

Development, Displacement, Media Representation: A Study of Projects in Telangana State

Rasu Chatrapathi Yadav

Assistant Professor (c) and Research Scholar
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Osmania University, Hyderabad Telangana State 500007

Abstract

Developmental processes have several contradictions and poses difficult questions to different sections of society. The Telangana state, formed after a prolonged agitation, witnessed a particular discourse, strongly opposing dominant form of development process as was witnessed in united Andhra Pradesh. There is opposition to mega projects involving massive displacement and focus was more on tank irrigation in agriculture sector with active people's participation. The characteristic features of discourse during Telangana movement are non-dispossession and non-displacement. The incumbent government has ignored these aspects and has planned several mega, medium and small irrigation projects on various rivers, involving massive displacement and this has attracted widespread resentment, in particular with the construction of Mallannasagar, a lift irrigation project in Medak district. This paper examines the contestations over the project, with government arguing in favour and people, non-party organizations and political parties strongly opposing the way government is going ahead with developmental projects displacing farmers and landless farmers. How these contestations of various parties are being portrayed in media needs to be looked into? Media should indulge in objective reporting in coverage of developmental projects and has it done that is what needs to be examined. How media represented the movement and what are the politics involved in the representation?

Keywords: Development, Displacement, Mallannasagar, Media, Telangana

Introduction

Development activity is a continuous process for the progress of society, and it gained momentum in almost all the developing countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia after they broke free from the clutches of colonial rules, and India is no exception to this phenomenon. Nation-building has remained the main agenda of successive governments in post-Independence India, due to huge expectations of people on democratically elected regimes. State-sponsored development projects have become a major issue for the government and the people. To achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture sector and give a boost to industrialization, huge irrigation projects, industries and factories had been constructed.

Hundreds of thousands of hectares of land were acquired for massive construction activity and this has resulted in large scale displacement of people. Irrigation projects took possession of large tracts of land and caused

displacement to a greater extent than other projects. Dispossession is rampant among tribal community, medium and small land holding farmers and landless labourers. People were asked to surrender lands for nation-building activity and many voluntarily agreed to do so with a strong hope that it would improve their standard of living and provide a bright future for future generations. This was the commitment exhibited by people, under the influence of freedom movement and independence struggle.

However, development process remained biased with a few beneficiaries enjoying the fruits at the cost of marginalized groups. The concept of development has changed in the last few decades with governments acting more as a facilitator, rather than protector, for corporates, in acquisition of land, for their profit purposes, resulting in vast unrest among the land-losers and the evacuees. After independence, India is one among the nations which has generated displaced persons at a greater extent, with its lackadaisical policies as far as rehabilitation is concerned. Development projects are one of the many causes for people's displacement. Governments have completely ignored the concept of equitable development.

Things have become more complicated with the advent of liberalization, privatization and globalization with governments not confining themselves to only policy making, but also acting as facilitators for corporate houses and started acquiring lands by establishing land pools for setting up industries. Also the magnitude of displacement has increased. More conflicts have emerged with more displacement and massive people's movements have come to fore making it difficult for governments to acquire lands.

Hundreds of irrigation dams built over a span of six decades after independence become the major source of displacement, right from Hirakud dam to the latest Polavaram project displacing hundreds of tribals in Andhra Pradesh and in the ongoing projects in the new Telangana state. Protests were launched by the dispossessed sections and the best example was Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), led by Medha Patkar, opposing the construction of Sardar Sarovar Project on River Narmada in Gujarat. The dam submerged vast stretch of forest, displacing nearly one lakh people, submerging their villages and most of the affected include the tribals. Similar is the case with other dams constructed and it remained a continuous process in the country. The Polavaram dam being constructed on River Godavari, bordering the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, meant to provide irrigation and drinking water to the regions in Andhra Pradesh is likely to displace thousands of tribals in 23 villages in Khammam district of Telangana. Tribals become victims in most of the development projects.

After irrigation projects, mining and thermal plants has displaced people to a greater extent. Posco has planned to establish the biggest ever foreign direct investment (FDI) project worth Rs 54,000 crores to mine bauxite at Niyamgiri Hills in Odisha state and export it from an exclusive port. The project is likely to destroy rich flora and fauna, dispossessing aboriginal tribesmen from the hills which they consider sacred. Massive protests were launched by tribals with the help of people's organizations and a protracted legal fight was fought and finally the Supreme Court has given a direction to stop the mining until further orders.

Review of Literature

Report published by the UN Working Group on Human Rights in India (WGHR) showed that India has the highest people displaced for development projects. The total people who have been displaced due to development projects are nearly 50-60 millions. Of those displaced nearly over over 40 per cent are tribals and another 40 per cent consist of Dalits and other rural poor.

(Hussain, 2008) opines that the development process instead of becoming a process of inclusion became a process of exclusion, excluding a large number of people in the North East. The move to construct mega dams has drawn stiff resistance from people leading to new social movements. People started demanding inclusion of human rights, human dignity, justice and popular grassroots participation in planning, implementation of development agenda, community rights, environmental issue the question of justice and popular participation in development discourse. Government should take people into confidence before planning construction of dams as people living in peripheral regions of the country continued to question the centrality of the centre in the context of centrally-sponsored mega dam projects. This popular resistance outside conventional party system is strengthening democratic consciousness of people living in peripheral regions.

(Baxi, 2008) provides a human right perspective in the development induced displacement and resettlement. He is emphatic that no development without displacement is the mantra that makes good sense only to the few who stand to gain from the development projects. These are beneficiaries in contrast to victims numerically much larger who are displaced by development projects. They not only bear disproportionate cost of development but are also treated less than citizens and human beings. Any voice raised against project is at once dubbed as anti-national, and if the victims with their human right supporters launch protests, then they run the risk of repression by police and even paramilitary forces.

(Kothari, 1996) finds displacement most critically threatening the poor and the weak with even greater impoverishment. Displacement caused widespread traumatic psychological and socio-cultural consequences. These include the dismantling of production system, desecration of ancestral sacred zones or graves and temples, scattering of kinship groups and family systems, disorganization of informal social networks that provide mutual support, weakening of self management and social control, disruption of trade and market links etc.

(Sharma, 2003) argues that the present model of development necessitates the setting up of large industrial and related projects-mostly in locations close to the natural resources. It alienated people from their traditional sources of sustenance, such as lands, forest and village habitats. The product of these mega projects, rarely reach the affected people, moreover, the displaced family hardly get fair treatment from the projects in terms of their resettlement and rehabilitation.

(Chandhoke, 2006-2007) argues that in the name of public purpose the local people have been disposed of their homes, their access to means of subsistence, disposed of their life style. Displacement means breaking up of communities, sundering their ties with their ancestral lands, dividing people who may be tied by organic links making in short people rootless. It is systematic violation of basic right i.e. the right to move and live freely in any part of India, the right to livelihood, the right to culture and community. Violation of these basic rights by development project leads to resistance to displacement. It is something thrown upon people. This resistance or what Chandhoke call people's movements are fighting for the survival and against exploitation, for the assertion of rights i.e. right to freedom, freedom to decide their own future.

For (Patkar, 1998) and (Banerjee, Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur, 2006), resistance to displacement is natural and they find the marginalized farmers, landless peasants and women in the forefront of these resistance movements. In the face of efforts to displace them, the poor, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups are increasingly choosing to resist to development induced displacement and resettlement in the hope it will prove more effective in protecting their long term interest. This shows displacement no more being taken for granted by the affected persons. The demand and struggle was not to remain confined only to the resettlement aspect. People started questioning the displacement itself. Why displacement? For whom? What is public purpose? Who decides the public purpose, the propriety of displacement? Whether the evaluation of resources of affected people, which includes their social, cultural and other aspects of life, could re-compensate them adequately? The consent of people becomes an important factor.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Media has a social responsibility towards society. The present paper studies various issues which changed democratic discourse in the country and how media reacted to these incidents and how these issues occupied public sphere through agenda setting mechanisms of media organisations. The study employs qualitative study relying on news reports, discussions and debates about the coverage of media on the policy formulation taken up by the Telangana government on land acquisition and also the protests involving civil societies and the coverage given by the media.

Media, Civil Society and Social Movements

Media has a greater responsibility in creating awareness among people about the ill things happening in the society. Media acts as a collector and disseminator of information and its role has to be studied in the backdrop of the impact it has in creating awareness among people about the injustices caused to various sections of people through displacement-induced development projects. Several social movements were launched in protest against injustices to displaced people in various development projects. Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) stands as a good testimony to this. The people who were involved in these movements have forced the media to take stock of the situation and provide an extensive coverage to the movement as an alternative platform has been evolved

in the form of emails, which were used as a mode of communication by activists to disseminate information. It has set a good example on how social movement acts as a communicator in sharing information.

There are different actors and agencies in the process of development. They include:

1. The government agencies, which formulate policies and ensure that the decisions taken as part of policy formulation are implemented at the ground-level.
2. The affected sections, those who are displaced by development projects, losing their land, livelihood and identity.
3. The protests and stiff opposition by displaced people to the injustice rendered to them as part of the dispossession activity, leading to massive social movements.
4. Civil society which include opinion makers and who guide victims in various movements and agitations and ensure that the movement becomes broad and evolves into a platform so as to negotiate with the government on the policy matters.
5. The media, all forms of media outlets, print, visual and social media becomes a major actor in the entire process as it is the main organ in manufacturing and disseminating information and acting as a communication to all the agencies.

The present article tries to look into the following objectives:

1. What are the patterns of displacement and responses of displaced in construction of Mallannasagar project in Medak district of Telangana state?
2. How the agencies of development and displaced communities communicate with each other.
3. The role and place of media in information formation, information dissemination and building up communication networks among the actors/agencies involved.

The major criticism against mainstream media is the issue of agenda setting. The media confines itself to the duty of providing information rather than maintaining communication with its subjects. The sharing of information depends upon level of information diffusion and domination of one group over other and it depends upon level of information they have as that point of time.

In the present age of information technology, information is not confined to only print of visual media, but social media gets involved in the process of development. What need to be studied is to how movements launched by displaced persons find its space in the media and how media reacts to the protests taken up by the sections which are displaced due to the development process. All the movements may not be using all forms of media, people depending upon their flexibility and convenience use different forms of media to vent their anger.

Irrigation Projects in Telangana

Telangana has been neglected in all fronts, including development, irrigation, jobs, water allocation, since its merger with Andhra State to form Andhra Pradesh state in 1956. Due to its topography, tank irrigation is famous in Telangana, but it was neglected by successive governments. The simmering unrest among people against the establishment's negligent attitude has manifested into massive protests and has spearheaded into a separate state movement, resulting in the formation of Telangana as the 26th state in 2014. Earlier, the region has been witness to thousands of farmers' suicides due to successive droughts and neglect of agriculture and farming sector. The incumbent TRS government has given top priority to irrigation sector and is constructing 22 major and nine medium irrigation projects apart from the existing 13 major and 37 medium projects, so as to provide irrigation facility to an additional 60 lakh acres of land. Several of these projects are lift irrigation schemes and are in various stages of construction (Avadhani, 2016). Land acquisition and displacement has been a major problem due to construction of reservoirs and canals. There have been protests over the rehabilitation and relief measures given to the affected population.

For the first time, Telangana state is witnessing displacement at such a magnitude due to construction of several dams simultaneously. Protests are being witnessed and the most vocal are the people who are being dispossessed under Mallanna Sagar reservoir being constructed as part of Pranahita Chevella project in Medak district. The oustees are demanding a fair compensation.

Policy formulation on rehabilitation and relief

The Central government has promulgated Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 to make land acquisition more transparent and non-problematic free, both for the oustees and the land takers. The Act is likely to end forced land acquisitions increased during the last few decades due to big industrial and development projects. Providing fair compensation and R&R to farmers, land-owners and livelihood losers becomes critical in the context of increasing alienation, displacement, deprivation, and disentitlement to the resources of livelihood are some of the salient features of the Act. The Act includes consent of 80 per cent of landowners required in case of land acquired by private companies and 70 per cent for land acquired under Public Private Partnership model for public purpose. Compensation up to four times the market value in rural areas and twice in urban areas, mandatory Social Impact Analysis to assess nature of public interest and estimation of socio-economic impact prior to acquisition, land cannot be vacated until the entire compensation is awarded to the affected parties, companies can lease the land instead of purchasing it, private companies to provide for rehabilitation and resettlement if land acquired through private negotiations is more than 50 acres in urban areas and 100 acres in rural areas are other features. The affected families include farm labour, tenants, sharecroppers and workers on the piece of land for three years prior to the acquisition, compensation should be house, one time allowance and (either Rs 5 lakh or a job or inflation adjusted Rs 2,000

per month for 20 years) for the affected family, compensation of four times the market value in rural areas and twice in urban areas will be given to affected families.

Development is an ongoing process and its main drawback and negative impact is displacement. Displacement has been on the rise with more development activity. The question of communication between state, civil society and displaced people has a greater impact on how development is being viewed. Development and displacement are related and are two sides of the same coin. It is necessary to know, whether is it possible to have development without displacement. Media as fourth estate informs and educates people about development process. It sets an agenda about coverage of developmental activities. There are protests over irrigation projects against displacement and this aspects needs to be studied. Since there are no significant research on this topic to know how displacement is being studied by media and what media is trying to project about policies of government as far as development and displacement is concerned, the present study assumes significance as it tries to understand dynamics of communication between actors in development process, the policy makers, media, the civil society which acts as a vigil for people against state excesses, and displaced persons and how they effectively use media to reach masses about their anguish and the injustice being meted out to them in the process of development. This needs to be studied in a more detailed manner.

Mallanasagar and People's Protest

As part of the major scheme to restore tank irrigation neglected by the successive governments, the newly formed Telangana government has launched the Mission Kakatiya on a grand note to restore the major, medium and minor tanks in the tank and for this the government is also constructing few reservoirs to bring the river water to the newly constructed and existing tanks and link all the tanks in the state. For this the government has planned to bring more land under irrigation in the drought prone Medak district and has decided to construct two reservoirs one at Mallanasagar with a capacity of nearly 50 tmcft and another at Kondapochamma with a capacity of 21 tmcft and these two reservoirs would be filled by diverting water from the Pranahita-Chevella project and bring an additional 7 lakh acres under the gambit of irrigation facility. These reservoirs would meet drinking and irrigation water needs of the neighbouring Nalgonda, Karimnagar, Warangal and Nizamabad districts.

For construction of Mallansagar reservoir, the government has decided to acquire nearly 12,000 acres of land from seven villages, four from Thoguta and three from Kondapaka villages.

While the government is offering to provide a compensation for the land as per the registration cost, the villagers who have been forgoing the land were demanding a compensation as per the market value and large scale protests were witnessed in the villages over the distribution of relief and the manner in which government is going forward with the relief and rehabilitation package without taking the land losers into confidence.

Erravalli, Singaram, Yetigadda Kistapur, Bramhana Banjarupalli, Laxmapur, Mogilla Cheruvu Thanda, Thirumalagiri, Vemulghat, Thurka Banjarupalli, Pallepahad, and Dasthagiri Nagaram from Kondapaka and Thoguta mandals were facing the threat of submergence. These villages have water resources with minor irrigation tanks, surrounded by forest land and Kudavelli water stream and for nearly 90 per cent of people agriculture is the main activity.

Government is planning to acquire 21,000 acres of land and 3,112 houses from 14 villages for this project, and passed GO No. 123, 214 to procure land from willing landowners. No Grama Sabha was conducted to explain the utility of the project and no consent was taken from the villagers. Land Acquisition Act, 2013 was blatantly violated.

The region witnessed largescale protests over the manner in which the government is moving ahead with the Mallanasagar project without taking consent from the villagers. Rasta rokos were organized and road blockades were organized on a regular basis protesting against the government's indifferent attitude. Joint Action Committees were formed to take the fight to the logical end and opposition parties rallied behind the protests, extending their support to the land oustees demanding proper compensation and rehabilitation (Avadhani, 2016).

However, the government which has to look into the development of all sections of the society, have acted in a coercion way and has started resorting to intimidating tactics involving local political leaders and making farmers agree to the compensation being offered by the government.

The issue had reached the courts with a few villagers and farmers approaching the High Court, which has stayed the process of land acquisition until the government comes clear on the compensation package and directed the government to adhere to the guidelines mentioned in the Land Acquisition Act, 2013.

Media Representation of People's Anger

Media, especially the vernacular media, including newspapers and electronic channels could not catch the momentum of the movement launched by the villagers for a reasonable compensation until it has been rightly focused by various civil society organizations and the political parties. The civil society organizations, especially the joint action committees formed by the villagers of the affected areas, taking a cue from the successful Telangana statehood movement, shows how matured the land oustees are in articulating their demands to the government forcing it to take note of their demands. It has also made the media to look into the issues which they are facing. The civil society organizations played a crucial role in educating and creating awareness among the people, especially villagers on the guidelines of compensation. Right from initial stages, it has educated farmers, explaining about guidelines framed under the New Land Acquisition Act, 2013. This is has made a lot of difference in the approach of land oustees towards the forcible takeover of the land by the government and their strong resistance.

Majority of the media in the Telangana state is in the hands of a few individuals who are for various reasons are prisoners of their own political inklings, thereby denying a objective and unbiased coverage of any issue which is of serious consequences to a major sections of people. The media in the state has their own political and economic compulsions thereby affecting the credibility of the fourth estates in the eye of the people. The manner in which the media organizations provided coverage to the protests organized by land oustees and the government's stand exposes its double standards.

The recent episode in which Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao invited the farmers of the Velumghat village to discuss about the compensation exposes the government's arm twisting tactics. The farmers demanded compensation according to the LARR Act 2013 and a proper rehabilitation before acquiring the land. They demanded a compensation of Rs 20 lakh an acre in their village and the issue was rightly highlighted by most of the media (both the print and electronic). The talks failed and the farmers returned refusing the lunch offer (TNIE, 2017). After the talks failed, the villagers established a permanent platform to continue their protest and for this they spent nearly Rs 50,000, giving a clear signal to the government about their resolution not to part with their land till justifiable relief was offered.

Conclusion

Media has a greater responsibility to play in a democratic society and it has to highlight the issues which the people are facing and should be sincere in projecting the omissions and commissions and the misdeeds of the governments and the people in power. Then only people will have faith in the fourth estate, and the way the media is conducting themselves during the period of crisis exposes its shortcomings.

References

- Banerjee, P. (2006). Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 4718-4720.
- Banerjee, P. (2006). Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 4718-4720.
- Baxi, U. (2008). Development, Displacement and Resettlement: A Human Right Perspective. In *Indian Social Development Report 2008*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Brun, C., Blaikie, P., & Jones, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Alternative Development: Unravelling Marginalization, Voicing Change*. New York: Routledge.
- Cernea, M. M. (1995). Public Policy Responses to Development-Induced Population Displacements. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 1515-1523.
- Chakravorty, S. (2013). *The Price of Land: Acquisition, Conflict Consequence*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Chandhoke, N. (2006-2007). People's Movements and the Articulation of Rights. *Indian Journal of Human Rights* , 55-73.
- Hussain, M. (2008). *Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Iyer, V. K. (1998). Marginalised Indian Humanity: Do the Bells of Constitution Toll for Them. In M. Desai, M. Desai, & Etc, *Towards People-Centered Development (Part I)*. Mumbai: Tata Institute of Social Sciences.
- Kothari, S. (1996). Whose Nation? The Displaced as Victims of Development. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 1476-1485.
- Mathur, H. M. (2013). *Displacement and Resettlement in India: The Human Cost in Development*. New York: Routledge.
- Oommen, T. K. (2004). *Development Discourse: Issues and Concerns*. New Delhi: Regency Publishers.
- Parasuraman, S. (1996). Development Projects, Displacement and Outcomes for Displaced - Two Case Studies. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 1529-1532.
- Patkar, M. (1998). The People's Policy on Development, Displacement and Resettlement - Need to Link Displacement and Development. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 2432-2433.
- Roy, A. (2000). *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Roy, A. (1999). *The Greater Common Good*. Bombay: India Book Distributors.
- Sharma, R. N. (2003). Involuntary Displacement: A Few Encounters. *Economic and Political Weekly* , 907-1012.
- Umamaheswari, R. (2014). *When Godavari Comes: People's History of a River - Journeys in the Zone of the Dispossessed*. New Delhi: Aakar Books.

Websites

- Avadhani, R. (2016, February 21). *thehindu.com*. Retrieved August 27, 2017, from The Hindu: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/multipronged-strategy-to-increase-irrigation-potential-of-medak-harish/article8263886.ece>
- TNIE. (2017, July 23). *www.newindianexpress.com*. Retrieved August 28, 2017, from The New Indian Express: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2017/jul/23/silver-tongued-kcrs-words-cut-no-ice-with-mallanna-sagar-project-farmers-1632342.html>