

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DISPLACEMENT TO THE URBAN AREAS AND ITS EFFECTS: A CASE STUDY

Diganta Kumar Phukan¹

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Jorhat College, Assam, India
E-mail: digantakr@rediffmail.com

Naba Krishna Borah²

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Jorhat Institute of Science & Technology, Assam, India

Abstract: Displacement is one of the causes for migration of indigenous people to urban areas. This study was conducted among the Mising people of North Lakhimpur Town, the Headquarter of the Lakhimpur District, Assam, who have migrated as a result of displacement due to heavy riverbank erosion and flood. The study depicted that they are having problem in case of food, shelter, dress, education, health and gradually the traditional culture is eroded among them and all these stand as the great challenge in front of them.

Keywords: Migration, Mising people, Indigenous people.

1. Introduction

It is a well known fact that most of the indigenous people worldwide are living in the rural areas. But due to various causes many indigenous people have to migrate from their original habitat to urban spheres and in this regard displacement is one of the causes which may take place by natural disasters, ethnic conflict, developmental projects, land disposition etc. But migration may bring challenges in respect to occupation, economy, livelihood, education of the child, habitation, recreation, traditional culture and many more. In a study of "UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues" it was revealed that indigenous peoples that migrate to urban areas face particular and often additional challenges, most prominently unemployment, limited access to services and inadequate housing. In addition, indigenous peoples in urban areas experience discrimination and have difficulties in sustaining their language, identity and culture and educating future generations which can result in a loss of indigenous heritage and value. (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/6_session_factsheet2.pdf)

The Misings – a major indigenous group of Assam have been living primarily near by the river banks in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat, Sonitpur Districts of the State. They have adopted cultivation primarily along with animal husbandry, weaving etc. as their income generating activities and they have a number of rituals and festivals celebrate due to different occasions. Traditionally, they have been following the Donyi:Polo: religion (Donyi implies the Sun considered as the mother and the Polo implies the Moon - the father of the tribe) and follow traditions in housing pattern, food pattern, dress pattern, language, literature, political system etc. for which it may be said that they are so much rich in their traditional culture.

But, many of the Mising people have displaced due to natural disasters like flood and riverbank erosion to governmentally rehabilitated areas, river dykes, urban areas etc. and it is a recurring phenomenon that many such victims are migrating from various riverbank areas to the North Lakhimpur Town, the Headquarter of the Lakhimpur District, Assam. But after migration, they face problems regarding economy, occupation, habitation, education, adaptation with an alien social environment and forestless, riverless natural environment, health, religion and many more. Therefore, such type of studies may be fruitful to know the challenges generated after displacement of those indigenous people to the urban areas like the North Lakhimpur Town and necessary measures can be adopted.

2. Objectives

The study was conducted with the following objectives-

(i) To find out whether any challenge is generated in their economy, residence, education, and health, /food, shelter,

education, health.

(ii) To explore whether any problem raised in adaptation with urban environment.

3. Methods

The study was conducted by collecting primary data with the help of interview and personal observation among some Mising people who have migrated as result of displacement for flood and heavy riverbank erosion. After collection of the data, they were processed, edited and finally analysed in a systematic manner.

4. Results

4.1 Effect on Food, Shelter and Dress

Almost all the migrant Mising families depend on agriculture along with some additional income generating activities such as animal husbandry, fishing, selling of wood and fuels kept from the river water etc. and at least a minimum standard of living could be maintained prior to displacement. But after displacement most of the people are unable to maintain at least such standard due to poor financial problem due to the lack of employment opportunity. Among them some males are being engaged as riksaw puller, security guards, in private farms, thelawala, house servant, hotel boy, daily wage earners etc. and most of the females are being engaged as house servant, daily wage earner in various sectors etc. But most of them could not carry out such works due to far away of the working place from their residential site, inadequate income, excessive physical labour etc. Regarding the employment another vulnerable fact was observed among them. As the single earnings of the aged people of a family could not meet be adequate for livelihood, most of them engage their child as hotel boy, sale's boy in the shops, house servant, handyman in private carriers, daily wage earners etc. All these show three basic facts, first, financial problem, secondly, child labour and thirdly occupational change from cultivators to other.

This is similar result with the study of Kaunga(2007) who found that 90 per cent of Masaai men who have migrated to the capital city, Dar Es Salaam, end up working as security guards, earning around \$40 per month. In another study by Cacho and Carling(2007) in the northern Philippine city of Baguio (where over 60 per cent of the population is made up of indigenous peoples from the Cordillera region), it is estimated that some 65 per cent of indigenous migrants suffer from extreme poverty.

Lack of proper residence is another vital problem faced by those people. Because of financial problem they have to live in such rented houses those which are of poor facilities, like small rooms constructed by bamboo and wood, lack of sufficient clean water, unhygienic latrine, bathroom and surroundings etc. Therefore, it implies that regarding their residents they are under a pathetic condition.

In such a study in Mexico City, Yannes(2007) stated that urban indigenous migrants generally live in lower quality housing, with more than one-third of indigenous homes in Mexico City having only one room and a higher proportion of indigenous homes incorporating asbestos sheeting. In another study of "UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues", it is revealed that indigenous peoples that migrate to urban areas face particular and often additional challenges, most prominently unemployment, limited access to services and inadequate housing.(www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/6_session_factsheet2.pdf).

4.2 Effect on Education and Health

It is a well known fact that displacement hinders in pursuing education. Among the people under study education is being greatly hampered due to poor economic condition. As reported by them, prior to displacement they were somewhat economically sound and then they were able to provide at least minimum facilities to their child in pursuing education. But, in present condition most of them are unable to provide minimum requirements. Especially, in adopting higher education they face more problems because of higher fees structures of the educational institutions, high price of books and other requirements, daily cost of to and fro journey, lunch etc. It results in the increase in the school drop-outs.

This result is in line with the result of a similar study in flood and erosion affected areas of Lakhimpur District, Assam of Gogoi and Phukan (2010). They found that many families including riverline tribal people were displaced due to loss of agricultural lands and residences by heavy floods and riverbank erosion. It causes serious problem in food and other requirements for which there was more expenditure in these items. This had a serious consequence in children's education. The drop-out of children at various levels of education has started increasing. Yanes(2007) in a study on migrated

indigenous people of Mexico City, revealed that indigenous people living in cities have been found to drop out of school to seek employment earlier than their non-indigenous counterparts and illiteracy rates among the urban indigenous population are four times higher than non-indigenous city-dwellers.

Regarding the health it was found that they are often under illness. It is due to heavy workload, living in un-hygienic condition, lack of clean water, adequate sanitation, lack of food and nutrition, lack of their awareness etc. Moreover, due to poor economic condition, most of them could not take adequate treatment in illness as reported by them.

In a study related to effects of flood and riverbank erosion on society, Phukan (2007) studied in the Matmora of Lakhimpur District of Assam – an area populated primarily by the Misings has reported that in this area flood and riverbank erosion force many Mising people to displacement and they have to face challenge regarding food, shelter, health, education etc.

4.3 Erosion of Traditional Culture

As they are residing in such an alien area where people of different castes, communities, religions, classes are living which hampers two aspects, first, their traditional culture. It is said that the Mising is a well known indigenous group having a rich traditional culture. The major traditional elements are observed in their housing pattern, food pattern, dress pattern, religious belief, traditional political system i.e. kebang etc. (the kebang is a democratic political system organized by elder male members of Mising village, which has the supreme power to settle disputes, take decision regarding socio-religious festivals, rituals etc.) Besides, they have their own language i.e. the Mising language. But, they could not follow these all sorts of cultural traits properly in such an alien social environment, even many young and children are giving up speaking the Mising language.

Secondly, often they are mentally harassed by many non-indigenous, high caste and high class people. Many people of those categories exhibit discrimination, unsocial manner to them with slang words and they are mentally disrupted with this attitude. Therefore, they could not adapt with such situations i.e. alien social environment with heterogeneous population as well as riverless, forestless natural environment, gradual erosion of traditional cultural traits and unsocial manner of some of the urban dwellers.

In a similar study conducted by Sema (2007) in India pointed that negative impacts of urban migration on indigenous peoples in India have included cultural erosion, loss of language, exploitation and discrimination. In another study conducted in Bangladesh Islam and Rashid (2011) stated that the major rivers e.g., the Padma, the Jamuna, and the Meghna, erode several thousand hectares of floodplain making thousands of people landless and homeless every year. Displacement marginalized them in respect of livelihood patterns, adaptation strategies and relationships with the local people etc.

5. Conclusion

From the study it was found that the Mising people who have migrated to the North Lakhimpur Town as a result of displacement for heavy riverbank erosion of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries are under vulnerable financial problem due to lack of employment, causing problem regarding food, shelter, dress, etc. and it leads to drop out from education of many displaced students as they have to engage in financial sectors to help their family raising child labour in many cases. Regarding their health it was found that lack of nutritious food, impure drinking water, and unhygienic living condition encourages many diseases among them.

Besides, they could not adapt with this urban environment because of heterogeneous population, gradual erosion of their traditional culture and unsocial manner exhibited by some non-indigenous urban dwellers. Therefore, governmental and non-governmental agencies should take some measures such as proper rehabilitation with at least housing, sanitation and drinking water facility, employment opportunity, financial aid, proper aid for pursuing education and health security etc. Such types of measures could uplift their present miserable condition to some extent.

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