

Book Review

Displacement, rehabilitation and social change: The case of Paraja highlanders

Nihal Raj

PhD Scholar, National Institute of Technology, Patna

Introduction

The book “**Displacement, rehabilitation and social change: The case of Paraja highlanders**” is written by **Dr S M Patnaik**, one of the most senior professors in the department of anthropology. This book is unique in the sense that it is tracing the structural and social change among the Paraja highlanders due to their displacement and rehabilitation from the place where Kolab River dam is currently situated. This book provides better insights into how we can critically understand the developmental process and its impact on different communities of society. The study is an attempt to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the process of changes among the Paraja, a hill tribe of Southern Orissa. It also focuses on the impact of displacement and rehabilitation on the social structure of the community. There are two important conceptual frameworks i.e. ‘social structure’ and ‘social change’ used for the above-stated objectives. This book consists of 8 chapters and lets us discuss these chapters in brief.

This book starts its introduction with earlier responses of the missionaries and administrators who had colonial interests to serve. Their focus was to descriptively reconstruct the tribal culture in their primitive purity. It was also pointed out that how 1970 onwards, the focus shifted from descriptive studies to social changes due to modernization based on the humanistic understanding of the tribal communities. Besides there was a change in approach, the study on the displaced community especially focussing on the process of change have been rare and this study attempts to fill this gap. Then it focuses on the conceptual understanding of the social structure, social change, and the idea of development and displacement.

The next chapter “The Setting” provides an account of the ethnographic landscape with a clear image of district profile, climate conditions, and topography of the Koraput District. This chapter also talks about the forest and soil, the historical context of the forest concerning Paraja Highlanders, infrastructural conditions of the villages and rehabilitation colonies, demographic profile and so on. The whole scenario is supplemented by maps

of the Bagar village and Batsana Rehabilitation Colonies along with the multiple tables which provide a better understanding of the infrastructural positioning and population distribution.

The chapter “The Upper Kolab Project” investigates the Upper Kolab multipurpose dam project located in the Koraput district of Orissa state. This chapter focused on the historical context of the construction programs with various agencies (like Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Forest Department, Engineering Department etc.) and personnel (D.C., The Zone officer, Superintending engineer etc.) involved in this project. It also critically examines the economic cost of the project, the emergence of a town (Kolab Nagar), and the benefits of the project.

The next chapter “The Rehabilitation Policy and its Implementation” critically evaluates the rehabilitation policy and its issues and concerns among the Paraja highlanders. This chapter focussed on how beneficiaries were identified based on the criteria provided by the government. It is important to note that how people were rejecting the ideas of rehabilitation as their basic problems of livelihood were not addressed by the government policies. This chapter also provides a broad understanding of the identification of land, establishment of resettlement colonies, the structure of compensation, compensation to people, issues with afforestation, and RAC’s insensitivity towards Paraja’s cultural heritage.

The next chapter “The Process of Displacement and Rehabilitation” deals with the first objective by explaining the conflict between what was proposed and the realities which were far from the policies stated. This chapter starts with the story of ‘Kasab Rana’ by explaining how he fell into trap of the authorities and ultimately gained nothing but loans from multiple sources. This chapter provides useful insights that how people faced problems while claiming their compensation and during the process of rehabilitation. It pointed out that how their house was demolished, agricultural land was submerged and they were forced to work on daily wages. In this chapter, Dr Patnaik also

discussed the case of Dasi Jani (Disari, who cures illness by chanting Mantras), Madan Deodia, Govardhan Machadi, and Bhakt Ram Deodia who were the victims of the whole rehabilitation project. These cases provide useful insights that how this whole process does not only affect their social, economic and cultural organisations but also their psychological/emotional and sexual need in society. This chapter also highlights that how development officers were not doing their job efficiently and no developmental programs being implemented in the colony due to which Paraja tribe was compelled to live a pathetic life.

The last chapter "Changes in the Paraja Social Structure" deals with the final objective of the study. This chapter focuses on emerging village organisations, changes in economic activities, impact on kinship and marriage, changes at the institutional level, impact on belief and rituals, changes in the pattern of education and associated frustrations of the Paraja highlanders. As the villagers of the ParajaPandi have settled at two different places i.e. near Batsana and Lalmunda, they were going through a lot of structural changes. Earlier they had only Naik but at a new place villager felt the necessity of an assistant Naik which they called this position "Bandhu Naik". The process of displacement and rehabilitation were also limited their economic opportunities because of the environmental constraints they were facing at a new place. There were severe implications on the institution of marriage, belief and rituals. The non-functioning school was losing their trust in the whole process and the future of children was in a state of illusion. This chapter provides a broad understanding that how the people of Paraja highlanders found themselves exploited and marginalized into a new environment and social set up.

On concluding remark, this book was really helpful to me as I am also going to work on the topic of Manual Scavengers which is closely related to the issue of displacement, rehabilitation and social change. Dr Patnaik's journal of personal experience of fieldwork provided me with a good understanding of how to initiate ethnographic work on the field. It was interesting to know the way he had initially established his rapport by identifying common grounds to discuss and share ideas with the local inhabitants. He also used to share gifts with the children, women and man and the way it was very much related with the care and concern rather than any kind of monetary value is something very important to learn. I will also apply these ideas during my field visit. His account of critical evaluation of changes in the social structure of the Paraja Highlanders after the process of displacement and rehabilitation provided me with a broad understanding of how to cover various aspects in my future research work. Overall, reading this book was an insightful experience.

References:

Patnaik, S. M. (1996). *Displacement, Rehabilitation, and Social Change: The Case of the Paraja Highlanders.*