dominant society and dowry tends to replace bride price, taboos are imposed on women, which do not exist in their own culture. In urban slums, like the ones studied in Delhi, women’s status was most adversely affected. More than 90% of the tribal people in those slums had migrated during last fifteen years due to displacement by development projects and drought caused by deforestation. While migration to an urban slum changed every ones life, it was the women who suffered most in terms of deterioration of their social status (Fernandes, 1995).

TISS (1993b) report warns that while consumption of Mahua liquor is an essential part of religious ceremonies like marriage, funeral, Holi or Indal, in Bhil communities, its

consumption was within the control of the community but, "...in the new area it is predicted that alcohol will change its role and lead to alcoholism" (p.66) due to loss of social cohesion, resulting insecurity and availability of liquid cash. Sardar Sarovar and Ukai (Gujarat), Chandil and Icha (Orissa) are some of the known cases where this warning has been translated into reality.

Sense of insecurity linked with rehabilitation has to do with the change in topographical and social environment. Villagers of Manibeli who had lived in the Satpura ranges were shifted to Parveta in Gujarat due to SSP. The women in a letter they wrote to the Morse Committee stated,

"We lived in the mountains. Perveta is on the plains and flat so you see everything around. In Manibeli we could defecate when we wanted to; the hills would hide us. This is one of the many freedoms we have left behind. Here we have to wait until dark or rise before dawn" (Morse & Berger, 1992; p.160).

All these incidences just illustrate the myriad ways in which displacement leads to a breakdown of lifestyles. Child care is one of the main responsibility fulfilled by women. Parasuraman (1999) points out -

"Women not only suffer in terms of health and nutrition, they also lost the capacity to provide a secure future for their children. By resorting to seasonal migration they have unwittingly denied their children access to school, health care, child welfare, and other welfare services" (p.226).

➤ **Children:**

Research has pointed out children to be particularly vulnerable to suffering due to changes in life circumstances resulting from displacement. There are several cases where children's education has been adversely affected. In rehabilitation sites of Upper Kolab, only 31 % of the school going children went to school (SOVA, n.d.). In 41 rehabilitation colonies of Pong dam oustees in Rajasthan, there were just 4 primary schools and access to schooling became more and more difficult in middle and high schools levels (Bhanot & Singh, 1992). Mahapatra (1999) in his recent review article of the impact of displacement in India suggests that loss of education is a serious outcome of displacement which should be added to the risk model proposed by Cernea. He states,

"The children of the tribal groups displaced by the IDA funded Salandi Major Irrigation Project in Orissa (around 1965) suffered a serious set back in education when schools were not provided at the relocation sites. Only after about 10 years were schools established...During those years, the children mostly worked for the family, either collecting and selling firewood or earning daily wages" (p. 211, 212).

Migration, particularly, seasonal migration disrupts schooling. Mankodi (1992) notes large absenteeism in schools in Ukai rehabilitation sites in Gujarat where families migrated for several months to work on sugarcane farms. In case of Narayanpur in Upper Krishna (Karnataka) Parasuraman (1996) points out,

"Migration of families seeking work as construction labour in places like Bombay under hard living conditions had a negative impact on women and children. Most child and women related services like health care, ICDS, preschool, ration shops, schools and other important basic services are place specific. On the other hand, construction work involved constant moves from site to site. During monsoon

months the families returned to the village to work as agriculture labourers in sowing season only to move out in September. The whole process deprived women and children of services meant for them. Displacement pushed men and women into repetitive, unrewarding seasonal migration for construction and other temporary work and marginalized not just them but subsequent generations as well” (p. 1530).

There are instances where children’s access to schooling has improved after displacement, like in many sites of SSP. Particularly because of the intervention of the Supreme Court, schools have been provided in almost all the rehabilitation sites in Gujarat and Maharashtra. In most of the tribal villages affected by SSP, government schools existed only on paper and the teacher never lived in the village. Given that background, schools was one thing that parents were happy to have in the rehabilitation sites (Parasuraman, 1999). Even in other cases, though concrete instances were not found, it is possible that access to schooling has improved after displacement.

In India, state of education among tribal people has been particularly dismal³⁰. As a group, scheduled tribes, lag behind on literacy rate, enrolment, attendance and have much higher incidence of dropouts. Analysis of this grim picture which has persisted for years, shows that apart from poor infrastructure and facilities, mainstream schooling with its standard curriculum, alien language of instruction and negative attitudes of teachers towards tribal community, culture and knowledge systems makes schooling a negative experience for many adivasi children (Nambissan, in press). Given this reality, access to schooling can open new avenues, unavailable thus far; but schooling will have to be substantially altered if majority of tribal children are supposed to benefit from it.

As mentioned earlier, research shows that children’s nutritional status and general health is likely to suffer due to displacement. Drastic change in food habits, mother’s inability of breast feed as they have to enter the labour market to supplement family income, general decline in family’s income are some of the reasons that cause nutritional deficiency and health problems (Ramaiah, 1998). Recently, Devarakonda was in the news³¹ because of infanticide and also selling of children among adivasis of Andhra Pradesh. It was reported that 90 % of child selling cases were reported from 11 villages and 60 hamlets where Nagarjunsagar oustees have been rehabilitated. Four decades after rehabilitation, the report noted that some hamlets were without electricity, roads, drinking water and other facilities. Half of them had no *pattas* for land. They were selling children to cope with poverty.

Numerous other less visible but long lasting ways in which displacement changes the life circumstances for children is yet to be explored. Krishna Kumar (1997) writes, “A group of people which has a past but no probable future can hardly hope to socialise its children into modes of cognizing the world which reflects the beliefs and practices sustaining the group. Such beliefs include the belief in the group’s identity. It needs little imagination to predict that the village communities about to be forced to disperse from the Narmada valley cannot fulfil the responsibility to socializing their children...Milieu or surroundings do not socialize; an ethos does.

³⁰ According to 1991 census of India, Literacy rate is 52 % among the general population (64 % for males; 39 % for females); 37 % among the scheduled castes (49 % - males; 23 % - females) and **29 % for the scheduled tribes** (40 % - males; 18 % - females).

³¹ News item in Indian Express, 10th April, 1999.

An ethos reflects the spirit and belief-sets which characterize a community's pattern of life. If a man made calamity destroys a community by breaking it up, the ethos cannot be reassembled with the rehabilitary trivia" (p.49).

Regarding other vulnerable groups in a community like **elderly, disabled, widowed**, it can be stated that unless rehabilitation package takes extra care to protect such people who are already on the margins, displacement is likely to increase their vulnerability. But, concrete research in this area is lacking.

- **Differential impact of displacement on various tribal groups and sub groups:**

Different tribal groups and within them their sub groups, have varying degree of contact and exposure to non tribal societies. People's perception of the risk and avenues of rehabilitation and their ability to cope with the social, environmental and economic changes is likely to vary among groups. Tribal communities which are more accustomed to the market economy, less dependent on forest and having stronger contact with political and legal systems of the mainstream, are likely to be able to take advantage of the improved access to market and resulting opportunities after displacement. Tribal people belonging to the Tadvi community in SSP have for example have been able to cope with displacement better than Bhil or Nayak communities living in more remote villages (CSS, 1997; Shah, & Sah, 1998).

Besides, adivasis who had legal *pattas* for their agricultural land in submergence village and have received good quality land and other compensation are likely to be economically well off after displacement. In many cases, few people in the village, particularly the village leader / Patil manage to make money in the process of rehabilitation. In SSP, in order to break the anti dam struggle, huge amounts of bribes were given to some people. As a result of such instances, in a single rehabilitation site, there is a wide gap between people's standard of living. A new kind of inequality is at times introduced in communities which were traditionally more or less egalitarian.

- **Improved access to civic amenities:**

As explained in the beginning of this paper, many tribal communities live in relatively isolated areas, which are remote, hilly and in the vicinity of the forest, characterized by poor infrastructure and lack of basic civic amenities. Because of this, there are attempts to portray displacement as a "development opportunity" for the tribal people. The position taken in this paper regarding this matter has been explained in the beginning. Given the isolation of tribal habitats, it can be assumed that people's access to basic infrastructure like roads, transport, market and communication would have improved after rehabilitation in many cases. There are cases where people's access to health care, education, electricity, sanitation, drinking water has also improved. But situation in this respect is mixed. In case of people living on the *Tapu* lands, their access to market and other facilities is severely curtailed due to the construction of the dam. In Bargi,³² schools and hospitals have been provided in the rehabilitation sites. Buildings have been built, but there is no teacher or doctor who comes.

When amenities improve, does it always improve the standard of living? This is a question that some researchers have asked. Mankodi, (1992), based on his observations in Ukai area notes,

³² Based on the documentary film made by Jan Madhyam, "*Kaise Jeebo Re*".

“The availability of transport and communication, educational facilities and drinking water for some resettlement villages did improve, but increased education, and exposure without any other economic avenues for vertical mobility only served to raise levels of aspiration as well as frustration” (p. 99).

Easier access to market opens up opportunities for employment and occupation hitherto unavailable to adivasi communities and it also poses its range of challenges in terms of the competition and resulting pressures. Under such circumstances, whether increased access will benefit the adivasis or serve as a means of exploitation and impoverishment depends on several factors. Special care has to be taken to ensure that sudden and drastic change in socio-economic life becomes empowering rather than debilitating, as that is what happens in many cases.

Response of displaced communities:

Assertion of tribal people’s rights over natural resources, autonomy and self rule has a long history. It is not within the scope of this paper, to do justice to the history of tribal movements in India ranging from the rebellions during the British rule to the present move towards the demand for separate tribal states. But it needs to be stressed that development induced displacement and tribal resistance to such destruction should both be viewed as a continuation of a process that dates back to at least the colonial rule in India.

Anti dam movement in India also has a long history. The first struggle against a dam was fought in early 1920s by peasants in Western Maharashtra who opposed the Mulshi dam built by the Tatas, under the leadership of Senapati Bapat (Vohra, 1994). In recent past, from 1970s till today several anti dam struggles have posed a major challenge to dam building in India. Silent valley was one of the first success stories where a dam threatening to submerge rich forest was scrapped. There are many other examples like Bedthi, Bhopalpattanam, Ichampalli, Bodhghat where the dams have been scrapped, or in case of Koel Karo, stalled, due to tribal resistance (CSE, 1999). One of the longest and most well known struggle against large dams is being fought in the Narmada valley against the Sardar Sarovar Project, known as Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), led by Medha Patkar. The struggle began in the mid 1980s and in the last 14 years, it has had a profound impact on the debate on large dams and role of people’s movement in India. NBA, along with other movements, has brought some of the most fundamental issues regarding equality, social justice and the notion of development to the forefront.

After independence large dams were symbols of India’s ‘national development’. All the human and ecological costs were justified in its name. It is on this background, that people’s movements have raised several fundamental questions. Who constitutes the nation? Who benefits from projects like large dams? Who has paid the price? Who decides and who obeys? Why? Can development that impoverishes communities, particularly the poor and the marginalized and destroys ecological balance for the sake of powerful classes be called development at all? Struggles against the destruction and devastation caused by large dams have challenged the very basis of State’s unquestioned power to take control of people’s lives and resources. They have argued that just and sustainable development cannot take place by forcing some people to ‘sacrifice’ for others. People’s right to know, to be informed, to participate in the process of shaping their life and future has been the very basis of these struggles. People’s movements have

challenged the principle of eminent domain and the State's right to define 'public purpose' and have questioned the very notion of development which is based on massive human and ecological exploitation.

Conclusions and future directions:

Some of the major issues and conclusions that emerge from this review are -

1. **Overwhelmingly negative impact of displacement on the tribal people of India:** Tribal people, who constitute just 8 % of India's total population constitute almost 40% of those displaced by dams in independent India. Impact of such forced uprootment has been extremely negative. It has invariably led to dispersal of communities, breakdown of traditional support systems, devaluation of their cultural identity and curtailed their access to natural resource base, affecting their mental and physical well being. In none of the cases for which research / information was available, have tribal people benefited from large dams. They have been victims rather than beneficiaries of the development achieved through large irrigation projects.
2. **Displacement cannot be taken for granted:** Displacement cannot be taken for granted as an inevitable price to pay for development. People who have suffered due to displacement are by no means a small minority, but displacement cannot be justified by using utilitarian logic. Dam cannot be allowed, if it is inevitably going to pauperize one (usually the poor) section of the society, in order to provide benefits to others. The State has to ensure that benefits of development projects are shared in a proportionate manner.
3. **Need to explore least displacing alternatives:** Given the enormous human price of large dams, there is a need to explore alternative ways of harnessing water, or producing electricity where large scale displacement is not inevitable. Some such alternatives are available, and have been tried out on a small scale. There is a need to invest time, energy and effort to exploit the potential of non displacing ways of meeting our needs of water and power.
4. **Rehabilitation as a "human" task:** Uprootment is an extremely painful experience. Building ones life in a new locale is a long difficult and arduous process. Rehabilitation cannot be treated as an appendage to the main project, and carried out as an afterthought. It has to be handled with meticulous planning and execution. Enormity and complexity of the whole process cannot be over emphasized. Consideration of displacement and rehabilitation has to be an integral part of the whole project.
5. **Questioning land "acquisition":** Every attempt should be made to minimize displacement, but even after that, there will be cases where some displacement will take place. But there should be no need to "acquire" land. If a private company or the State is building a dam by putting in capital resources, people whose land is required should be treated as partners, who will invest by putting in their natural resources. If the project shares its substantial benefits with the people who for example have to surrender their land, they will agree to such an arrangement. Land used for the project becomes their share of investment in the project which entitles them to share its

- benefits, rather than just costs³³. Implementation of this will require substantial modification in the present legal framework and the concept of eminent domain.
6. **Huge backlog of those who have not been rehabilitated:** A large majority of people, almost 75 % of those displaced have not been rehabilitated. This is totally unacceptable. Serious efforts will have to be made to mitigate the damage done, and further displacement cannot be allowed till the backlog is at least substantially reduced.
 7. **Definition of project affected persons:** There has been gross underestimation of the number of people who are affected by dams. Comprehensive base line studies have almost never been carried out with adequate seriousness. All the people who are adversely affected by a project need to be recognized as project affected and rehabilitation package must make provisions for all of them.
 8. **Need to recognize customary rights of tribal people over natural resources:** Tribal people in India have suffered because their traditional rights over natural resources, land, river, forest have not been recognized. They are politically and economically a weak minority. Protective legislation pertaining to schedule areas needs to be implemented seriously. Land acquisition act needs to be substantially changed, recognizing people's right over resources that sustain their livelihood.
 9. **Right to informed participation in decision making:** Recognition of people's right to information, resources and participation is the basis on which tribal people can become partners rather than victims of development. They have to be treated as co-partners in the process of development.

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³³ This idea has been elaborated by Justice Venkatramani, in a meeting on the proposed amendment in the land acquisition act, in January 1999 during a joint meeting of government officials, representatives of people's movements and independent experts, in New Delhi.

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Appendix I

Independent estimate of total persons displaced by dams during 1950-90 (in lakhs)

Category	Number (in lakhs)	Percentage (%)
Total number of persons displaced	164	100 %
Total number resettled	41	25 %
Backlog	123	75 %
Total number of tribal persons displaced	63.21	38 %
Total tribal persons resettled	15.81	25 % *
Backlog	47.40	75 % *

(Source : Fernandes and Paranjpye, 1997)

* This percentage is out of total tribal persons displaced

Appendix II

Percentage of tribal people affected by some large dams in India

Sr. No.	Project	State	Total no. displaced	% of tribal persons displaced	Scheduled Caste / Others
1. ³⁴	Hirakud	Orissa, Madhya Pradesh	110,000	18.34 %	n.a. ³⁵
2.	Bhakra	Himachal Pradesh	36,000	34.76 %	n.a.
3.	Pong	Himachal Pradesh	80,000	56.25 %	n.a.
4.	Ukai	Gujarat	52,000	18.92 %	n.a.
5. ³⁶	Lalpur	Gujarat	11,300	83.20 %	n.a.
6.	Daman Ganga	Gujarat	8,700	48.70 %	n.a.
7.	Karjan	Gujarat	11,600	100 %	n.a.
8.	Icha	Orissa	30,800	80 %	n.a.
9.	Manas	Bihar	3,700	31 %	n.a.
10.	Chandil	Bihar	37,600	87.92 %	n.a.
11.	Povalam	Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh	1,50,000	52.90 %	n.a.
12.	Tittuli	Maharashtra	13,600	51.61 %	n.a.
13. ³⁷	Upper Indravati	Orissa	20,000	43.76 %	13 %
14.	Machkunda	Orissa	16,200	51.1 %	10.21 %
15.	Subarnarekha	Bihar	64,000	67.29 %	27 % ³⁸
16. ³⁹	Kabini	Karnataka	20,000	30 %	n.a.
17.	Mandira	Orissa	n.a.	68.18 %	n.a.
18.	Masanjor	Bihar	16,000	Mostly tribal	n.a.
19.	Bansagar	Madhya Pradesh	1,42,000	75 %	n.a.
20. ⁴⁰	Mahi Bajaj Sagar	Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh	35,000	76.24 %	2.13 %
21. ⁴¹	Kadana	Rajasthan, Gujarat	30,000	100 %	n.a.
22. ⁴²	Bisalpur	Rajasthan	70,000	70 % (SC +ST)	
23. ⁴³	Bargi	Madhya Pradesh	35,000	43 %	10 %SC 19 % OBC ⁴⁴

³⁴ 1 to 4 and 24 from Das, Fernandes and Rao (1988)

³⁵ n.a. is not available

³⁶ 5 to 12 from Singh (1997)

³⁷ 13 to 15 from Mahapatra (1990)

³⁸ Derived from Areeparampal (1990)

³⁹ 16 to 19 from Fernandes, (1991)

⁴⁰ From Sekhar (1995)

⁴¹ From Vyas (1995)

⁴² From Hemadri (1995)

⁴³ From Bargi Bandh Visthapit Avam Prabhavit Sangh (1998)

⁴⁴ OBC is Other Backward Classes

24.	Maithan and Pachet	Bihar, West Bengal	93,874	53.46 %	n.a.
25. ⁴⁵	Nagarjun Sagar	Andhra Pradesh	25,490	36 %	7% SC 45 % OBC
26. ⁴⁶	Srisailam	Andhra Pradesh	100,000	81 % (SC + ST)	
27. ⁴⁷	Rihand	Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh	47,500	Mostly tribal	n.a.
28. ⁴⁸	Upper Kolab	Orissa	50,771	52 %	17 %
29. ⁴⁹	Narmada Sagar	Madhya Pradesh	1,70000	20 %	14 %
30. ⁵⁰	Sardar Sarovar	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh	2,00000	56 %	9 % ⁵¹
31. ⁵²	Kulku	Orissa	14,000	Mostly tribal	
32. ⁵³	Surya	Maharashtra	7290	100 %	

⁴⁵ From Singh and Samantray (1994)

⁴⁶ From CSE (1982)

⁴⁷ From Prembhai (1990)

⁴⁸ From SOVA (n.d.)

⁴⁹ From Alvares and Billorey, (1988)

⁵⁰ From Morse (1992)

⁵¹ From Alvares and Billorey (1988)

⁵² From Sainath (1996)

⁵³ Singh, (1998)

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