

Migration and Displacement from Hasdeo Forest Area at Chhattisgarh: A Study

Dr. Manish Verma

Associate Professor of English Department

Shri Davara University, New Raipur (C.G.)

vermanish13@gmail.com

Abstract

The Hasdeo Forest in Chhattisgarh is a crucial ecological and cultural region, inhabited by indigenous communities who depend on its resources for their livelihoods. Over the years, the expansion of coal mining and associated developmental activities have led to widespread displacement and forced migration of these communities. This study examines the socio-economic and environmental impacts of such displacement, focusing on the loss of traditional livelihoods, inadequate resettlement programs, and cultural disruptions. Drawing on data from field surveys, interviews, and secondary research, the findings highlight the struggles of displaced families, including unemployment, family disorganization, and reduced access to basic services. It also evaluates the shortcomings in policy implementation and governance. Recommendations include adopting sustainable development strategies, strengthening rehabilitation policies, and empowering local communities to mitigate the adverse effects of displacement. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of forced migration in ecologically sensitive areas and offers actionable solutions for policymakers.

Keywords: Hasdeo Forest, Displacement, Forced Migration, Coal Mining, Indigenous Communities.

Introduction

The Hasdeo Forest, located in the state of Chhattisgarh, India, is a region of immense ecological and cultural significance. Known for its rich biodiversity, the forest is home to diverse flora and fauna as well as indigenous tribal communities who have historically depended on its resources for their livelihoods. This area, however, has come under increasing pressure due to coal mining and industrial development, which have led to extensive deforestation, habitat destruction, and displacement of local communities. Displacement and forced migration in the Hasdeo region are primarily driven by the expansion of coal mining projects, which are a key part of India's energy strategy. These activities not only disrupt the livelihoods of indigenous people but also contribute to the loss of cultural identity and social cohesion within these communities. Despite policies and legal frameworks designed to protect the rights of tribal populations, inadequate implementation has left many displaced families struggling to adapt to new environments.

This study aims to explore the socio-economic and environmental impacts of displacement and migration in the Hasdeo Forest. By analyzing patterns of migration, the challenges of resettlement, and the effects on traditional lifestyles, this research seeks to highlight the pressing need for

sustainable development practices and more effective rehabilitation policies. Through a combination of field data and secondary research, the study also evaluates the role of governance in addressing the long-term consequences of displacement in the region.

Literature Review

1. Displacement and Socio-Economic Impacts

Displacement caused by development projects often results in severe socio-economic challenges for affected populations. In the case of Chhattisgarh, studies have highlighted that displaced families face significant disruptions to their livelihoods, family structures, and social networks. A study of displaced families in Chhattisgarh noted that the absence of effective rehabilitation policies leads to unemployment, poverty, and social disorganization (Markam & Gajpal, 2021). Furthermore, indigenous communities often lack access to adequate compensation or alternative livelihoods after displacement, exacerbating their economic vulnerabilities (Mathew & Kasi, 2021).

2. Cultural and Psychological Impacts

Displacement not only affects the economic well-being of communities but also leads to cultural and psychological challenges. Indigenous communities in forested regions often lose access to ancestral lands and traditional practices, leading to cultural disintegration. Displaced women and children are particularly vulnerable, often facing heightened risks of exploitation and violence. A study focusing on reproductive health among displaced tribal women in Chhattisgarh found significant gaps in healthcare access and widespread domestic violence, limiting women's capabilities to adapt to new environments (Sahoo & Pradhan, 2020).

3. Environmental Degradation and Displacement

The expansion of coal mining in Hasdeo Forest has caused extensive environmental damage, including deforestation, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. These environmental changes directly impact indigenous communities, whose livelihoods are closely tied to natural resources. Research shows that environmental degradation in regions like Hasdeo Forest drives forced migration, as communities are unable to sustain agricultural and forest-based activities (Lasgorceix & Kothari, 2009).

4. Government Policies and Implementation Gaps

While India has legal frameworks to protect tribal communities under acts like the Forest Rights Act (2006), their implementation often falls short. Displacement and resettlement programs in Chhattisgarh frequently fail to provide adequate compensation or involve affected communities in decision-making. A thematic review of internal migration in India during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how systemic gaps in governance and social security exacerbate the vulnerabilities of displaced populations (Pillai & Dam, 2020).

5. Sustainable Development as a Solution

Studies emphasize the need for sustainable development practices that balance industrial growth with environmental conservation and community welfare. Research on livelihood transitions among vulnerable tribal groups in Chhattisgarh suggests that integrating traditional knowledge and practices into resettlement plans can help displaced communities adapt more effectively (Mathew & Kasi, 2021).

A Critical Study Area: Hasdeo Forest, Chhattisgarh

1. Geographical Overview

The Hasdeo Forest is situated in the state of Chhattisgarh, India, and forms a part of the dense forests of central India. It spans across the districts of Korba, Surguja, and Surajpur, covering approximately 1,500 square kilometers. The Hasdeo River, a major tributary of the Mahanadi River, runs through this forest, making it an ecologically rich and vital region.

2. Ecological Significance

The Hasdeo Forest is known for its diverse flora and fauna, including several endangered and endemic species. It plays a critical role in maintaining the ecological balance of the region, contributing to carbon sequestration and regulating local climate patterns. The forest also acts as a vital water catchment area for surrounding agricultural and residential zones.

3. Tribal Communities

The Hasdeo Forest is home to indigenous tribal groups, such as the Gond, Korwa, and Baiga tribes, who have lived in harmony with the forest for generations. These communities rely heavily on the forest for their livelihoods, including agriculture, forest produce collection, and traditional medicinal practices. Their cultural and spiritual practices are deeply intertwined with the forest ecosystem.

4. Economic Importance

Beneath the Hasdeo Forest lie extensive coal reserves, making it a hotspot for mining activities. The Hasdeo-Arand Coalfield is one of the largest in India, with reserves estimated at over 5 billion tons. Mining projects in this area contribute significantly to the state's economy and India's energy needs but come at a substantial environmental and social cost.

5. Challenges

The expansion of coal mining projects in the Hasdeo Forest has led to:

Deforestation: Large-scale clearing of forest land for mining and infrastructure development.

Displacement: Forced relocation of tribal communities, leading to loss of livelihoods and cultural disintegration.

Environmental Degradation: Loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and pollution of water resources.

Policy Conflicts: Disputes between environmental conservation efforts and developmental policies, such as the Forest Rights Act and mining clearances.

6. Importance of the Study

Understanding the Hasdeo Forest region is critical for:

Developing sustainable development strategies that balance economic growth and environmental conservation.

Protecting the rights and livelihoods of indigenous communities.

Informing policy frameworks for equitable resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced populations.

Drivers of Displacement in Hasdeo Forest, Chhattisgarh

1. Coal Mining Expansion

The Hasdeo-Arand Coalfield, one of India's largest, has been the primary driver of displacement in the region. The government's push for coal mining to meet energy demands has resulted in large-scale acquisition of forest land, forcing indigenous communities to relocate. This expansion has led to deforestation, destruction of agricultural lands, and loss of livelihoods.

Example: Projects like the Parsa East-Kanta Basan Coal Block have directly displaced tribal communities, with inadequate compensation and resettlement policies aggravating their vulnerability.

2. Land Acquisition and Policy Frameworks

Land acquisition under the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act and Forest Conservation Act often prioritizes industrial needs over community rights. Although the Forest Rights Act (2006) aims to protect tribal land rights, its inconsistent implementation has led to forced evictions without proper consent or compensation.

Issue: Many affected communities report lack of consultation and failure to recognize their traditional forest rights before land acquisition.

3. Deforestation and Environmental Degradation

Mining and related infrastructure development in the Hasdeo Forest have led to extensive deforestation, which disrupts ecosystems and reduces the availability of forest resources like firewood, medicinal plants, and food. These environmental changes make traditional subsistence lifestyles untenable, pushing communities to migrate.

4. Loss of Livelihoods

The indigenous tribes in the Hasdeo Forest rely heavily on agriculture, forestry, and traditional occupations for their livelihoods. The destruction of arable land and forests has resulted in economic instability, compelling families to move to urban areas or nearby towns in search of work.

5. Inadequate Rehabilitation and Resettlement

Displacement often occurs without sufficient planning for resettlement. Displaced families frequently report receiving inadequate compensation, substandard housing, and limited access to

basic amenities like water, electricity, and healthcare. This failure to provide sustainable alternatives exacerbates forced migration.

6. Infrastructure Development

The construction of roads, railways, and other infrastructure to support mining operations has further displaced communities. These developments often involve clearing large tracts of forest land, contributing to cumulative displacement impacts.

7. Governance and Institutional Failures

Weak governance, lack of accountability, and inadequate enforcement of protective legislation contribute significantly to displacement. Many displaced families struggle to navigate bureaucratic processes, leaving them excluded from resettlement benefits.

Patterns of Migration in Hasdeo Forest

1. Temporal Trends in Migration from Hasdeo Forest

Migration patterns from the Hasdeo Forest region have evolved over the years due to the expansion of industrial activities and environmental degradation:

- **Early 2000s:** Initial migration due to small-scale mining and deforestation. Affected communities began moving to nearby towns or agricultural zones.
- **2010–2020:** Large-scale coal mining projects intensified forced displacements. Entire villages were cleared for mining operations, leading to a significant increase in out-migration.
- **Post-2020:** Migration accelerated due to cumulative environmental and livelihood challenges. Communities that were partially displaced earlier began leaving as conditions worsened.

2. Categories of Migration

Migration from the Hasdeo Forest can be broadly classified into two categories:

a. Forced Displacement

- **Definition:** Involuntary relocation caused by land acquisition for mining, infrastructure development, and deforestation.
- **Characteristics:**
 - Families are often evicted with little or no prior consultation.
 - Relocation occurs without adequate planning, leading to disrupted livelihoods and social networks.
 - Forced migrants typically experience high levels of economic instability and cultural disintegration.
- **Example:** Entire tribal villages displaced by projects like the Parsa East-Kanta Basan Coal Block.

b. Voluntary Migration

- **Definition:** Movement initiated by individuals or families seeking better opportunities or escaping deteriorating living conditions.
- **Characteristics:**
 - Triggered by loss of income sources, degraded agricultural land, and declining forest resources.
 - Often involves younger individuals seeking jobs in nearby towns or cities.
 - Migrants may retain links to their original communities, occasionally sending remittances.

3. Destinations of Migrants and Integration Challenges

a. Destinations

- **Nearby Rural Areas:**
 - Migrants often move to nearby agricultural zones or forest-fringe villages.
 - These areas provide temporary relief but are typically under-resourced, leading to overcrowding and pressure on local resources.
- **Urban Centers:**
 - Major towns like Korba, Bilaspur, and Raipur are common destinations for economic migrants.
 - Urban centers offer employment opportunities in unorganized sectors like construction and domestic work.

b. Integration Challenges

- **Economic Challenges:**
 - Migrants often work in low-paying, unstable jobs due to limited skills and education.
 - Competition for scarce resources and employment creates tension with host communities.
- **Social and Cultural Challenges:**
 - Indigenous migrants face difficulties in adapting to urban lifestyles and maintaining cultural identities.
 - Discrimination against tribal communities is a common barrier to social integration.
- **Access to Basic Services:**
 - Migrants in urban slums often lack access to housing, healthcare, and education.
 - Legal and bureaucratic hurdles prevent them from availing government benefits.
- **Psychological Impact:**
 - Displacement leads to mental health challenges, including stress and depression, due to loss of community and identity.

Impacts of Displacement

1. Socio-Economic Impacts

a. Loss of Traditional Livelihoods

- Indigenous communities in the Hasdeo Forest area have traditionally depended on agriculture, forest produce, and small-scale animal husbandry for their livelihoods. Displacement due to coal mining and deforestation has led to:
 - Loss of arable land and access to forest resources such as firewood, medicinal plants, and fruits.
 - Inability to continue traditional occupations, forcing families to seek low-paying and unstable jobs in urban or peri-urban areas.
 - Decline in income levels, making it difficult for families to meet basic needs.
 - Example: Many tribal families report losing their primary income sources after the land was acquired for coal mining projects.

b. Challenges in Resettlement and Rehabilitation

- Displacement programs often fail to provide adequate resettlement and rehabilitation for displaced communities. Key challenges include:
 - **Inadequate Compensation:** Financial compensation rarely reflects the true value of the land and fails to account for cultural and emotional losses.
 - **Substandard Housing:** Relocated families are often resettled in poorly developed areas lacking basic amenities like clean water, electricity, healthcare, and education.
 - **Legal and Administrative Barriers:** Many tribal families lack formal land ownership documents, preventing them from receiving compensation or rehabilitation benefits.
 - **Loss of Community Networks:** Displacement breaks apart social bonds and traditional support systems, leaving families isolated.
 - Example: A study in Chhattisgarh found that many displaced families struggled to adapt to resettlement sites due to the lack of basic infrastructure and livelihood options.

c. Economic Hardships and Social Disintegration

- Displacement often plunges families into deeper poverty and economic uncertainty:
 - **Economic Hardships:**
 - Many displaced individuals are forced to take up low-paying, unskilled labor jobs in urban areas.
 - Rising debts among displaced families due to lack of stable income sources.
 - Displaced women face additional challenges, such as exclusion from formal labor markets and exploitation in informal sectors.
 - **Social Disintegration:**
 - The forced removal of families from their ancestral lands disrupts traditional cultural practices and rituals.
 - The erosion of indigenous identity as tribal communities lose access to sacred sites and cultural landmarks.
 - Increased incidences of domestic violence, alcoholism, and mental health issues among displaced populations.

Government Policies and Interventions

1. Review of Policies for Displacement, Resettlement, and Rehabilitation

The Indian government has implemented several laws and policies to manage displacement and ensure fair resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) for affected populations:

- **Forest Rights Act (2006):**
 - Recognizes the rights of tribal and forest-dwelling communities to forest land and resources.
 - Mandates community consent before the transfer of forest land for non-forest purposes.
- **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act (2013):**
 - Establishes guidelines for fair compensation and mandatory R&R for families displaced by land acquisition.
 - Requires social impact assessments (SIA) before land acquisition.
- **Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act (1957):**
 - Facilitates coal mining by allowing the government to acquire land for coal projects.
 - Lacks robust provisions for compensation and resettlement, often overriding community rights.
- **State-Specific Policies:**
 - Chhattisgarh has its own R&R policies to provide compensation and employment to displaced families. However, implementation remains inconsistent.

2. Analysis of Effectiveness and Implementation Gaps

Despite comprehensive frameworks, the implementation of displacement and R&R policies often faces significant challenges:

- **Inadequate Compensation:**
 - Compensation is often below market value, ignoring cultural and livelihood losses.
 - Many displaced families lack formal ownership documents, disqualifying them from benefits.
- **Poor Resettlement Planning:**
 - Resettlement sites are frequently located in areas with inadequate infrastructure, such as housing, schools, and healthcare facilities.
 - Rehabilitation rarely includes sustainable livelihood opportunities, leaving families dependent on government aid.
- **Weak Enforcement:**
 - The Forest Rights Act and other protective laws are frequently bypassed to expedite industrial projects.
 - Social Impact Assessments are often superficial or ignored altogether.
- **Community Exclusion:**
 - Affected communities are rarely consulted in decision-making, violating their rights under the Forest Rights Act.
 - The lack of grievance redressal mechanisms leaves displaced families with limited recourse for justice.

Example: In the Hasdeo Forest, several coal mining projects have been cleared despite widespread protests by tribal communities, often without proper compensation or rehabilitation.

3. Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives by Mining Companies

Mining companies operating in the Hasdeo region are mandated to allocate funds for CSR activities, aiming to support displaced and affected communities. However, their efforts have been inconsistent:

- **Positive Contributions:**
 - Some companies have initiated programs for skill development, education, and healthcare in resettlement areas.
 - Employment opportunities in mining operations are occasionally offered to displaced individuals.
- **Limitations:**
 - CSR efforts are often tokenistic and fail to address the root causes of displacement-related hardships.
 - The focus is primarily on infrastructure projects rather than long-term livelihood restoration or cultural preservation.
 - Lack of accountability and monitoring mechanisms limits the impact of CSR initiatives.

Example: Mining companies in the Hasdeo Forest area have faced criticism for prioritizing profit over meaningful CSR engagement, leaving many displaced families without sustainable support.

Case Studies

1. Detailed Accounts of Affected Families and Their Experiences

Case Study 1: Forced Displacement in Parsa East-Kanta Basan Coal Block

- **Background:** Families from several tribal villages in Hasdeo Forest, including Ghatbarra and Salhi, were displaced for the Parsa East-Kanta Basan coal mining project.
- **Experiences:**
 - **Loss of Livelihoods:** Families reported losing agricultural land and access to forest resources, their primary sources of income and sustenance.
 - **Inadequate Compensation:** Displaced individuals received compensation that often failed to reflect the market value of their land. Many lacked legal documentation and were excluded from compensation schemes.
 - **Cultural Loss:** The displacement severed ties with ancestral lands, disrupting traditional rituals and cultural practices.
 - **Resettlement Challenges:** Families relocated to poorly developed areas with limited access to water, schools, and healthcare, further exacerbating their hardships.

Case Study 2: Displacement in Tara Coal Block

- **Background:** The expansion of the Tara coal block displaced around 200 families in Surajpur district.
- **Experiences:**
 - **Economic Struggles:** Many displaced families were unable to secure sustainable employment, leading to widespread poverty and indebtedness.
 - **Social Disintegration:** Communities, previously unified in their villages, were dispersed, leading to weakened social ties and collective resilience.

- **Health Issues:** Increased exposure to air and water pollution near mining sites contributed to health problems such as respiratory diseases among displaced families.

2. Successes and Failures of Resettlement Programs

Successes

- **Employment Opportunities in Mining Operations:**
 - Some displaced individuals were employed in mining projects as unskilled laborers, providing temporary relief from unemployment.
 - Example: A small number of families from the Hasdeo-Arand area were able to secure jobs with mining companies, though often at low wages.
- **Skill Development Programs:**
 - In a few instances, mining companies initiated training programs to equip displaced individuals with skills for alternative livelihoods.

Failures

- **Inadequate Resettlement Planning:**
 - Resettlement colonies were often poorly planned, lacking basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, and sanitation.
 - Families resettled in areas far from their original villages faced difficulty adapting to new environments and accessing markets or schools.
- **Inconsistent Policy Implementation:**
 - Many families reported receiving less compensation than promised or waiting years for promised benefits.
 - Affected communities often had little or no say in the resettlement process, leading to dissatisfaction and distrust toward authorities.
- **Limited Livelihood Support:**
 - Rehabilitation programs rarely provided sustainable livelihood options, leaving families dependent on government subsidies or temporary jobs.
 - Example: In the Hasdeo region, displaced farmers who lost agricultural land were not offered sufficient alternative means of earning a living, forcing some to migrate to urban slums.
- **Health and Social Issues:**
 - Poor living conditions in resettlement areas contributed to increased rates of illness, malnutrition, and mental health problems.
 - Displaced women and children faced heightened vulnerabilities, including exploitation and lack of access to healthcare.

Recommendations

1. Sustainable Development Strategies for the Hasdeo Forest

- **Promote Renewable Energy Alternatives:**
 - Reduce dependence on coal mining by promoting renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind power, to balance energy demands while conserving the forest.
- **Enforce Strict Environmental Regulations:**

- Strengthen and enforce policies to minimize deforestation and environmental degradation caused by mining activities.
- Mandate reforestation and biodiversity restoration projects in degraded areas.
- **Sustainable Livelihood Programs:**
 - Introduce agroforestry and eco-tourism initiatives to create sustainable income sources for indigenous communities.
 - Provide training and financial support for alternative livelihoods, such as small-scale industries or forest-based enterprises like honey production and herbal medicine.
- **Scientific Land Use Planning:**
 - Conduct thorough Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before granting mining clearances, ensuring the protection of critical ecological zones in the forest.

2. Policy Reforms for Better Resettlement and Livelihood Restoration

- **Improve Compensation Mechanisms:**
 - Ensure that compensation packages reflect the true market value of land and include provisions for cultural and livelihood losses.
 - Provide additional financial assistance for rebuilding homes and starting new businesses.
- **Strengthen Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policies:**
 - Develop comprehensive rehabilitation policies that include employment, healthcare, education, and access to essential services for displaced families.
 - Implement periodic monitoring of resettlement sites to address gaps in infrastructure and services.
- **Mandate Skill Development and Employment Programs:**
 - Require mining companies to establish training centers to prepare displaced individuals for alternative employment in both mining and non-mining sectors.
- **Transparent Governance and Accountability:**
 - Establish independent committees to oversee land acquisition, compensation, and resettlement processes to prevent corruption and exploitation.
- **Incorporate Community Consent:**
 - Ensure compliance with the Forest Rights Act by obtaining free, prior, and informed consent from indigenous communities before land acquisition.

3. Community-Driven Approaches to Address Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts

- **Participatory Decision-Making:**
 - Involve local communities in planning and decision-making processes related to land acquisition, resettlement, and development projects.
 - Form tribal councils or committees to represent affected populations in negotiations with government and corporate stakeholders.
- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:**
 - Protect sacred sites and traditional cultural practices of indigenous communities during land acquisition and resettlement.
 - Support community-driven documentation of cultural traditions and rituals to preserve their heritage.
- **Social and Psychological Support:**
 - Provide counseling and social support programs for displaced families, focusing on mental health, community rebuilding, and adaptation to new environments.

- **Strengthen Local Governance:**
 - Empower panchayats (village councils) to play a key role in managing local resources and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits from mining activities.
- **Education and Awareness:**
 - Educate communities about their legal rights and provide legal aid to help them navigate bureaucratic processes for compensation and rehabilitation.

Conclusion

The Hasdeo Forest, a region of ecological and cultural significance, has been heavily impacted by displacement and migration driven by coal mining and industrial development. The indigenous communities, deeply dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods and cultural identity, face significant socio-economic and environmental challenges. Displacement has led to the loss of traditional livelihoods, inadequate resettlement, and cultural disintegration, compounded by gaps in policy implementation and corporate accountability. While there are existing legal frameworks and resettlement programs, their shortcomings highlight the urgent need for sustainable and inclusive development strategies. Balancing economic development with ecological preservation requires enforcing strict environmental regulations, promoting renewable energy, and developing alternative livelihood programs. Policy reforms must prioritize fair compensation, robust rehabilitation measures, and participatory decision-making to address the long-term needs of displaced populations. Finally, empowering local communities through education, capacity-building, and active involvement in development decisions is crucial for mitigating the socio-economic and cultural impacts of displacement. Addressing these challenges holistically can ensure equitable outcomes for affected populations while preserving the Hasdeo Forest for future generations.

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