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Development vs. Displacement in India

Mamta

Assistant Professor, Aryabhata College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract:

Development and displacement debate in India does not need any introduction. we see a lot of discussions on this issue. The issue attracts concentration in view of recent attacks by Maoist on Police personnel. In his work we try to see what causes displacement and can't we grow without displacing people. If displacement is unavoidable what can we do to mitigate the losses?

1. Introduction

Endless debates on this topic but can development be achieved without displacement?

There are no free lunches.

India after independence was all sucked out by the British raj in the field of agriculture, trade, art, handicrafts, industries etc. The nation at that time, with the population of 350 million was all torn out. The aim of achieving the self sufficiency and self esteem was paramount at that time. Today India has overtaken Japan to become third largest economy in the world for the year 2011 as per the recent report by World Bank. India is the global leader in Information Technology. India is respected all over the world. Indian Diaspora has earned reputation abroad and is reaching high positions abroad. India the largest democracy was the fastest growing economy before the recent economic crisis, touching the growth trajectory of 9 percent. India is pioneering in space sector. India's successful launch of MOM adds jewel to the crown of its achievements in space sector. India a nuclear power with a great military might today is considered to be strategic partner of many world powers. India's stand in International matters is significantly improving (Mr. Putin calling Mr. Singh on Crimea issue & many countries supporting India's permanent seat in United Nations Security Council). India is the youngest country going through the phase of demographic dividend. India aspires to be the world power in 21st century. India has developed much since independence but are achievements an end in itself? Is every citizen of country bears fruits of progress? Has every citizen gained from the development? Has every citizen become better off in term of welfare? Had India been a market economy the question of the debate arising between development and displacement wouldn't have arisen but we are a welfare state. All our policies and actions are supposed to promote welfare of the citizens.

2. Development vs. Displacement

In India more than nineteen lakhs people are homeless. Large numbers of people migrate from one place to another. What are the causes of people becoming homeless? What are the causes of people migrating from one place to another? The more our country develops more and more people are displaced. Can't we progress without displacing people? Even if some people are displaced due to unavoidable reasons, can't we assure them a good deal with some policy initiatives?

After independence in initial five year plans our main focus was on agricultural and industrial development. We still after so many decades of independence depend on monsoon for irrigation. The problem was more severe then. To increase the agricultural production to feed the ever increasing masses, we went for constructing dams. Dams although form backbone of economy by providing water for irrigation, electricity for industrial as well as residential purpose are notorious for displacing a huge number of people. Many villages are submerged when dams are created then people are left with no other option except to move on to other places. Displacement not only displaces them, it displaces their future, their expectations, and their dreams. Displacement does not only displace people, but our culture, our heritage and our values. Can we expect a tree to grow the same way after we remove it from one place and place it at other? India a country known for its rich diversity in culture, won't lose its reputation if we keep on destroying our culture for short term gains?

Vedanta issue in the recent past in Odisha is the best example to show how fast paced development affects cultural values of people. Vedanta was lobbying for the project of extracting bauxite from Niyamgiri hills in Odisha. The place is inhabited by Dongria, Kondh and Kutia tribes. They worship Niyam Raja and consider the mining as an encroachment in their religious life, further they believe that the mining would make Niyam raja angry and their whole tribe will vanish due to the anger of Niyam raja. If we still blindly running after development keep on encroaching their property won't it affect them mentally? Right to property, although is not a fundamental right in our constitution, but it surely qualifies to be a human right. Should we dishonor their right for betterment of some others?

The red terror the most dangerous threat to our internal security, has it come from outside the country? Have we imported the red terror? No, it has emerged on our very own soil. When we keep on encroaching the culture, land and personal lives of our tribal people, who are part of our rich culture and keep on displacing them without any proper and just rehabilitation plan will they keep quiet? The Naxalites, the Maoists are not terrorists rather they are terrified. They are not predator rather they are prey. The continuous torture in the name of development by development seekers on these people has made them vulnerable. And we know from our past experience that vulnerable people can be influenced easily by mischievous elements.

In economics as well we talk about Pareto optimum. An outcome is said to be efficient if it increases welfare of some person without decreasing welfare of other. Now if the development is done by displacing people, will that be efficient? No, then why we should the benefit accrue to some person at the cost of other?

The Amartya sen and Bhagwati debate is more or less linked to the same problem. Both renowned economists one from Harvard University and other from Columbia University differ on the role of different classes in development process and the conduit through which the fruits of development reach them. While Sen believes that India should invest more in its social infrastructure to boost the productivity of its people and thereby raise growth, Bhagwati argues that only a focus on growth can yield enough resources for investing in social sector schemes. Investing in health and education to improve human capabilities is central to Sen's scheme of things. Without such investments, inequality will widen and the growth process itself will falter, Sen believes. Bhagwati argues that growth may raise inequality initially, but sustained growth will eventually raise enough resources for the state to redistribute and mitigate the effects of the initial inequality. In Indian context where a minuscule fraction of people comes in rich class and a large mass comes in lower middle class, can we think of growing without providing them required support. Can we keep on developing to make India represented by few Ambanis and myriad people displaced to make those Ambanis? If we keep on avoiding the lower class to blindly reach the high growth trajectory, what the upshot is going to look like? We are a welfare state; can we keep at stake the welfare of people to become superpower? Can we keep on frustrating marginalized class to reach our development agenda? The continuous frustration among them may culminate in a civil war kind of situation. And do we need to actually see a civil war inside our country to see the impacts of it? Sri Lanka, Egypt, Syria, Thailand aren't these examples enough to make us think about the way where we are heading?

It is argued that development displaces people. Aren't there enough examples within our country to bolster the fact that lack of development also causes internal displacement? People from north-eastern states and some eastern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as well migrate to relatively developed cities for want of better education and employment opportunity. This displacement is not result of fast paced development rather it is a result of lack of development at those places.

Displacement if occurs for better education and employment opportunities is justified apparently, but the incidence of unjust behavior meted out to them by the fellow citizens affects national harmony and fraternity. The recent attack in Delhi on north-eastern students and attack on Bihar natives by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, a political outfit laments the impact of internal displacement on the displaced people, our national fraternity and our social structure. Further this type of displacement imbalances the demography of the home and host states to displacement.

3. What is the Way Ahead Now?

Displacement whether because of development or lack of development creates trauma on the evictees and excludes them from continuing social and economic network. Construction of dams, extension of transportation corridors, improvement of urban infrastructure etc. are some of the areas, which dislodge large number of people. But without development of infrastructure we can't move on growth path so the dilemma is that we have to develop and the development necessarily will cause displacement. If development suffers on account of consideration of displacement problem then also poor growth will impact our national stand in international community and make us vulnerable to external pressure. This lack of development will not only affect us as a nation but its brunt will be on citizens. Lack of development creates social unrest as well and social unrest is home to many problems. Now what should be our right course of action? The way forward is to put attention to the rehabilitation plans for the displaced people. We if for some important reason want to shift a plant from one place to another; we can't just throw it and let it dry for want of attention. We have to put it at another and water it till it becomes strong enough to grow itself. The same strategy should be designed for these people. We should have a well prepared rehabilitation plan for them and we should effectively execute it to get better results.

First of all to tackle the displacement happening due to lack of development we need to make sure that all the regions in our country whether rural or urban, all the states of our country whether eastern or western, northern or southern should grow equally. Every citizen no matter in which part of country he resides, whether a metropolitan city or a far remote area should have access to better social infrastructure. He should have access to participation in developmental activities. Similarly fruits of development should also reach him. Now this requires a lot of effort on State's part. We are a democracy, the largest in this world. We send our politicians to parliament to represent us, our problems, our culture and our welfare needs. We give them power to make us powerful. It is now responsibility of our government to ensure that, the strength of democracy that is its people do not suffer due to any reason. It is a fact that we need more and more dams to be independent in matter of irrigation and it is also a green source of power generation. We need better roads and highways to connect trade and commerce to each part of the country. We also need to have access to mines to explore the metal potential of our country. But it is also a fact that we are a welfare state, it is also a fact that government has moral as well as legal duty to take care of each faction of the society. It is also a fact that the people who are displaced are our very own brothers. It is now government's duty to devise and implement better rehabilitation plans for the displaced people. We should respect their right to a dignified life. We could do that by providing them with the good residential facilities elsewhere in the same kind of locality, ensuring a better employment option for them, keeping their culture alive by moral support to them. As far as beliefs of tribal people are

concerned, we should respect their beliefs as India is country of different beliefs owned by different sections of society. We can't take away identity of our country in the name of development. A good rehabilitation plan is answer to all questions. It should be clear by the fact that whenever state announces good rehabilitation plans, we see a lot of surrenders by Naxalites and Maoists.

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