FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY: DEMOCRACY'S RESPONSE TO CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper will shed light on the close nexus shared between our Indian democratic structure and the Sustainability Goals. Migration is becoming an increasingly important part of adaptation and recovery plans for communities at risk around the world as the effects of climate change become more visible. This study examines the relationship between development, migration brought on by climate change, and democracy with the goal of figuring out how democratic governance systems handle the difficulties that come with migration in the face of environmental decline. This study examines how democratic institutions affect migration patterns and development outcomes in climate change-affected countries by using a combination of approaches that includes qualitative case studies and quantitative analysis.

Introduction

In a world full of open pursuits of sustainable development, there are chances of tackling those interconnected global challenges. Achievement of those goals would prove the strong nexus of principles of governance, equity, and environmental stewardship converge to shape the trajectory of human progress. India right now the largest democracy, stands in its pivotal journey of development, facing numerous and variety of issues be it economic, social, or environmental, one of them being climate and development-induced migrations. The phenomena of climate-induced migration have become a major worldwide challenge with deep consequences for both biological systems and human cultures in an era characterized by the intensifying effects of climate change. Vulnerable populations are forced to migrate more often in search of jobs, safety, and chances to survive as environmental deterioration worsens. Numerous stresses on the environment, including rising sea levels, extreme weather, and agricultural disruptions, are the driving forces behind this migration, which presents difficult socioeconomic, political, and environmental issues for both sending and receiving communities.

Advancing Sustainable Development goal in India

In the Indian context, the pursuits of sustainable development are closely related to the colorful and vibrant democracy, which is participatory in nature, inclusive in policy making, and social activism. Democracy works as a catalyst for changes in the society, the ethos makes the institutions accountable for their own actions and engages the citizen to take part in the decision-making process. So the question that should be arriving in the mind of the readers is how will we be able to intertwine Democracy and SDGs both of which are very broad in their own perspectives.

The first is having *a participatory government*[1] that is, India takes a step toward always having a participatory form of decision-making framework. Including various stakeholders and all the marginalized sections of the society in the implementation and policy-making regarding the SDGs, will ensure that every person in the democracy has their say and everyone's decision and preferences are kept in mind while implementing something that is going to benefit not just any one according to their economic strata but to everyone as the citizens of the country.

[1](No date) Sustainable development goals | The United Nations in India. Available at: https://india.un.org/en/sdgs (Accessed: 31 March 2024).

The second aspect as we move forward in intertwining the two is *Policy Alignment,* the democratic principles of transparency, accountability, and quick response mechanism of the government are some traits that might be helpful in checking if the Sustainability Development Goals are aligning with the public policies, open debates, parliamentary reforms are a way to do so and to keep a check on the government by the people of the country for the same, and can also enhance it's effectiveness and efficiency. The third surface is how it can be intertwined is by the way of *Environmental stewardship* that is by making the environmental laws and forest laws rigid, making some changes and amendments towards climate change, and enforcing certain mechanisms and sustainable practices, also empowering the minorities and the indigenous communities to participate in the decision-making process. The other way by which we are intertwining the two is that the major focus will be on the *inclusivity* of the indigenous, the tribes, and the vulnerable sections of the society, that is where the target is everyone will have a say and the cultures to be safeguarded to maintain the richness of their culture as this also amounts to sustainability goals that are safeguarding the indigenous communities that can be done by introducing of policies, making them literate and providing them with their basic amenities so they get encouraged to participate in the Indian democracy and know what their rights are. By providing a rights-based approach to development, India can see and analyze that the resources of this country, benefits of economic growth, and social progress are shared among the citizens equally, especially the ones who are marginalized and ostracized.

Let's talk about what we have discussed in the above paragraphs. The picture of the SDGs is quite a happy and content picture but are these plans coming into action, or are the implementation of these plans taking the indigenous or the vulnerable community into account? Thus here we can discuss the various communities all over India that are marginalized, mostly migrated which is forced, and who have no say in all that we discussed above. What we talked about above is a very celebrated picture of sustainability and not hampering the indigenous communities. What is the real picture?

Climate-induced displacement

India is struggling with the painful truth of the climate migration link as it continues to be the country most affected by climate change. According to the global report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, In 2020, 40.5 million more internal displacements occurred

throughout 149 nations and territories as a result of severe natural disasters. One of the nations that records some of the biggest numbers of new displacements worldwide each year is India, the great majority of which are brought on by natural disasters. A report by "Cost of climate inaction: Displacement and distress migration" estimates that around 4.5 crore Indians would have to forcefully migrate and leave their homeland due to natural calamity by 2050. Displacements like these can have disastrous impacts on social well-being, environmental sustainability, and economic stability leading to countries suffering major setbacks in all the possible spheres of development as planned and wish to be implemented by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.[2]

Some of the major consequences faced by these marginalized communities is that they have to go through a lot just because they are not properly financially aided. Firstly, their basic human rights get infringed that is during the calamity or gradually because of the rise in sea level and desertification of land. The communities have to face many obstacles by rebuilding their means of living, very limited access to healthcare and education, and limited job prospects eventually giving rise to unemployment. The other possible consequence can be that of aggravating the existing inequalities of the society, that is climate change also affects the already affected and the marginalized communities like women, children, low-income groups, mainly indigenous communities, and tribes of the coastal area are the vulnerable categories as they have to make the best out of the very limited resources they have and not provided with. Erosion of land and intrusion of salt water caused by rising sea levels are two major effects of climate change in coastal locations. Increased floods may occur in tandem with this development. For example, frequent rainy and flooding spells in the eastern Indian region of the Sundarbans have ruined kitchen gardens and damaged agricultural land, making it harder for these rural inhabitants to have enough food. Additionally, inland fisheries are a significant source of food and have been impacted by the influx of salt water. Additionally, there is a rise in the frequency of waterborne infections. Governmental measures to address this have usually centered on building strong sea walls, or embankments, along the shore of the Sundarbans for about 3000 km by employing concrete. However, concrete is an opaque substance, it enhances floods during storms and cyclones by trapping precipitation on the landward side. These populations may experience worsening health issues related to malnutrition and other issues as a result of their increased

[2] Balaji, M. (no date) Climate-induced displacement: A new normal for India's vulnerable communities, CAG. Available at: https://www.cag.org.in/blogs/climate-induced-displacement-new-normal-indias-vulnerable-communities#:~:text=Furthermore%2C%20communities%2C%20such%20as%20indigenous,and%20lack%20of%20political%20representation. (Accessed: 01 April 2024).

risk of floods. These communities also go through a lot of unemployment recession periods because they have to relocate themselves and must leave their land behind, making it impossible for them to survive on farming methods alone. As a result, they are left without a way of making a living. Likewise, the livelihoods of fishing communities may be severely impacted by their forced relocation from coastal areas as a result of the loss of traditional fishing grounds. This might result in a drop in total productivity, which would raise food prices. This would have a significant influence on India's economy, affecting commerce, employment, and food security, among other things.

If we analyze, these tribes were already secluded from society as early as I can remember in Indian history, and as a society, we do make it hard for them to be included in the system or if I put it that they do have access to places but we as the "upper-class citizens" of the country make it unaccessible for them, there is a difference between things being accessible and having access to them. The government introduces schemes to provide the indigenous, the vulnerable, and the marginalized with access to things only the upper middle class or the privileged could only use. Now if we still think about it are we as people or I should put it as "good people" letting them feel like us or the same as us after they have been provided with access to it, common observation, easy for any layperson to observe is that what if a transperson enters into a public transport, you would definitely see people hiding their purses and kids as if they are a threat to them. Let us take another instance of an indigenous person in their traditional clothing in a very professional setting or for a job interview, it is so easy to witness people or the other delegates murmuring about their clothing or maybe judging their qualifications with their background, why so? Why did we never think of the knowledge they might have regarding agriculture, climate, animal farming poultry, and whatnot?

Tribal agroecology: climate adaptation strategies

These communities were never showcased for their impeccable quality of predicting the weather and having so many different techniques for sustainable farming. In India's diverse ecosystems, which range from the snow-capped Himalayas to the parched Thar desert and present different difficulties and adaptations, the importance of this information becomes even more apparent. Indigenous communities, as stewards of this repository, provide a cultural legacy as well as a transformative solution to the problems posed by climate change. Because of this tangible evidence of their profound ties to the environment, their traditional knowledge

is a vital asset in the quest for sustainability and may even unleash creative solutions for addressing climate change. Let us discuss some of the numerous examples by which they are making it possible for themselves to sustain the environment for future generations. They do have some great ways to tackle the situation of climate change as well. Using methods like wet and terrace agriculture, paddy-cum-fish culture, and effective irrigation, the Apatani tribes of the Eastern Himalayas combine sustainable farming with traditional ecological knowledge. Similarly, the tribe of Lahaul flourishes in the frigid desert, exhibiting a wealth of agro-biodiversity by means of inventive techniques such as agro-forestry and ice-water harvesting, guaranteeing food throughout the months immersed in snow. In order to address climate change, the Dongria Kondh tribes of the semi-arid Eastern Ghats place a strong emphasis on organic farming methods, varied crop production, and sustainable agroforestry. By using 16 plant-based pesticides and 11 preservation techniques, the Irular tribes in the Western Ghats manage pests naturally and forecast the weather in addition to storing seeds according to custom. Taken together, these age-old customs provide a singular barrier against global warming, highlighting the critical role that indigenous agriculture plays in promoting adaptability.[3]

Weather forecasting and climate predictions: Here, we can talk about the different tribes in the different regions of the country who have their very own way of doing this, for instance, the Toda tribe (Nilgiri hills) of Tamil Nadu state are good at predicting the rain by observing the behavioral changes in the ants. According to this tribe, it is when the rain starts to come when these ants start building small mounds beside or on the side of their nest. While on the other hand, The Jarawa Tribe (Andaman and Nicobar Island) can predict the velocity of the upcoming cyclone or if the cyclone is going to come, by just observing the fish's behavior in the ocean waters. If the fish are swimming in the shallow waters, close to the shore, then the cyclone is about to hit the island. Due to their frequent interactions with the natural world and the fact that they live in dryland rangeland areas, the Afar pastoralists have the opportunity to observe minute environmental changes that are invisible to current data collection methods. Similar to the concepts of citizen science or outsourcing information, weather data or information in the distant past has traditionally been gathered by individual distant parties.

[3] Balaji, M. (2024) Harnessing Indigenous Wisdom for Climate Resilience: Insights from indian communities, CAG. Available at: https://www.cag.org.in/blogs/harnessing-indigenous-wisdom-climate-resilience-insights-indian-communities (Accessed: 01 April 2024).

Here, we can also discuss the medicinal plants and natural remedies that we got as an essential commodity from the past and we as the human race still hampering it without giving them the credit. Native American wisdom can be extremely important in creating sustainable and geographically appropriate health care solutions when climate change affects the distribution of diseases and the accessibility of medical services. To name just a few instances, the Kani tribe of the Western Ghats has a rich history of using over 700 medicinal plants in traditional medicine to treat diseases including AIDS, cancer, and malaria. They became the first Indian indigenous community to be acknowledged in this way when they obtained a patent in 1995 for a novel cancer therapy that was developed from the Kanji tree. Their wisdom is passed down through the centuries and is protected by the tribal healers, or Plathis, who are essential to their survival in the Western Ghats. The Santal tribe of Jharkhand also has a wide range of traditional medicines for common illnesses. They use a variety of plants to treat conditions like colds, fevers, stomachaches, wounds, and skin diseases. On the other hand, the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh exhibits a deep understanding of the therapeutic properties of orchids, employing a variety of orchid species to treat a wide range of illnesses, such as skin diseases, lung infections, and stomach problems.

Development–induced displacement

Here, we will be discussing the case study of the Gond tribe in Madhya Pradesh who were displaced during the making of the Major Bargi Dam, and during the making, approximately One hundred and sixty-two villages in and around the district of Seoni, Mandla, and Jabalpur were affected which resulting in loosing of lives and property, people shifting to cities for job hunting, for their livelihood, the indigenous people of Chutka, Tatigath, and Kundla villages are still reminded of their past protest to the Bargi Dam project. We can start by knowing a bit about this community, According to their Dravidian heritage and pre-Aryan heritage, the Gonds are the biggest Adivasi community in India. Kond is the origin of the term Gond, which in Dravidian is an idiom for "green mountains." Due to their residence in the green mountains, the Gonds chose to refer to themselves as Koi or Koiture, while others called them Gonds. Widely scattered across vast regions, the Gonds, also known as the Koiture, are found from the Vindhya Mountains in the north to the Godavari Gorges in the south and are a heterogeneous tribe. They spent generations living in the thick forests of the Vindhyas, Satpura, and Mandla

in Madhya Pradesh's Narmada region of the Amarkantak range.[4]

The people and the communities who lost their houses and lands in the Bargi Dam Project in 1990 in Madhya Pradesh still do not have access to good roads and electricity. Among the 162 villages of the district Jabalpur, Mandla, and Seoni were totally submerged and around 1,14,000 were displaced, but the government announced only 70,000 displaced in 101 villages. Still, even the locations designated for the relocation of displaced residents were flooded when the reservoir filled up. The residents of many displaced villages are known to take refuge and built houses on hilltops within forests. Villages like Kathotiya, Milki, and Badhaiya Khera suffer the issue of not being recognized by the state government schemes and have no access to roads and even electricity. In fact, the Madhya Pradesh government's income records did not include Kathotiya, Milki, Badhaiya Khera, or eight other villages where the dam's displaced people lived until December when Chouhan paid a visit to the dam as part of his widely publicized Narmada Yatra. This indicates that these communities were excluded from numerous government assistance programs, such as crop compensation or agriculture subsidies, for almost thirty years. These programs are run by the state Revenue Department. The Bargi Dam, more commonly referred to as the Rani Avanti Bai Sagar Irrigation Project, was Madhya Pradesh's first significant reservoir constructed on the Narmada River. It was finished in 1990. It was supposed to generate 105 megawatts of hydropower and irrigate 4.37 lakh hectares of land. The construction of the Bargi Dam happened quickly, in contrast to the decades-long legal challenges that resulted in the Sardar Sarovar Dam finally being elevated to its maximum height. But according to government documents and the testimony of the villagers who were moved, the government not only neglected the rehabilitation of the people when they were displaced but also essentially forgot about them for a period of 27 years. The construction of the dam resulted in the submergence of a significant land area totaling 26,797 hectares[5]. However, government records present conflicting information regarding the consideration of resettlement and rehabilitation for the displaced individuals. According to a 1987 report by Jabalpur commissioner KC Dubey, the state purportedly had a well-defined policy for rehabilitating and resettling individuals whose lands were affected by irrigation projects. This policy supposedly included provisions for employing at least one member from each displaced

[4] The Gond of Madhya Pradesh | ignca (2024) The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh. Available at: https://ignca.gov.in/divisionss/janapada-sampada/tribal-art-culture/adivasi-art-culture/the-gond-of-madhya-pradesh/ (Accessed: 31 March 2024).

[5] Shrivastava, K.S. (2019) Damned if you do: As history is repeated on Narmada, those displaced in 1990 serve as a warning, Scroll.in. Available at: https://scroll.in/article/845911/damned-if-you-do-as-history-repeats-itself-on-narmada-those-displaced-27-years-ago-issue-a-warning (Accessed: 01 April 2024).

family, with a draft legislation in preparation to implement it. However, the Narmada Valley Development Authority, responsible for executing the project, contradicted this in a 1994 report, stating that no specific resettlement and rehabilitation policy existed for those affected by the Bargi Dam project when construction commenced in 1971. At that time, the only provision was for compensation for land and property submerged by the dam.

In practice, however, most displaced families received meager compensation ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 9,940 per acre, as stipulated by the government. This compensation proved insufficient for many families whose primary source of income was their land, leaving them struggling to rebuild their lives after displacement.

The loss of asset

In an interview with the Scroll a man named Narayan Gond belonging to the Gond tribe was asked about the assets and the land holdings he had pre-dam construction, and what is left with him now, to which he answered and told them that he owed 10 acres of land and 4 cows and 4 buffaloes and grew around 4 crops in a year as the soil of Narmada was very rich. Unfortunately, their land fell under the area where the Bargi project was to be initiated and thus the Gond family had to give away their land for just 33,000. The were given 2,500 per acre as compensation while the actual market rate of the land in that region was 10,000 per acre.

The family used the majority of the settlement money they had been given to support themselves over the first few years after being displaced. "My father was left with Rs 10,000 from the compensation money after the dam construction work was completed," Gond added. “He gave my brother and me each Rs 5,000. I spent Rs 2,500 on a fishing net and another Rs 2,500 on a boat. I made it through three years of fishing until both the boat and the net had been in good shape. Then, I ran out of money before I could buy a new net or fix the boat”. Gond sent his children to work as daily wage laborers in Jabalpur. He and his wife survived by farming little bits of forest land, which brought them the anger of the forest authorities. "Forest officials would call us invaders and remove our houses each moment now and then," he claimed. "I had to build five houses in the past 25 years.”

Gond received a bit of relief in 2015 when the Forest Rights Act, which upholds tribal peoples'

customary rights over forest land[6] they have historically used, granted him a title over 4.5 acres of forestland. Nonetheless, non-tribal households are not covered by this Act's provisions. Gond feels that the dislocation destroyed the lives of the younger generation in addition to displacing the finances of his family. His younger son does not know how to read or write. He said, "In our old village, we had an elementary school. After the village drowned, we were left without a panchayat structure or a school for a decade." The children that grew up then are not literate today.

The future threat and the way forward

Because of the building of a nuclear facility, the residents who were resettled in the area of Chutka village in Madhya Pradesh could have to relocate once more. The Nuclear Power Corporation of India is planning to build two nuclear plants with a capacity of 700 MW each in the near future. These would probably be followed by two additional plants with a capacity of 2800 MW total. Four areas are probably going to be relocated during the first phase. To express their opposition to the nuclear project, the people who live in and around Chutka have united under the Chutka Parmanu Sangharsh Samiti. Because they were concerned about the risks posed by a nuclear plant, many villagers from far beyond the primary relocation zone joined the demonstration.[7]

A Bargi dam evictee organization's coordinator, Rajkumar Sinha, stated that the group has been speaking out against the relocation and voicing worries about the risks. According to him, those displaced by nuclear plants have visited other areas, such as Rawatbhata, where they have seen individuals with grave health issues. They were not given much weight before, he claimed, but since the Fukushima accident, their voices started to be heard more. He claims that they have also brought attention to the dangers of constructing a nuclear power station in an area with high seismic activity. Numerous people lost their lives and significant harm was caused by the 1997 earthquake. Furthermore, Sinha stated that Madhya Pradesh currently has an excess of power rather than a need, negating the need for the project. The people initiated a sadbudhi satyagraha against the government in order to bring these points of view to their attention. The

[6] Forest Rights Act, 2007, §2 ©, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2007 (India).
[7] Dogra, B. and Mayaram, B. (2017) For Tribals Displaced by Madhya Pradesh's Bargi Dam, a Second Displacement Looms, The wire: The Wire News India, Latest News, news from India, politics, External Affairs, science, economics, gender and culture. Available at: https://thewire.in/rights/tribals-madhya-pradesh-displacement (Accessed: 01 April 2024).

song that gained the most popularity during the demonstration was a prayer asking for wisdom so that the administration could make an informed decision. Many gram sabhas have expressed their strong opposition to the nuclear project and the resulting displacement that it will bring about. Since this is a fifth schedule area, the PESA (Extension of Panchayati Raj to Scheduled Areas) legislation should give gram sabhas in this area far more privileges. The voices of many gram sabhas are being disregarded despite this. The government assembled police in response to the mounting fears of the local population, rather than acting sensitively. However, the majority of the villages where the evicted people lived still object to the risks and the second displacement that this project would bring about, as seen by the recent protests.

It is necessary for the project plans to contain a carefully thought-out rehabilitation policy that will be used consistently. In order to avoid issues during implementation, proper communication with the impacted parties must take place during the planning stage.

Rehabilitation policies must be flexible enough to accommodate modifications based on local circumstances, and decisions about these adjustments must be made as quickly as possible at the lowest feasible level.

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