The Impact of Displacement on Tribal Communities: A Reading of Rajam Krishnan's When the Kurunji Blooms Through Michael M. Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction Model

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Abstract:

The clutches of displacement are one among the many haunting issues that present-day societies face owing to postcolonial atrocities, disasters, and various development projects. Having been uprooted from their familiar surroundings means a multi-pronged disaster at every level for the societies facing such an experience. Disruption in lifestyle patterns, social networks and cultural security threatens the foundations of a community therefore producing conflicts at various layers. From prehistoric times Adivasis' existence has been devoid of mainland interferences due to which their voices are unable to reach national attention in the last few decades. When it comes to displacement of Adivasis, the hue and cry is far less compared to the other societies facing similar experiences. Rehabilitation is also in a state of lack. The distortion that might fall on Adivasi communities at the dawn of the development project can be seen in When the Kurunji Blooms by Rajam Krishnan. The novel pictures the fall of the Badagas, a community native to the Nigiri Hills, at the advent of the hydroelectric project that brings electricity, water, and education by shattering communal values.

This paper attempts to read the novel along with the anthropologist Michael M. Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction Model (IRR) as the model offers multiple critical lenses for textual analysis.

Keywords: Displacement, Tribal, Development, When the Kurunji Blooms, Cernea's IRR Model

INTRODUCTION:

Displacement has become a pervasive and deeply impactful phenomenon in the modern world whose impact alters societies nations and global dynamics. The term displacement encompasses the forced movement of individuals and communities due to a myriad of reasons, including conflict, war, environmental degradation, economic hardships, and political persecution. It can categorised under two types such as .(1)displacement affected by natural disasters in the forms of droughts, floods, earthquakes and cyclones; and (2) the second type is displacement due to developmental projects like dams, mines, thermal power plants, industries, railways, roads, ports and others. (Ali and Imam 65). Displacement, whether internal or across borders, leads to complexities at different levels that disrupt lives, ruptures

societal fabrics and engenders multifaceted challenges that reverberate across local and international spheres. Its effects resonate through humanitarian crises, the global refugee dilemma, strains on host countries, socio-cultural upheaval, economic perturbations, health adversities, and enduring psychological scars. As such, understanding the consequences of displacement is paramount in navigating the complexities of contemporary geopolitics, economics, and humanitarian endeavours. As of today, there are various types of displacement, each characterized by different causes and circumstances:

1. **Refugees:** Refugees are individuals who have fled their home countries due to well-founded fears of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. They seek refuge in another country and are unable or unwilling to return due to fear of persecution.

2. **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** Unlike refugees, IDPs have been forced to leave their homes but remain within the borders of their own country. They face similar threats and challenges as refugees but do not cross international borders. IDPs often lack the same legal protections and assistance available to refugees.

3. **Asylum Seekers:** Asylum seekers are individuals who have fled their home countries and are seeking protection in another country. They apply for asylum, claiming refugee status, and await a decision on their application.

4. **Environmental Displacement:** This type of displacement occurs due to environmental factors such as natural disasters (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes), slow-onset environmental changes (like desertification or sea-level rise due to climate change), and environmental degradation (deforestation, land degradation). These conditions force people to leave their homes and sometimes their native regions.

5. **Development-Induced Displacement:** Development projects like infrastructure development, urbanization, or construction of dams or highways can displace communities. These displacements occur when people are forced to leave their homes or lands to make way for such projects.

6. **Conflict-Induced Displacement:** This type of displacement is caused by armed conflict, war, or generalized violence within a country. Civilians flee their homes to escape violence, persecution, or the direct impact of warfare.

7. **Economic Displacement:** Economic factors such as poverty, lack of job opportunities, economic crises, or financial instability can lead individuals or families to move, either within their own country or across borders, in search of better economic prospects.

Each type of displacement presents unique challenges and requires fitting responses. Addressing the needs of displaced populations involves measures such as providing humanitarian aid, ensuring access to necessities like shelter, food, healthcare, and education, as well as seeking durable solutions such as resettlement, integration, or voluntary return where feasible and safe. Understanding the distinct circumstances and causes behind each type of displacement is crucial in developing effective strategies to assist and protect those affected.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study focuses on as aspect of Development Induced Development (DID) and its effects on Adivasis communities using Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction Model (IRR). Though the model offers significant factors regarding the effects of displacement on displaced communities in the place of their resettlement, the scope of these critical lenses can be extended to the analysis of the change in living patterns, and cultural norms before the physical displacement also. Since the novel deals with the

struggles of the community that is facing the ensuing displacement, out of the construction of the dam, this paper borrows these critical lenses for the analysis of the work. The three factors, namely (a). Landlessness, (b). Joblessness and (h). Community disarticulation is taken for the analysis. These selected factors are utilized in an interconnected manner as they are the outcomes of the same nexus.

LITERARY REVIEW:

In *Dams, Development, Displacement And Tribals* B G VERGHES opines that he largest part of India's forest, mineral and water wealth, outside the Himalayan belt, lies within tribal India. Varghese (35). Since India is a developing nation it is nearly impossible to use the wealth available for the development of the country without disturbing the Adivasis. However, the adverse effects that are produced as the result of DID can be managed by adhering to some methods such as making the Adivasis as the shareholders of the project, providing employment for the people, equalling the loss of land with land as the compensation etc.

Kantilal Bhuria and Vikarant Bhuria has asserted that abundance of rich mineral sources on tribal lands has attracted commercial interests. In return, such commercial activities have marginalized the tribal voices and resulted in the loss of autonomy of the land. (Kantilal and Bhuria 48). Such action has led to the erosion of indigenous cultures and identities as a consequence. Separation from ancestral lands disrupts traditional knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices that are intricately tied to the land. Indigenous tribes often find themselves grappling with identity crises as they navigate unfamiliar territories, distant from their historical roots.

Displacement as a "human-made phenomenon" (Ali and Imam, 65) disrupts the socioeconomic fabric of indigenous communities. Forced removals strip of their livelihoods, traditional means of sustenance, and access to resources. As they adapt to new environments, these communities often encounter marginalization, poverty, and limited opportunities for education and healthcare, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Another major crisis of the process of displacement is the contempt of the host community towards the displaced societies. Most often the labours, unpreferred by the host community are forced upon the migrants with mediocre wages. As they are not in the position to resist the Adivasis have to undergo such blatant exploitation to provide livelihood for their families. The causes of dislocation extend itself to traumatic experience also as it reverberates through generations, inflicting deep psychological wounds on indigenous populations. Loss of connection to land, cultural disintegration, and the stress of adaptation in new surroundings contribute to mental health issues within these communities. The displacement of indigenous tribes jeopardizes their traditional livelihoods that are intricately linked to their ancestral territories. For many, their survival is reliant on sustainable practices tied to specific ecosystems, such as farming, hunting, fishing, or herding. Displacement disrupts these practices, rendering communities dependent on unfamiliar and often unsustainable means of subsistence.

Moreover, their knowledge of medicinal plants, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management is lost when displaced from their natural habitats. The consequences reverberate beyond the immediate displacement, affecting the delicate balance of ecosystems and endangering traditional practices that have sustained these communities for centuriesThe term forced displacement encompasses the relocation of people "to build infrastructure for new industries, irrigation, transportation highways, power generation, or for urban developments such as hospitals, schools, and airports." (Cernea 7).

Literary Representation of Badgas in *When the Kurunji Blooms*

Literature holds a supreme place in recording the voices of Adivasis among other multimedia elements that bring the attention of mainstream societies toward Adivasis. The Adivasi narratives register the experience of indigenous communities without any biases. Such narratives fight against stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the Adivasi self in the mainstream world. Removing the stigmatization that is associated with the Adivasis texts upholds the lifestyles of those communities and strongly argues for due representation. When the Kurnji Blooms deals with the Badaga Adivasis by exploring their lifestyle with a pictorial lense where the tradion , identity, culture are provided with their importance to the wellbeing of the community.

The Badagas are the Adivasis who settled in the hills of Nilgiris nearly centuries ago whereas the hills were already home to six other hill tribes that are native to the land. Though the term Adivasi itself represents the early settlers of the land, there are scholars who extend its meaning to the communities that migrated once to the different lands under the term. In the novel there generations of the Badagas are described with the swift transitions that take place around the hills, leaving the community in a state of flux as it fumbles between catching up with the development and simultaneously safeguarding the tradition. Rajam Krishnan the author of the work, pictures the community at a time when the whole century is undergoing an evolution. Allegorising the scenario after the independence, the novel depicts the community in the blooming of Kurunji flower, a flower that blooms once in evry twelve year,in the end and the ongoing construction of a hydroelectric project that breathed developments into the community at the cost environment and peace.

IRR MODEL:

Impoverishment Risks, Risk Management, Reconstruction Model is found by the Sociologist Michael. M. Cernea, that "highlights the intrinsic risks that cause impoverishment through displacement as well as the ways to counter climate or mitigate these risks." (Cernea 88) .Cernea lists here few earlier models that attempted to provide guidelines in settlement and displacement . However the lack of a wholistic approach makes the model unsuitable for the forced displacement discourse. Chambers three-stage model for settlement and Nelson model for new settlements in Latin America. Measures suggested by these two model are based on the experiences gained form voluntary settlers and conceptualized the institutional/organizational dimensions of managed land-settlement programs. (Cernea 5). Scudders and Colson's 1982 model containing four different stages explores the experiences of the displaced people by analysing their behaviour. The aforesaid model limits itself in its incapacity to be applied for the settler missing the final two stages of the model. At last Cernea comments on the conceptual framework provided by Immanuel Marks in 1990 for the management of refugee settlers. Turning his attention to the shortcomings of these models Cernea asserts that "None of these models has placed at its center the onset of impoverishment, its unfolding, and the process of escaping impoverishment." (Cernea 11).

Cernea list the following as the risk factors that should be given proper care as the displacement takes place.

(a) Landlessness; (b) Joblessness; (c) Homelessness; (d) Marginalization; (e) Food insecurity; (f) Increased morbidity; (g) Loss of access to common property resources; and (h) Community disarticulation. Among these eight enlisted factors, this paper selects a few prominent risks and hold more potential in the destruction of the community.

Rajam Krishnan's *When the Kurunji Blooms* and Cernea's IRR Model: A Reading.

Commenting on landlessness Cernea asserts that the loss of land affects the productive systems, commercial activities and livelihoods, resulting in decapitation of the people. (Cernea 13). In the Maragathamalai hatti, where the novel takes place most of the productive system of the people is based on agriculture produces. As the construction process of the dam takes place the people of the 'hatti' are divided into two groups, the elderly people who demand the preservation of the agricultural livelihood of the community and the younger generation, now educated looking for jobs that would suit their qualifications. The villagers use traditional crops such as *samai* and *thinai, potatoes* are later replaced by tea plants symbolizing the currents of modernism. Regardless of the change in the sowing of crops, the community still thrives on its agricultural roots.

The land is considered a sacred mother is an irreplaceable element as it also serves as the bondage with the memories of ancestors who ploughed the land earlier. During the argument with Rangan and his father Jogi, regarding submerging their family land for the construction project, the reverence given to land is visible. Trying to get the consent of his father, Nanjan says "What if we lose the land, the government will not just take it away. They will pay as a sum of good money for it" (Krishnan 249). To which Jogi replies. "Can paper currency be equated to a mother? Can one put a price on a mother?" (Krishan 251). Being equated with the mother, the land holds the value of memory, identity and bondage not the aspect of wealth. The fear of Jogi about losing the land is also connected with the aspect of survival. Once the family is unrooted from its agricultural basis, it becomes unavoidable to look for jobs elsewhere to earn a livelihood. Losing ownership of the land results in the eradication of livelihood as people become dependent on their survival. Appearance of shops, vehicles, non-native workers in the later part of the novel echoes the disturbances happened to the community, a significant change in the livelihood. Due to developments, the members of the community who once did works based on agriculture now , working in the construction cites doing odd jobs. Cernea sees the "risk of losing wage employment" is in a high level at both rural and urban setting. From the evidence available in the novel, one could confirm that there is a shift in the lifestyle of Badagas as the result of dam construction. Due to the cheap availability of labour, the community members no longer practice customs such as cultivating crops jointly and guarding it at turns, as landlords like Kariamalla started to hire the newcomers.

> "Ever since more people had come to work in Kariamalla's tea estates, law and order had begun to deteriorate in the area. The system of each one taking a turn at the night watch had almost disappeared. The coolies who worked under Kariamalla guarded his estates. A handful of others living in the hatti maintained the old traditions and customs; they cultivated the land jointly and guarded it in turns, Yet, the feeling of togetherness which had been there earlier, had gone. (Krishnan 235).

Such changes influenced by developments, make "labours lose access to works" (Cernea 14) and as a result leave the members of the community in the gloom. From the agriculture basis, the community looks for some menial jobs that offer low income. Ragammai , a charater in the novel serves as the example for the danger of losing lands. In the later part of the novel , her son is driving a lorry to provide for the family. Their suffering is hinted through the narration as to stand evidence to what could happen after the loss of land. Jogi while trying to educate his sons regarding the importance of land says "They grabbed the land at Maragathamalai to build the colony and now Rangammai's family is suffering." (Krishnan 250).. Through the words of Jogi, the importance of the land to the thriving of the Adivasi communities is proven. As the last point of the argument, the researcher wants to discuss the element of community disarticulation of the community.

Agriculture is the basis of the Badagas therefore the land is an indispensable element of their lives. Such reverence for land is stuffed all through in the narrative itself. Due to the distinctive values of the community that markedly vary from the mainstream values, the concept of replacing money with land is considered as an abomination. As Nanjan's father Jogi, asks after questioning the worthiness of his education here becomes the representation of the dilemma that happens among every Adivasi community, facing the option of development at the cost of identity, land, culture, environment, etc. Due to the loss of land, the displaced communities look for livelihood elsewhere through different means. In the as the land have been submerged for the project, people do some odd jobs to earn a livelihood. As the land is taken up , the people whose livelihood was dependent on agricultural work are affected. Even though they are given some odd jobs in the construction projects, they reduced to be workers whereas they were the owners of the land.

The process of losing jobs becomes evident from the characters in the novel, before the loss of land there was the availability of agricultural labour but after that people started working elsewhere. The family of Ragmammai in the novel serves as a better example for this purpose. Like everyone in the community, they were also dependent upon agricultural products in the beginning. Once they lose their land, they are forced to work for others for their survival. Raman, the son of Rangammai drives a lorry to earn a living. Jogi, the father of Nanjan cites the family as an example of what landlessness could do to people. He says "They grabbed the land at Maragathamalai to build the colony and now Rangammai's family is suffering." (Krishnan 250). It is also to be noted that there is new business springing everywhere over the hills, that somehow offers jobs for the settlers. Jobs including those offered at the development projects are "short-lived and not sustainable" (Cernea 57). It is also to be noted that such temporary losses are more conducive to the migratory works and need qualification also. As the story unfolds, there is a steady increase in the appearance of new shops along with houses that cater to the needs of people. There is an established town called 'Othai' with its city infrastructure signalling the already instituted developments. Such new elements discretely enter into the community and make it a monopoly. It is not the appearance of the people on the lands that is a matter of concern but the adverse effects they bear on the environment and community by posing dangers. As the narrative itself is located at the moment of India's independence, different projects have been carried out all over the country.

Looking at the developments itself, a remarkable change in the landscape took place, as there are roads with transaction facilities, motor vehicles, and schools for the children. Though such evidence is only given hint in the course of the narrative they hold an important place while looking at the landscape as a whole, a rapidly changing one. There is no need for evidence as such developments only happen in the suitable location, where there is a high chance of people already living, especially in hilly areas. Instances in the novel, such as Paaru, being approached by the headmaster of the school to give her land for the construction of buildings. There is other evidence as the replacement of crops with tea estates and due to the need for labour, the workers are brought into the populating the place more. This development has disturbed the social fabric and has dismantled the patterns of organization and interpersonal ties (Cernea 30). Having been populated by people, and introduced to developments the community customs have been severed. Customs such as watching over lands at night in shifts has been replaced since the plantation of tea and the workers available at cheap price. As the valleys were replaced by factories and teas estates there were no kuruṇji flowers to be seen.

Conclusion:

Displacement induced by natural disasters is beyond the control of humans as they happen unprecedentedly most of the time. Whereas displacement induced by development can to prevented or at least remedied with suitable provisions. In unavoidable cases, it can be remedied with suitable provisions such as land for land policy, a conducive rehabilitation process, etc. It is time that the sufferings of the few are made known to many who enjoy the benefits to spread awareness and they remember the sacrifices of many kinds by the Adivasi communities.

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