

Industrial Displacement, Occupational Shift and Human Rights Challenges: The Case of Tribal Women in Kalinganagar, Odisha

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Abstract: This article is based on field research that investigated the long-term effects of industrial displacement on tribal women in Kalinganagar, Odisha, with a specific focus on their shifting occupational status and the human rights challenges they endure in the post-displacement period. The research was situated in Kalinganagar, Jajpur district, where the establishment of Tata Steel (private sector) and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited (public sector) industrial projects collectively displaced over a thousand families, severely disrupting their socio-economic organization. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study selected 200 tribal women aged 40 and above from the Gobarghati resettlement colony through stratified proportionate sampling. Data collection incorporated semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and structured observations. Quantitative analysis highlighted significant occupational and income changes prior to and following displacement, while qualitative insights assessed the gender sensitivity and efficacy of resettlement policies under international human rights frameworks such as UNDRIP, ICESCR, and ILO Convention No. 169. Findings reveal a stark decline in economically active tribal women from over 98 percent in pre-displacement to less than 46 percent in post-displacement, accompanied by a shift from secure, traditional livelihoods to precarious, informal labor. Despite resettlement efforts, gender-blind policies exacerbated economic dependency and marginalization. Employment opportunities under rehabilitation schemes were minimal, with only 8-9 percent securing industrial jobs, and skill development programs failing to ensure sustained income generation. Moreover, displacement violated fundamental human rights including the right to livelihood, dignity, and equality. The propositions that emerge from the study in this article include the urgent need for gender-responsive resettlement and rehabilitation policies that recognize tribal women as independent rights holders by embedding livelihood restoration in the policy with a rights-based approach. Such reforms are essential to redress livelihood erosion and promote inclusive development among displaced indigenous communities and their women folk ensuring them social and economic justice.

Keywords: Displacement, Tribal women, Occupation, Resettlement & Rehabilitation, Human Rights

Introduction

Displacement in the name of development remains one of the most profound disruptions faced by indigenous and native communities globally (Mohanty, 2009;

Padel & Das, 2010). In India, particularly in Odisha, mega-development projects starting from the big dam projects to large-scale industrial set ups and mining, have precipitated widespread displacement, leaving enduring social, cultural, and economic scars on affected populations (Ota & Agnihotri, 1996; Meher, 2009). Although recent years have witnessed a reduction in new displacements, due to protest movements and the active involvement of human rights organizations, the unresolved plight of communities displaced decades ago has been marginalized in both public discourse and academic research. The scenario perpetuates even today. The case of Kalinganagar exemplifies this phenomenon, where the violent repression in 2006 led to the deaths of twelve tribal protesters, including women, and reports of autopsy mutilation, reflecting the extreme tensions surrounding industrial encroachment. Critical questions still persist regarding the long-term economic trajectories of these displaced communities and their present-day status, particularly that of the womenfolk. This research gap has become the broad focus of the present field research-based article.

A Critical Overview of Literature

Government reports often claim that Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) measures have effectively addressed the adverse impacts of displacement. However, independent researchers have documented a contrasting reality, showing that displacement uproots communities, disrupts livelihoods, and causes irreversible socio-economic and cultural loss (Fernandes & Thukral, 1989; McDowell, 1996; Robinson, 2003; Terminski, 2012; Kumar, 2015; Satiroglu & Choi, 2015; Smith, 2019; Panda & Samantray, 1989). These works consistently note that displacement results in the loss of sustainable livelihoods and long-term economic instability (Mathur, 2013; Behera, 2021; Sampat, 2008; Ota, 2001; Negi & Ganguly, 2022).

In India, tribal communities bear the highest costs of displacement because of their historical marginalization stemming from political, economic, and geographic vulnerabilities (Fernandes, 1991; Mahapatra, 1994; Mathur, 2006; Patnaik, 2016; Padel & Das, 2017; Pandey & Sapre, 2020; Bag, 2024; Srihari, 2022). Their settlements, often located in resource-rich regions, make them prime targets for extractive development projects, while their deep dependence on land and forest-based livelihoods compounds their vulnerability (Merlan, 2009; Jayswal & Saha, 2018).

Within these marginalized communities, women face an even greater burden of displacement. Research by Kothari (1996), Gururaja (2000), Fernandes (2001), Mohanty (2015), Patnaik (2019), Dinooop & Joseph (2021), and others reveal the gendered consequences of displacement. In Odisha, the absence of meaningful rehabilitation and inadequate livelihood restoration interventions have intensified women's vulnerability, resulting in long-term deprivation (Mishra, 2002; Patnaik, 2007).

Rehabilitation measures are often reduced to cash compensations and infrastructure provisions, failing to rebuild sustainable livelihoods or address structural inequities

(Cernea & Mathur, 2008; Mohanty, 2005). Weak policy implementation marked by bureaucratic delays and insufficient monitoring further exacerbates marginalization (Dwivedi, 2002; Sharma, 2003; Mathur, 2011; Das, 2020). Additionally, these R&R policies remain largely gender-blind, overlooking the differentiated impact on women's livelihood, social roles, and reproductive responsibilities (Thukral, 1996; Saxena, 2011).

At a structural level, state and corporate alliances legitimize extractive development projects at the expense of tribal autonomy, eroding human rights concern, democratic consent and community rights (Padel, 1995; Sundar, 1997; Fernandes, 2023). Displacement, thus appears to be more than an economic disruption, a systemic process that undermines constitutional protections, collective resource ownership, and indigenous identity (Baviskar, 1995; Xaxa, 2004; Kumar & Sahoo, 2017).

From an intersectional perspective, Crenshaw (1991) helps illuminate how gender, indigeneity, and marginality intersect to produce layered vulnerabilities for tribal women. This host of reviews clearly highlight that; till date there are under researched areas like

- Lack of longitudinal studies examining the socio-economic and livelihood trajectories of displaced tribal women decades after displacement, particularly in Odisha.
- Research on the gender components of R&R policies is vividly missing.
- Absence of studies on the degree of conformity of displacement process to international human rights standards.

Objectives

- To examine the long-term impact of industrial displacement on the livelihood patterns and occupational transitions among tribal women in Odisha.
- To assess the gender sensitivity of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) policies and evaluate their effectiveness in restoring the economic and occupational status of displaced tribal women.
- To analyze the protection of displaced tribal women's rights in the post-displacement context through the lens of international frameworks such as the ICESCR, UNDRIP, and ILO Convention 169.

Methodology

The study analyzes long-term occupational consequences of industrial displacement among tribal women in Odisha, comparing pre- and post-displacement patterns and evaluating the gender sensitiveness of resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) policies. It examines whether the displaced women's rights to livelihood, equality, and dignity have been upheld within the framework of UNDRIP, ICESCR, and ILO Convention No. 169.

A mixed-method design integrating descriptive analysis of occupational shifts with exploratory assessment of policy implementation has been resorted to. Quantitative data has captured structural and income changes, while qualitative data has explored

gender and rights dimensions. The research focused on Kalinganagar, Jajpur district, an industrial hub where Tata Steel (private) and NINL (public) displaced 1,016 and 640 families, respectively. Gobarghati Phase I resettlement colony, housing 675 affected families from 12 villages, have become the study site.

Using stratified purposive sampling, 200 tribal women aged forty and above with direct displacement experience were selected (150 from TATA Steel, 50 from NINL on proportional basis). It becomes worth mentioning that while TATA Steel is a private venture, NINL is a public sector unit. Field data collection used semi-structured interview schedules, FGDs, and structured observations for the displaced sample victims, supplemented by policy and rehabilitation records from district and industry offices. Quantitative data were analyzed through percentage distributions; qualitative narratives have been put into thematic interpretation.

Triangulation across sources ensured validity, and ethical protocols followed include consent, confidentiality, permissions. Grounding analysis in human rights frameworks enabled evaluation of both livelihood restoration and the realization of gender-equitable justice within industrial rehabilitation policies.

The Field Insights Derived

In response to the objective of examining the long-term impact of industrial displacement on the livelihood patterns and occupational transitions among tribal women in Odisha, the following key insights were discovered.

By taking recourse to a longitudinal recall method, this study compared the pre- and post-displacement conditions of tribal women displaced by two major industrial projects i.e. TATA Steel from the private sector and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited (NINL) from the public sector. Despite the extensive national debate on industrialization and displacement, limited empirical research has explored its long-term and gender-specific repercussions. The present study addresses this gap examining how the dislocation from traditional land-based livelihoods impacts tribal women's occupational stability, income sources, and broader livelihood strategies across generations. This has led to study four indicators: economic activity status, nature of occupation, nature of income, and occupational shift, allowing for an in-depth assessment of changes over two decades. The field findings in terms of these indicators in two period before and after displacement are placed in Table no. 1.

Table No.1

Comparative analysis of occupational indicators of tribal women in the pre- and post-displacement periods

Indicators	Classification	Pre displacement Period		Total	Post displacement Period		Total
		Public Sector (N=50)	Private Sector (N=150)		Public Sector (N=50)	Private Sector (N=150)	
Economic activity status	Economically active	96.00	99.33	98.5	38.00	46.00	44.00
	Economically inactive	4.00	0.66	1.5	62.00	54.00	56.00
Nature of occupation	Permanent/ stable	96.00	99.33	98.5	10.00	14.00	13.00
	Temporary/ contractual	0	0	0	0	2.00	1.5
	Casual/ seasonal	94.00	99.33	98	28.00	30.00	29.5
Nature of income	Subsistence/ In-kind	96.00	93.33	98.5	0	2.00	1.5
	Cash/ Market based	94.00	99.33	98	38.00	44.00	42.5
	No independent income	4.00	0.66	1.5	62.00	54.00	56.00
Occupational Shift	Traditional majorly stable occupations	96.00	99.33	98.5	0	2	1.5
	Non-traditional informal precarious occupations	0	0	0	28.00	30.00	29.5
	Non-traditional regular secure occupations	0	0	0	10.00	14.00	13.00

(Source: Field data)

In Odisha, large-scale land acquisition initiated by the Industrial Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO) under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 during the

1990s marked a turning point in tribal livelihoods. In the Sukinda block of Jajpur district, land was first acquired for NINL in 1992, while displacement linked with TATA Steel began in 2005, signaling the beginning of lasting social and economic disruption.

The comparative analysis clearly shows that before displacement, nearly all women were economically active, with 96 percent from NINL and 99.33 percent from those displaced by TATA Steel engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, and forest produce collection. These economic roles were integral not only to household subsistence but also to collective cultural identity. After displacement, economic activity fell sharply to 38 percent among the public sector displaced group and to 46 percent among the private sector displaced group, while economic inactivity resulting in 'no income' rose to 62 and 54 percent respectively. The loss of livelihood was driven by land alienation, diminishing access to forests and water sources, and inadequate rehabilitation support. Women's testimonies reflect deep psychological and cultural distress resulting from unemployment and a forced detachment from work historically tied to community and identity.

The nature of occupation also witnessed profound transformation. In the pre-displacement period, more than 98 percent of women held stable agricultural and allied occupations, forming the backbone of tribal economic life. Two decades later, only 10 percent of the NINL displaced and 14 percent of the TATA Steel displaced women retained any form of permanent or stable employment. A large section of women have moved into casual or seasonal labor, accounting for roughly 28 and 30 percent of sample displaced by the public and private sector. This trend symbolizes the collapse of occupational stability and the growing dependence on low-wage, temporary work. Women displaced by TATA Steel appear to have adapted marginally better, largely due to informal employment opportunities near industrial sites and township economies, though such work remains insecure and irregular.

Before displacement, more than 95 percent of women's income was derived from subsistence or in-kind sources, ensuring food security and reinforcing mutual aid within villages. In contrast, the post-displacement scenario is characterized by a marked shift toward cash-based income, 38 percent among the public sector displaced and 44 percent among the private sector displaced. While this suggests economic modernization and market integration to the outside observer, it has instead increased women's exposure to unstable employment and market fluctuations. Moreover, the proportion of women without independent income has risen alarmingly to 62 percent in the public sector displacement and 54 percent in the private sector, reflecting heightened dependency and reduced financial autonomy. This change reflects the erosion of both economic and social security among displaced tribal women in long run.

The overall occupational pattern highlights a structural rupture. Prior to displacement, nearly all women (98.5 percent) were engaged in traditional, community-based occupations that ensured social value and livelihood sustainability.

Two decades later, this has fallen to a mere 1.5 percent. Only about 13 percent of women have managed to secure relatively stable non-traditional occupations, often in small-scale enterprises such as tailoring, poultry farming, or local grocery shops. The overwhelming majority, however, have been absorbed into informal and precarious employment categories such as contract labor, domestic work, or petty vending. These changes exemplify a broader process of the feminization of labor insecurity, where industrial development has intensified both economic vulnerability and gender inequality.

The findings resonate with earlier studies by Baviskar (1995), Fernandes (2007), Mehta (2009), and Padel and Das (2010), all of which identify displacement as a key driver of livelihood erosion and social dislocation. However, the present study advances this discourse by empirically demonstrating the depth and persistence of gendered livelihood transformation over a two-decade span and making a comparative analysis between a public sector led displacement and a private sector induced displacement. The collapse of land based economic systems has undermined women's agency and social standing, transforming them from independent economic contributors into dependent household members. Although TATA Steel's private-sector resettlement offered marginally better employment access compared to NINL's public-sector rehabilitation, both cases reveal enduring livelihood instability, inadequate compensation frameworks, and minimal attention to gender-specific needs.

Thus, the process of industrialisation in tribal regions such as Kalinganagar has displaced women not only from their land but also from their traditions, networks, and roles as economic anchors within households and communities. The transition from stable, community-oriented occupations to insecure, market-based labour represents not merely an economic setback but a profound socio-cultural disintegration.

With regard to the second objective, i.e. to assess the gender sensitivity of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) policies and evaluate their effectiveness in restoring the economic and occupational status of displaced tribal women, the study could discover profound realities discussed below.

It is well acknowledged that Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) policies play a vital role in mitigating the socio-economic hardships caused by displacement. Yet, this study reveals that the gender-insensitive and poorly implemented project-specific R&R frameworks in Odisha have significantly altered the livelihoods of displaced tribal women, deepening their economic miseries leading to marginalization.

Before the Odisha R&R Policy of 2006, the state lacked a comprehensive framework. Displacements were governed by project-specific guidelines, often shaped by industrial interests rather than human concerns. The Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) undertook land acquisition in Sukinda Block under the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894, a colonial law that prioritized state control over people's rights (Kalinganagar Odisha, 2010). Consequently, displacement was executed coercively. For those displaced under Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited (NINL),

a 1997 guideline was applied, while TATA Steel implemented a 2005 policy. Though both frameworks promised livelihood restoration through employment and skill development, their outcomes were far from equitable which came out from the field study as ground realities. The study could find the naked truth that these commitments have remained largely symbolic, particularly in relation to tribal women, as evident from the Table No. 2.

Table No. 2

Access to employment & skill development under R&R policies by sample tribal women

Criteria	NINL (public) N= 50	TATA Steel (private) N=150	Total (N=200)
Women employed in industries	8.00	8.66	8.5
Women employed elsewhere by industries	0	1.33	1.00
Skill training provided to sample Women	28.00	34.66	33.00
Training led to employment	2.00	4.00	3.5

(Source: Field Data)

The field data from the women clearly transpires that NINL model focused on providing one industrial job per displaced household, whereas TATA Steel's approach extended to ancillary units and entrepreneurial ventures linked to the extent of land loss. In practice, however, women remained largely excluded. This is because the eligibility criteria for R&R benefits define a family as comprising husband, wife and their minor children; separated major son and unmarried daughter above 30 years of age. This shows clear gender biases in both the policies. Thus employment absorption of sample women was minimal being only 8 percent in NINL and 8.66 percent in TATA Steel. Even when 28 to 34 percent of women received training, merely 2 to 4 percent gained employment. The absence of gender-specific design, poor market linkages, and inadequate follow-up support made these initiatives largely symbolic, failing to generate sustainable incomes.

Voices from the field reveal the human toll of these gaps. A 61-year-old woman displaced by NINL shared how loss of land reduced her to economic dependency, while a 47-year-old woman under TATA Steel lamented that skill training offered no real livelihood due to lack of resources and access to markets. Such narratives highlight that so-called gender-neutral R&R policies ignore women's socio-cultural realities and post-displacement constraints.

A deeper structural issue lies in the nomination of a single household beneficiary; typically, a male. This excludes women from direct access to employment or

rehabilitation benefits due to the deep-rooted gender bias and patriarchal sentiments. Patriarchal norms within families and institutions further limit women's participation, rendering their rehabilitation more incidental than planned. The findings resonate with earlier research by Dwivedi (2002), Mathur (2011), Das (2020), Kelkar (2014), Saxena (2011) and Rao & Reddy (2020), all of which note the inefficacy and gender-blindness of rehabilitation frameworks which render disempowerment to the women. In its quest to explore the third objective i.e. to analyze the protection of displaced tribal women's rights in the post-displacement context through the lens of international frameworks such as the ICESCR, UNDRIP, and ILO Convention 169. In this effort, the study has reached at an assertion that the loss of land, livelihood, and occupational identity is not simply an economic disruption but a violation of fundamental rights to dignity, equality, and participation. Viewing displacement through this lens transcends welfare-oriented evaluation, instead insisting state and corporate accountability in upholding internationally recognized entitlements. While earlier research has primarily examined violations of national laws, the present study emphasizes the universal applicability of international conventions, which affirm that economic security and livelihood constitute basic human rights rather than privileges. By locating the experiences of displaced tribal women within this framework, the study positions their struggles as part of a broader global discourse on justice and human dignity.

International human rights instruments strongly uphold the right to work, livelihood, and economic participation. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) obligates states to respect and fulfil essential rights such as work, education, health, and adequate living standards to allow every person to develop and live in dignity. In Articles 6, 7, and 11, it recognizes the rights to work, fair conditions, and an adequate standard of living. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples to establishing minimum standards for their survival, dignity. It affirms in Articles 17 and 20 the rights of indigenous peoples to freely pursue traditional economic activities and mandates states to safeguard their access to employment and livelihood resources. Although India has not ratified ILO Convention No. 169, several of its core principles are embedded in constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes and domestic legislations. ILO Convention No. 169 mandates that Indigenous and Tribal peoples have the right to exercise control over their own institutions, resources, and development, with special regard for their social, cultural, and economic rights within the states where they live. All these provisions are inclusive of indigenous women.

Complementarily, the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) reaffirm state responsibility to ensure gender-equitable access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. Collectively, these frameworks impose negative obligations on states to prevent

displacement-induced marginalization and positive obligations to restore and enhance livelihoods when displacement occurs.

However, the empirical realities of tribal women in Kalinganagar expose the disjunction between international commitments and ground-level implementation. Despite the presence of rehabilitation policies, the women's economic rights have been systematically undermined. The loss of land-based livelihoods following industrial acquisition, inadequate compensation, exclusion from employment, and ineffective skill-training initiatives have collectively eroded their right to work (Article 6, ICESCR), equal access to employment (Article 20, ILO 169), and an adequate standard of living (Article 11, ICESCR). The resulting economic dependency and diminished control over productive resources reflect the broader violation of their right to freely pursue traditional occupations (Article 20, UNDRIP).

Overall, the displacement and rehabilitation process in Kalinganagar reveal how the absence of gender-sensitive livelihood restoration mechanisms produce structural inequities that perpetuate women's economic marginalization. The gap between policy intent and local outcomes demonstrates that global human rights commitments often fail to materialize in contexts shaped by industrial expansion and state–corporate alliances.

Conclusion

The study thus, demonstrates that industrial displacement in Kalinganagar has resulted in significant, long-term occupational decline for tribal women, made majority economically inactive while shifted others from stable, land-centered livelihoods to precarious, informal occupations. This loss of economic autonomy signalizes the patriarchal frameworks entrenched in the R&R policies by allocating benefits to a single household member, predominantly to men. This divorces women from employment and meaningful livelihood restoration. While private sector initiatives offer comparatively better opportunities than public ones, gendered exclusion remains pervasive with the policies of both.

Despite the alignment of national policies with robust international human rights instruments, such as the ICESCR, UNDRIP, ILO Convention No. 169, and Sustainable Development Goals, the safeguards remain on records without manifesting in realities. Women's rights to work, livelihood, dignity, and economic participation are consequently reduced to symbolic commitments rather than substantive operations on the ground. The study calls for a revisit in the R&R policies aiming to bring a paradigm shift in R&R frameworks to explicitly recognize displaced tribal women as independent rights-holders, incorporate gender-responsive livelihood restoration measures, and institutionalize a human rights-based monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Such reforms are imperative to move beyond compensation toward the genuine restoration of economic agency and fundamental rights for displaced tribal women.

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