

Tribal Displacement in India

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Tribal Displacement in India: Causes, Challenges, and the Way Forward

Context:

The **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** has recently ordered a thorough survey to assess the condition of displaced tribal communities in the states of **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Chhattisgarh**. These states have seen significant tribal displacement due to a combination of security issues, developmental projects, political conflicts, and ecological disasters. The plight of these tribals has been exacerbated by a lack of cohesive policies and effective rehabilitation measures.

Causes of Tribal Displacement:

1. Security Concerns:

- **Left-wing extremism** and insurgency have been significant contributors to tribal displacement.
- For instance, around **50,000 tribals** were displaced from **Chhattisgarh** due to **Maoist violence**.

2. Developmental Projects:

- Infrastructure projects, such as dams, highways, and power plants, often require the displacement of tribal populations.
- The construction of the **Sardar Sarovar Dam** on the **Narmada River** displaced over **41,000 families** across **Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh**.

3. Political Conflicts:

- Tribal communities are often caught in the crossfire of **ethnic tensions**,

insurgencies, and border disputes.

- States like **Nagaland, Assam, and Mizoram** have experienced tribal displacement due to **insurgency-related violence**.
- For example, **clashes between Bodo and other communities** in Assam led to the displacement of thousands.

4. Ecological Disasters:

- Natural disasters such as **floods, droughts, and cyclones** displace tribal communities from their traditional lands.
- The **Mishing community in Majuli Island, Assam** has faced repeated displacement due to **river erosion**.

The Strategic Hamlet Program in India:

The **Strategic Hamlet Program** was introduced as a counterinsurgency tactic aimed at isolating tribal communities from insurgents by relocating them into **fortified settlements**. The effectiveness of this program has varied across regions.

1. Telangana:

- In 1949, after the **Nizam's surrender**, the Indian government relocated tribals from forests into **roadside camps** to combat the **Telangana communist movement**.
- Tribals were also recruited as **Special Police Constables** to fight the communist rebels. One notable group was the **Tiger Squad**, consisting of around **300 Koya tribals**.

2. Chhattisgarh:

- In 2005, the government initiated a **Strategic Hamleting** program, relocating **50,000 Gond tribals** to camps in **Andhra Pradesh** (now part of Telangana) to counter Maoist insurgents.
- Many tribals later returned to their forest homes, but some were unable to do so due to threats from **Maoists** and instead joined security forces.

3. Mizoram:

- In the 1960s, the **Strategic Hamlet Program** was more successful in **Mizoram**, where the government reached a **peace agreement** with the Mizo insurgents.

4. Bru Displacement:

- In 2019, **Bru (Reang) tribals** were displaced due to **ethnic violence** with **Mizo tribals** in **Mizoram**, leading to their migration to **Tripura**.

Challenges Faced by Displaced Tribals:

1. Absence of National Policy:

- There is no specific national or international policy for **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**, leading to ineffective rehabilitation and resettlement.

2. Harassment and Exploitation:

- Displaced tribals often face **harassment** from **forest officials, police**, and even **local residents** who view them as encroachers.

3. Security Threats:

- Many tribals, especially in **Maoist-affected regions**, are unable to return to their ancestral homes due to the **ongoing security threat** from armed groups.

4. Lack of Legal Recognition:

- States like **Andhra Pradesh** and **Telangana** have not officially recognized many **displaced tribals** as Scheduled Tribes, thus denying them **state support** and benefits.

- For example, the **Gutti Koya tribals** in these regions have been denied **tribal status**, being treated as **migrants** instead.

5. Non-Allocation of Alternative Land:

- According to the **Forest Rights Act (2006)**, the government must provide **alternative land** to tribals displaced from forest areas. However, this provision has not been effectively implemented in **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Chhattisgarh**.

6. Inadequate Compensation:

- Many displaced families do not receive adequate compensation under the **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (2013)**.

7. Regressive State Actions:

- In some states, like **Telangana**, the government has seized tribal lands for **afforestation projects**, while **Andhra Pradesh** has **destroyed houses** built by displaced tribals in forested areas to prevent settlement.

8. Poor Inter-State Cooperation:

- States often fail to **cooperate** on the rehabilitation of displaced tribes, leading to further hardship for these communities.

The Way Forward:

1. National Policy on IDPs:

- A **dedicated national policy** for **Internally Displaced Tribals** should be formulated to establish clear guidelines for **inter-state cooperation** and the protection of tribal rights.

2. Amendment of Existing Laws:

- Existing laws like the **Forest Rights Act (2006)** and the **Land Acquisition Act (2013)** must be amended and strictly enforced to ensure that displaced tribals are adequately compensated and resettled.

3. Provision of Alternative Land:

- Displaced tribals should be provided with **alternative land** with proper infrastructure, ensuring their sustainable livelihood.

4. Protection of Political and Social Rights:

- The **political and social rights** of displaced tribals should be respected in both their **new settlements** and **original homelands** to ensure their full reintegration into society.

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