

Issues of Large-scale Dam Resettlement and Rehabilitation: Case of Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Large chunks of land have been acquired in different parts of India for large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams, power stations, etc., in the past. The Bhakra Dam project, being one such large-scale project executed immediately after the Independence, displaced thousands of families without having any proper rehabilitation mechanism in place. The old Bilaspur town (OBT) was part of land acquired for construction of the reservoir for Bhakra Dam, known as Gobind Sagar Lake. The new Bilaspur township was established to rehabilitate families originally living in the OBT. Presently, second or third generation of these families are living on these allotted plots in the new town. This article is an attempt to unfold the flaws in the undertaken rehabilitation policy which has led to unplanned and haphazard development in the town as well as created problems for both oustees and public authorities. These problems continue to persist in present times also, thereby limiting the citizens to avail benefits of the recent policy for regularisation of encroachments and the newly launched housing programme—Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

Keywords

Bhakra Dam, Bilaspur, displacement, oustees, rehabilitation

Introduction

The construction of large dams has been considered as projects implemented for public purposes as their creation may lead to an increase in the amount of

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available energy and lower its price, in turn, contributing to speedier economic growth of the nation. In addition, these projects may yield other economic benefits such as creation of thousands of new jobs and income from tourism. However, increased energy security and well-being of urban residents cannot be achieved at the cost of violation of fundamental rights such as people's right of land and resources, thus violating the basic right to dignified life or life with dignity. Unfortunately, a number of economic development policies of developing states regard involuntary resettlement as a necessary and unavoidable cost of development, and the people affected by it as victims of a just cause (Terminski, 2013). The notion of 'sacrifice' has influenced thinking on displacement considerably and led to the perception of resettlement and rehabilitation (Bartolome, de Wet, Mander, & Nagaraj, 2000).

It is estimated that each year during the 1980s and 1990s, development projects caused the displacement of 10 million people worldwide. In recent years, more specialists have spoken of approximately 15 million development displacements per year. In the 1990s, we had already observed an increasing number of people displaced following the construction of dams in India and China (Terminski, 2013).

The mega dam projects initiated in several regions of the world from the 1940s and 1950s of the last century onwards has already led to a large increase in the level of development-induced displacements. Indian independence led to accelerated economic growth, largely based on dam construction. In 1947, dams were called 'Temple of Modern India' by the then Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. Today, there are nearly 4,000 dams in India alone. Among the projects launched in the 1940s, it seems worth mentioning the construction of three dams: Tungabhadra (53,000 people displaced), Hirakud (110,000 displaced) and Gandhi Sagar (about 51,000–61,000 displaced). A project which became a particularly important symbol of India's independence and economic development following the age of colonialism was the construction of Hirakud Dam, carried out between 1948 and 1957, and strongly supported by Nehru. It led to the forcible resettlement of 22,000 families, the total number of people affected by its construction being estimated at 150,000 (*ibid.*). Another period of the intense growth of resettlement in India fell in the first half of the 1970s. Taneja and Thakkar (2000) have pointed out that the construction of dams could have led to relocation of between 21 and 40 million people in India alone. Among the dams built in India by 1947, the Pong, Hirakud, Balimela and Sardar Sarovar dams are the noteworthy ones which led to a high level of involuntary resettlement.

Displacement and resettlement is, however, more than a question of sheer numbers, though this one is very critical issue in itself. There are several issues involved such as human rights, governance and accountability, participation and self-determination in development, the complexities of resettlement goals, options and strategies and relevant legal and policy instruments; these are but some of the important ones. Cernea (1995) identifies eight risks—landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property and services and social disarticulation—that emerges due to development-induced displacement. These risks render resettlement inherently problematic and indeed impoverishment and

disempowerment have been the rule than the exception with respect to resettled people around the world.

This article is an attempt to understand the consequences of poor planning policies and rehabilitation practices in case of the Bhakra Dam oustees (hereafter referred to as the oustees in the article) of the Bilaspur town. So far, there has been little research done by scholars and academicians to highlight the problems faced by the oustees. Poor planning practices and malapropos rehabilitation have not only promoted haphazard development but also degenerated lives of the oustees. It is now high time to look into different appropriate options which could help to alleviate the oustees from impacts of adopted rehabilitation process, in this case, by providing them appropriate housing and livelihood options. This article may also help planners and policy makers, in future, to design flawless policies and programmes involving rehabilitation of masses.

With this brief introduction, the next section of this article synoptically outlines the historical context of Bilaspur, its socio-economic and environmental conditions prior to construction of the Bhakra Dam (hereafter referred as the dam). The third section discusses the process of implementation of the dam, its impacts which led to the establishment of the new Bilaspur town (NBT). The fourth section looks into issues involved in the rehabilitation process undertaken. This is followed with an in-depth discussion on why recent policy formulated by the State government on regularising encroachments done by the oustees and the national flagship programme—Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)—Housing for All (HFA) (Urban) 2022,¹ are unable to resolve these issues. The concluding section encapsulates the impact of poor rehabilitation and plight of oustees along with key suggestions which could be henceforth adopted by the authorities/planners in order to improve the lives of the oustees. The methodology adopted consists of observational, comparative and historical-analytical methods supported by semi-structured interviews of twelve oustees and also by the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Apart from reviewing the available literature, the author also analysed available documents with the oustees and local activists in Bilaspur as well as policies, rules and Acts pertaining to the resettlement and rehabilitation under this project. Having the privilege of working within the Municipal Council of Bilaspur gave the author an insight of the issues from the perspective of the Municipal Council. Further, the author has availed information from the Deputy Commissioner (D.C.)² Office, Bilaspur, through the RTI Act 2005. Besides, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve oustees to understand the entire complex development process which has taken place in the past few decades in the town.

Context of Bilaspur: A Synoptic Outline

History of Bilaspur

The state of Bilaspur was originally known as Kahlur, founded by Raja Deep Chand in 1663. In October 1948, the princely state of Bilaspur was taken under the administrative control of the Central government. Subsequently, by an Act of



Photo 1. Old Bilaspur Town During the 1950s

Source: Courtesy Daleep Studio, Main Market, Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh.

Parliament, it was merged in Himachal Pradesh on 1 July 1954, and thereafter converted into a district (see Photo 1). For the first time Bilaspur was classified as a town in the 1891.

Socio-economic and Cultural Environment of Old Bilaspur Town

The old Bilaspur town (OBT) was inhabited by people belonging to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. Whilst district administration was present, however, the king played a greater role in maintaining peace and harmony in the town as well as in promoting local art and culture. There are many temples, mosques and *gurudwaras* (place of worship for the Sikhs) in the town wherein religious activities are organised on various occasions. There are many schools and playgrounds present in the town. The annual *Nalwari* fair, famous for buying and selling of cattle and for wrestling, is still organised under the supervision of district administration in the NBT. Theatre activities including drama and plays are organised not only for recreational purposes but to revive memories and disseminate stories of our great history and epics. The rich people mainly comprise the landlords, whereas the landless people are engaged in petty businesses, working as potters, cobblers, blacksmiths, labourers, etc. The elderly citizens reminisce the life in the old town full of joy without any livelihood crisis, unlike nowadays. Each person was engaged in works and earned as per his capacity and skills.

The OBT got submerged in the Gobind Sagar Lake with completion of the dam (see Photo 2). Thus the NBT was formed to resettle families displaced from



Photo 2. Submerged Area of OBT in Gobind Sagar Lake

Source: The author.

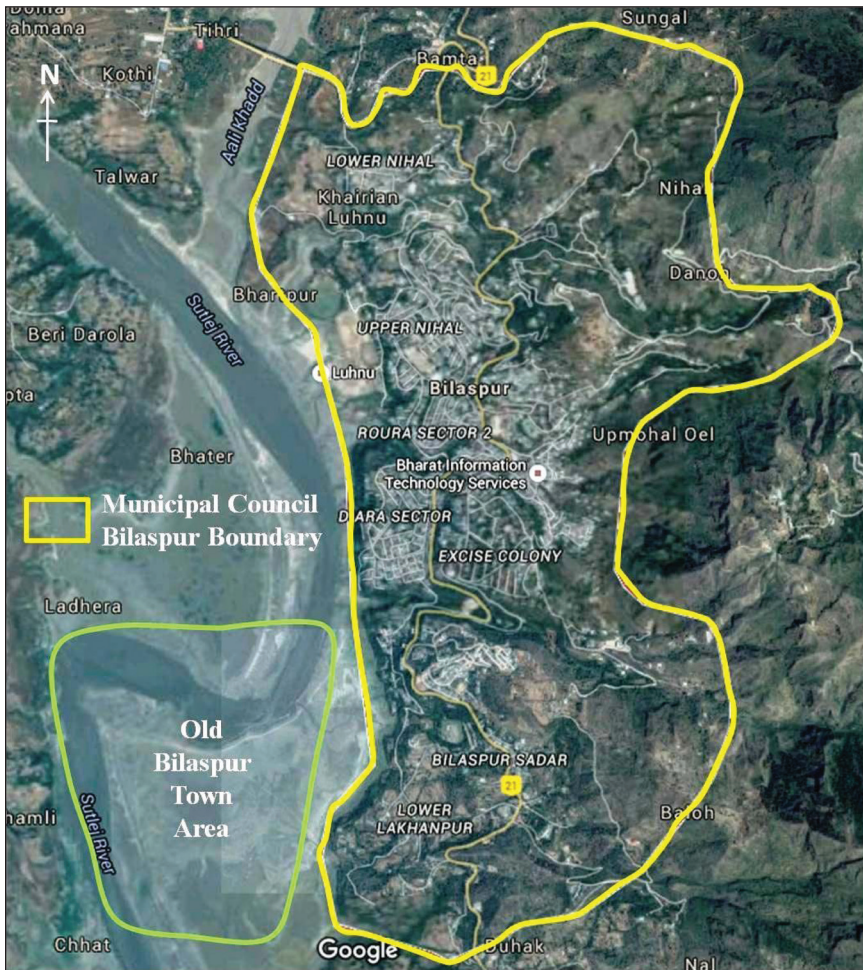
the OBT. A Notified Area Committee for the NBT was constituted on 10 October 1961 which was upgraded into a Municipal Council in 1994 (see Map 1). The NBT has been conceived, planned and developed on the modern lines of planning techniques and regarded as the first planned hill town in the country. The built areas have come up in a planned manner according to the sectoral plans prepared by the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) (Delhi), in the municipal area in the late 1950s (TCPD, n.d.) (see Photo 3).

Course of Development

Construction of the Bhakra Dam

The large dams which were supposed to generate irrigation, power and protect lands from floods became focus of the development projects since the First Five-Year Plan (1951–1955) (Gill, 2006). Projects like Damodar valley, Bhakra, Hirakud, etc., displaced thousands of families from their lands, homes and deprived them of their livelihoods. Bilaspur town fell into gambit of one such infrastructure development project. Over 11,000 families were displaced from their homes and large tracts of farmlands were acquired for construction of the dam.

Though planning for construction of the dam started in 1908; an estimate and design for the dam was prepared by the Punjab Irrigation Department in 1910.



Map I. Location of OBT and Present Boundaries of Bilaspur Municipal Council

Source: The author.

Over a period of time, various changes in the plan (in terms of its height, catchment area, etc.) were made. In 1945, plan for the dam was revised and a draft agreement between the independent princely State of Bilaspur and the Punjab government was prepared which was subsequently revised in 1948. This revised draft agreement set out conditions on the royalty received by the Raja of Bilaspur upon production of hydroelectric power by the dam. In addition, the Raja was to receive 500 kilowatt (kw) of electric power free of charges and another 2,000 kw at project cost. The draft agreement allowed the Raja of Bilaspur to withdraw water 50 cubic feet per second free of cost and another 50 cubic feet per second at project cost. This agreement also stated the provision of construction of road, bridges and other infrastructure in the project affected areas. However, before this came into effect, Bilaspur acceded to India as Part C State which meant that



Photo 3. Morphology of Present Bilaspur Town

Source: The author.

from henceforth the area would be administered by the Central government. In 1954, Himachal Pradesh and Bilaspur were united by the Himachal Pradesh and Bilaspur (New State) Act, 1954. Under which, the combined states were Part C State named as the state of Himachal Pradesh. The Section 31 of the 1954 Act saves the powers of the Central government with respect to the Bhakra Nangal project (Dharmadhikary, 2005). The construction work of dam started with pouring of first bucket of concrete into its foundation by the first Prime Minister of India on 18 November 1955. While the construction of the dam was completed by the end of 1963, successive stages were completed by the early 1970s.

The State was reconfigured under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966. While Section 78 of the 1966 Act addresses the Bhakra Nangal Project; the rights and liabilities of the project were transferred from Punjab to the successor States; whereas under Section 79 of the Act, the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) was set up by the Central government to oversee this particular project.

Compensation and Resettlement of Displaced People

As per the information received from the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Board of D.C.'s office of Bilaspur district, around 31,191 acres of land were acquired for implementation of this project from 1951 to 1958. Out of which, around 10,676 acres of land were private while the remaining belonged to the government.

About 376 villages—including 256 from the former Bilaspur district, 110 from the erstwhile Kangra district, 5 from Mandi district and 5 from Solan district were submerged in the dam's catchment area. Besides these, about 10,000 acres of agricultural land and 20,000 acres of forest land were also submerged.

Compensation, in terms of cash or land, was determined on the basis of submerged levels of land. People displaced from lands submerged up to the level of 1,280 feet were given only cash compensation. Those affected, beyond the 1,280 feet up to 1,700 feet level, could accept either land or cash compensation. Those who opted for cash compensation, by and large, chose to continue to live in the state of Himachal Pradesh and moved up on the hill slopes along the sides of the Sutlej River. The oustees who demanded land as compensation were given land in the Hisar district, which was around 200 km away from their original native places in the Bilaspur district.

Estimates inform us that a total number of 11,777 families were affected for implementation of this project. Some of the displaced people were rehabilitated in Sirsa, Hisar and Fatehabad districts of the Haryana state. Several others were settled in Ropar (in Punjab), Bilaspur, Nalagrah and Una districts in Himachal Pradesh. Apart from these, some displaced have also been resettled along both sides of the forested slopes of the reservoir running from Bhakra to Slaapad and Lathyaani.

However, this was not really a land-in-lieu-of-land policy. The oustees were paid cash compensation, with which they could purchase new land at the resettlement sites (Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, 2009). Landless tenants were also declared eligible for the allotment of land equivalent to the extent of their submerged tenancy but subject to maximum area of 5 acres whereas half acre of land, free of cost, was to be provided to each artisan and labourer of the rural areas who did not own or cultivate land, provided he shifted and relocated to the Hisar district (*ibid.*).

In order to resettle these affected families, the Himachal Pradesh government framed the two following schemes:

1. Rules for the allotment of plots in the new Bilaspur township (HPARD, n.d.).
2. The resettlement and rehabilitation of Bhakra Dam oustees (Grant of Land) Scheme 1971 (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 1971).

Around 410 acres of land was acquired to set up the NBT, primarily for those affected families which have been addressed as the oustees in the Rules of Allotment of Plots in NBT. According to these rules, an 'oustees' is defined as

a person who has been deprived of his house or shop or both or his shop-cum-residence on account of land acquisition proceedings in connection with the Bhakra Dam Project and is entitled to compensation therefore, or a person who has been or may be deprived of his house or shop or both or of his shop-cum-residence on account of land acquisition proceedings taken or hereafter to be taken for the construction of the New Township of Bilaspur and who is or may be entitled to compensation therefore and who has not been or cannot be allotted land for construction of house new house or shop or both for shop-cum-residence elsewhere.

As per the official records, approximately 653 families were affected in OBT due to implementation of this project whereas; about 1,267 families were allotted plots in NBT as oustees from outside OBT were also allotted plots in NBT. Around 5,066 and 1,256 families were allotted land for agricultural purposes and housing sites outside the NBT. Besides the land acquired for NBT, the total land granted was around 28,000 *bighas*³ (approximately 5,600 acres).

Establishment of the NBT

Once acquisition of land was completed, plots of various sizes were demarcated, roads and utility lines were laid down, and families were allotted plots to shift from the old town. Only after being served notice from the administrative authority informing that the old town would soon be submerged in water; people began to occupy the allotted plots from 1959–1960 onwards. Families were paid transportation costs for shifting their goods but were not paid any compensation amounts for constructing their new houses on the allotted plots. Since the compensatory amounts were insignificant for construction of houses, even during those days, many families' availed loans from the district administration authority. However, since majority of these were unable to repay the availed loan amount, the State government waived off the loan amounts. Plots were allotted to the oustees at earnest money amounting to 10 per cent of the premium of the plot. See Table 1 for rates of premium for various sizes of residential and commercial plots (for shops).

From OBT, around 762 families were given residential plots, 338 were given commercial plots and 167 were given commercial-cum-residence on lease for a period of 999 years with the conditionality that the oustee cannot make any transfer of his right/title/interest except in case of previous sanction for such transfer(s) obtained by him from the D.C., Bilaspur. In 2002 and 2013, 56 and 118 plots (in addition to the 1,267 previously allotted plots) were allotted to families of oustees in NBT, respectively. The oustees from the surrounding rural areas were also allotted land parcels in the NBT. So far, about 1,441 plots were allotted to oustees

Table 1. Rate of Premium for Various Sizes of Residential and Shop Plots

Type of Plot	Size of Plot (in sq. ft)	Premium Rate (in ₹ per sq. ft)
Residential plots	800	70.00
	950	85.00
	1,800	168.75
Extra for corner plots	800	25.00
	950	29.00
	1,800	55.00
Commercial (for shops)	450	200.00
Extra for corner plots of shops	450	68.00
Commercial-cum-residence plots	900	240.00
Extra for corner plots	900	83.00

Source: Rules for the allotment of plots in the NBT.

against the payment of nominal charges, that is, 5 per cent of the full development cost. The full development cost of the plot had been fixed by the government at ₹20 per sq. yard. The plots had been allotted on perpetual lease basis. The oustees were charged ground rent at the rate of ₹1 per 100 sq. yard. Recently the rent has been increased from ₹1 per sq. yard to ₹2 per sq. yard. In case of sale of plot to any non-oustees, the ground rent of the plot is fixed at 2.5 per cent of the present market value of the land.

However, till date, around 250 oustees of the OBT are still seeking plots in the town and their applications are pending in D.C.'s office, Bilaspur. Here, it is important to note that over time many plots have been allotted to the non-oustees by developing new spaces such as Indira Colony in Main Market, Housing Board Colony in Changer and in the Industrial area, in the town primarily established for oustees. Many commercial plots have also been allotted to vendors who are predominantly non-oustees. Majority of these shop plots have now been converted into commercial-cum-residential structures.

Ecology and Economy of the Affected Area Before Development of Bhakra Dam

Earlier, Sutlej River valley was rich in flora and fauna—both terrestrial and aquatic, was densely forested and had irrigated lands. The plains of the riverbanks were extremely fertile whereby both *khari*⁴ and *rabi*⁵ crops were cultivated. Water for irrigation was supplied from the Sutlej River and from numerous streams flowing into plains from the mountains. A variety of crops such as corn, wheat and cotton were grown here. Most people owned orchards. There was a substantial large cattle economy in this region. While people inhabited in the plains, the cattle sheds were situated in the mountains where there was ample fodder available for the cattle to graze on (Dharmadhikary, 2005). However, there has been a dramatic change in the aquatic composition, especially in the fish species. The delicious native varieties like *Mahseer*, etc., are now almost extinct and the exotic silver carp, a low-value fish, has replaced an overwhelming part of the catch (Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, 2009).

Issues with the Rehabilitation Process Undertaken

The resettlement policy was hardly adequate, both in its conception and its implementation. What is really unique to this case is that in spite of the inadequate provisions for compensation, the oustees understood, co-operated and accommodated at every step, despite the enormous hardships. Nationalist sentiments of sacrifice for the nation, which were prevalent at that time, obviously influenced the oustees (*ibid.*). However, this did not mean that the oustees accepted whatsoever offered to them. They made a number of suggestions and demands through memorandums to the authorities. In November 1953, the Bhakra Dam Sufferers Association presented a memorandum to the then Prime Minister asking for resettlement of displaced people on lands which were to be irrigated by new

canals at one place. Subsequently, a team of project affected persons was shown proposed site for rehabilitation in Hisar which was rejected by them owing to its poor-quality land, outgrown with bushes. Instead, the project affected people agreed to resettle on the 11,000 acres of grassland, near Fatehabad in Haryana. But their demands were rejected, and they were forced to settle on the site shown to them, in 33 villages spread over a wide area (*ibid.*).

Those who were settled in the command area of the project in Hisar district, far away from their culture and home, were allotted poor quality lands which were hardly arable. An entire generation spent its life in backbreaking work trying in making these lands cultivable. Even 55 years after displacement, their lives are not yet back on track. Many of them have not got land titles to their lands or house plots. In many cases, residents of the original villages forcibly occupied these allotted house plots. When the oustees complained to the local administration, false cases against the oustees were lodged and the entire administrative machinery resulted in favour of the locals causing tremendous harassment to the oustees. Neither did the oustees find political representation since they are in a minority, nor were their grievances heard properly. They were cut off from their relatives and cultural roots. They are still derogatorily called *bilaspuriyas* (as they came from Bilaspur district) by the locals (Dharmadhikary, 2005).

It is well known that the Bhakra Dam was one of the first and largest ambitious infrastructure projects of post-independence era in India. During that time, there were no policies or legislations envisaged/formulated/prevaling either at the National or State-level to ensure proper rehabilitation or resettlement of the affected families under any developmental projects. Also, land transactions were largely not in practice as the country was still grappling with aftermaths of the partition—in terms of large-scale in-migration from Pakistan and other regions, dependence of the economy on agrarian and other allied activities, and negligible development boom.

Therefore, people were unaware of the concepts of land pricing and values, accepted whatever amounts of compensation were given by the then government. The information obtained by the author through RTI revealed that in the rural areas, compensation rates varied from ₹1,000 per acre for agriculture land to ₹250 for uncultivable land; whereas the landless received merely ₹200 as an overall compensation. In the OBT, land was acquired under the Local Land Acquisition Act, *Bikrami Samwat*, 2002,⁶ but no documentary evidences are available till now. Hence, there is no information about the compensation rates per unit area decided for the OBT. However, in course of interviews with the oustees by the author, it was found that the compensation amounts given were very minimal.

Another problem was that while parcels of land were acquired in 1946 according to rates prevailing, land acquisition for resettlement was done only in 1956, by which time the land prices had already increased. The oustees were not given land-for-land but could purchase land with their compensation. Due to these two factors, there was a gross difference in the quantity of land lost and land they were able to purchase (*ibid.*).

Before the construction of dam, an agreement was signed between the ruler of the erstwhile Bilaspur princely state and the Government of Punjab on 7 July

1948, titled the Bhakra Dam Agreement. This agreement laid down rehabilitation measures to be undertaken for the displaced people, which are yet to be implemented. In 1971, the Government of Himachal Pradesh evolved a resettlement and rehabilitation policy that provisioned 'land for land' (agriculture as well as homestead). But this policy has not been implemented yet (*The Times of India*, 2013a). Ironically, land was acquired between 1951 and 1958, and majority of people resettled haphazardly later in the 1960s. Subsequently, the government framed the 1971 scheme for resettlement and rehabilitation of the dam oustees which was never implemented. Moreover, the government was supposed to build bridges at three different locations to enable free travel across the reservoir. While only one is built, the other two, even after 55 years of existence of the reservoir, are yet to be constructed.

In India, most of the families were living largely as joint families (in towns and in rural areas at least) and land titles were usually made in the name of the male head of the families. Therefore, when families were rehabilitated from the OBT to NBT, each family was entitled to a single plot of size varying from 800 to 1,800 sq. ft, irrespective of size of the family. At present, the third generation of the oustees are living in these allotted plots which are, by and large, nuclear families. Hence, one plot has been sub-divided into multiple rooms and in many cases, one family, consisting of five to six members, is living in each room of size 100 sq. ft. Small size of plots and multiple families living together are prominent reasons for family and property disputes in the town nowadays. One can imagine the situation by knowing that this town was built for 929 families (762 residential and 167 residential-cum-commercial) but now 3,226 families are residing with a population of 13,654 (Census of India, 2011). This growth cannot be accommodated without violating building bye-laws and encroaching setbacks, roads, drains and public spaces.

Here, it is significant to highlight that the electricity generated by the dam is serving the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, etc., but the families who had sacrificed their hearths and homes do not have sufficient space to live and nurture their kids. Neither has any attempt been made by the successive governments, in course of time, to provide livelihood opportunities to the oustees and their successors which have made their situation more deplorable. Expanding family sizes on limited areas of plots have forced people to encroach on the setbacks, and public properties like adjacent roads and drains to fulfil their housing needs. Over time, this planned hill town has turned into an unplanned and haphazardly developed town (see Photo 4).

Lacunae in the New Policies and Programmes

Policy for Regularisation of Encroachments

In 2013, the State government formulated a special policy regarding regularisation of encroachments, up to 150 sq. metres, by the oustees on free-hold basis in the NBT (HPDR, 2013). Applications for regularisation were invited by the district administration from families of oustees, wherein they were required to



Photo 4. Haphazard and Unplanned Development in the Town

Source: The author.

disclose the extent of encroachments made by them. After that, a survey was conducted by the District Revenue Office to verify the validity of these applications submitted by the oustees for regularisation. However, only handful of encroachments were regularised under this policy due to following reasons:

- Encroachments for regularisation under this policy were only limited to the oustees of the dam and their legal heirs; thus plots allotted to non-oustees and plots/houses sold by oustees to non-oustees (if any) were out of ambit of this policy.
- As per the policy, these encroachments had to be contiguous along the allotted plots and should not involve any hindrance/obstruction of public utilities such as public paths, drains, parks, pavements, etc. In case the encroacher wanted his encroachment to be regularised, portion(s)/part(s) of encroachments hindering the public utilities were to be removed by the encroacher, himself, on the spot and such an action was to be verified by the Tehsildar and Executive Officer of Bilaspur Municipal Council. However, no one was ready to remove encroachments made on the public places.
- The maximum extent of land which could be regularised was up to 1,615 sq. ft only. If an allottee or his successor had encroached land more than 1,615 sq. ft, he/she had to remove the encroachment exceeding 1,615 sq. ft prior to submission of his application for regularisation to the concerned authorities. None of the applicants were ready to follow this condition too.

As per the information received from the D.C. Office, Bilaspur, around 1,051 families (including 917 oustees and 134 non-oustees) had applied for regularisation of their encroachments under this policy. However, only 161 cases have been decided yet, out of which, only 32 structures have been regularised. Remaining 129 cases have been rejected since they are not in congruence with the above-mentioned conditionalities. Though many cases are still pending, only a handful of more structures can be regularised under this policy.

Also, in order to get a new electricity or water connection, he/she has to first get No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Municipal Council and then apply to the concerned electricity board/Irrigation and Public Health (IPH) Department.⁷ However, the Municipal Council does not issue NOC to those violating building bye-laws. Hence, many families, who have separated from their original family but are living in the same house by constructing an additional floor or living in the same floor after division of space, are deprived from new connection(s). However, using their kin's connection many times leads to conflicts between the families. Moreover, since many buildings cannot be regularised under stringent clauses made under this policy, it deprives many new separated family units of getting their individual water/electricity connections.

Apathy of the State and Ousteers

In India, the issue of equity is not considered at all, since a situation of inequality and injustice prevails among the oustees (Sharma, 2014). The condition of people displaced by the Bhakra Dam, who are claimed to have been resettled by the authorities, is pathetic, with basic civic amenities and livelihood severely endangered and standard of living much worse than before the displacement. An article published by the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) (2004) revealed that the 350 villages on the banks of Gobind Sagar are reeling under an acute shortage of drinking water supply even after 40 years of commissioning of the dam. The old town had natural sources of water and was receiving water supply from two live springs. The Bilaspur town still receives water from one of them but is presently facing severe water shortage, especially in the summer when the water in the spring and the lake reduces.

There is a general perception that Bhakra project has played a significant role in making Punjab and Haryana granaries of the nation. But the fact is that the gross command area of Bhakra in Haryana and Punjab are about 30 per cent and 18.6 per cent of the state's geographical area (Dharmadhikary, 2005). The research carried out by Manthan Adhyayan Kendra in 2009 reveals that in Punjab 43–46 per cent of all agricultural production is based on unsustainably mined groundwater. For Haryana, this figure stands at 35 per cent. One of the most serious issues has been water logging and salinisation of the lands under Bhakra Dam command area which has led to sharp decline in the productivity levels, and even ended up in making large tracts of land totally uncultivable.

However, it would have been possible for these areas to be irrigated with Sutlej River, even without the Bhakra Dam. Also, real and tangible alternatives, which

could have served the country better, were always available. There were decentralised widespread schemes being proposed, which would have spread inputs, resources, investments and the outputs—and put purchasing power in the hands of the people (Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, 2009).

Manthan Adhyayan Kendra's (2009) research doubts on the tall claims made by the contribution of Bhakra Dam towards providing irrigation and increasing the foodgrain production in the states of Punjab and Haryana. The research reveals that the driving force behind the Green Revolution was tube-well irrigation. The impact of Bhakra project was mainly in Haryana, that too in the drier tracts of Hisar district. The contribution of the areas served by the Bhakra Dam is limited. However, this limited contribution had come with huge costs including financial and social costs, ecological impacts (with respect to land degradation in the command areas, large scale water logging and salinisation of soil—which seems very difficult, if not impossible to manage), deprivation of the areas downstream, displacement of thousands of people, impact of the prolonged and extensive use of chemicals, etc. These have enormous long-term impacts and are probably irreversible.

Resettlement programmes have predominantly focused on the process of physical relocation rather than on economic and social development of the displaced and adversely affected people. This has severely eroded development effectiveness of the resettlement and rehabilitation programmes and heightened the impoverishment risk of resettlers. Bilaspur town has proven to be one of the exemplars of haphazard resettlement and rehabilitation without envisioning future problems which has led to unplanned development in country's first planned hill town. The restricted scope for physical expansion of the town and its limited economic activities has contributed in its marginal population growth also. As per the recent census data in 2011, the town has registered population growth of only 596 people in last decade. With rampant encroachment on public spaces in the town, large number of buildings has been constructed by breaching the building bye-laws, much beyond the prescribed floor space ratio (FAR).

A recently published newspaper article reveals,

Despite all tall claims of the government to rehabilitate the Bhakra Dam oustees, 1,680 oustees are waiting to be settled in Haryana even after more than five decades. Haryana is one of the beneficiary partner states, drawing 18.08 per cent water share and equally benefitting with 27 per cent electricity generation from Bhakra dam. (*Hindustan Times*, 2016)

It further states, 'Haryana was to give plots to 2,836 families and agriculture land to 2,285 families ... after long span of 55 years, only 1,156 families were given residential plots and 2,237 families got the agriculture land till March 31, 2014' (*ibid.*). About 250 oustees families are still seeking allotment of plots from the district administration in Bilaspur Town too. All these figures are enough to show the plight of these oustees and discrepancies in the rehabilitation process undertaken.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana—Housing for All (Urban), 2022

Launched in June 2015 by the Modi government, this programme aims to provide a decent housing to all the families living in both rural and urban areas. It offers four distinct options—(a) in-situ slum redevelopment⁸ through private sector partnership; (b) credit-linked subsidy; (c) affordable housing in partnership (AHP); and (d) subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction, to address the existing housing crisis faced by the urban poor including slum dwellers (Government of India, 2016). One key point of divergence from the previous housing programmes is that under the PMAY, while the Central government has given broad guidelines for each programme vertical of this Mission, the States have been given flexibility to use their discretion regarding details such as deciding the applicability of options on the existing slums, cut-off dates of beneficiaries, project formulation, approval, implementation, incentives to the private developers, etc. Although the policy looks promising enough, in spite of its revamped menu card, whether it would be able to provide solutions to meet the housing requirement of all the urban poor in the country is debatable.

Some basic observations on the programme include the following. The urban poor not only consist of those living in slums located on public or private lands but also include people encroaching on roads or *nallahs* (open drains), the homeless with temporary shelters (commonly found along footpaths or under-bridges etc.), migrants living on rent in pathetic condition, etc., which are often unaccounted for in the official records. The policy conveniently dismisses many of such categories of the urban poor. On one hand, the programme lays its premises on the very fact that a beneficiary family (comprising of husband, wife and unmarried children) is defined as ‘any family which should not own a pucca⁹ house either in his/her name or in the name of any family member in any part of the country’ (Government of India, 2016). This seems to be absurd on various accounts such as lack of proper monitoring mechanism in place to check the same, in many parts of the country, at least smaller towns, families continue to live jointly etc. Whereas on other hand, the guidelines lay down the conditionality that to avail subsidy (for beneficiary-led individual house construction), the beneficiary needs to be (a) included in his/her respective city’s Housing for All Plan of Action (HFAPoA); and (b) have a plot and title to the plot;¹⁰ which means there is actual documentary evidence of land ownership available with the slum dweller (thus becoming beneficiary in this case) seeking assistance under this programme which itself is contradicting the programmes’ definition of beneficiary.

In Bilaspur, this ambitious programme is being executed by the Municipal Council. Many of the aforementioned peculiarities are also applicable in case of this town; in addition to the issues of the resettlement and rehabilitation process undertaken. Majority of families cannot avail its benefits due to the below-mentioned reasons which are proving to be hurdles in achieving the prime objective of this programme, that is, to provide an affordable and viable housing to all families in the Bilaspur town.

- Under beneficiary-led individual house construction and interest subsidy on loan components, beneficiary needs to either own land for new construction or space for enhancement of the existing dwelling unit (DU). As discussed in the earlier sections of this article, families were allotted plots of sizes varying from 800 to 1,800 sq. ft around 55 years back to which they have now made extensions on setbacks, encroaching on drains and road margins in most cases. Many families have constructed floors exceeding the permissible FAR. Thus, it is almost impossible for these families to get their building plans approved as per existing regulations and building bye-laws under these two components of the programme.
- Also, as families are living on land leases for a period of 999 years, they need to get prior permission from D.C., Bilaspur before applying for loan to the bank. In absence of which, the bank would not sanction the loan in the oustees' name considering house built on leased land as mortgage. However, getting permission from D.C. is a time consuming and cumbersome process.
- Under the AHP component, any township having minimum 250 DUs is built either by public authority or by a private party and reserves at least 35 per cent DUs for economically weaker section (EWS), then the builder will be paid ₹0.15 million per DU reserved for EWS to subsidise these units. But the main problem in hill towns, in general and in Bilaspur too, is the scarcity of land to develop large-scale public housing projects. The State government has the wherewithal to reduce number of DUs in such kind of projects. Considering the physical condition and topography of NBT, the Urban Development Department of the State government is thinking of reducing the minimum number of DUs to 100. Although it is difficult to have such kind of projects in this town, even if two or three township projects do come up, it would hardly be able to accommodate a hundred poor families which will not address the prevailing housing problems. Also, it is to be noted that the oustee families are seeking plots of land, not flats. Thus, it is very sceptical to assume that providing flats would satisfy their demands in spite of being given assurance time and again for land plots by the public authorities.¹¹
- In order to avail housing under this programme, beneficiaries are required to declare that they do not own any *pucca* house either in his name or any other member of his family. But these families residing in tiny single or double-room house, after sub-dividing the original allotted plot, cannot give such a declaration as this sub-divided portion is registered as part of the original allotted plot (in name of their ancestors who were oustees) in the land records. The real question here is, how can a family of five to six members, residing in a single room be considered as owner of the house? And thus, these are by default excluded from the scope of this programme.

Due to above constraints, despite huge demand of liveable habitation, only 96 DUs have been constructed in the last 2 years (2016–2017 and 2017–2018) whereas 109 DUs were under construction in April 2018 according to Municipal Council of Bilaspur. Here it is important to mention that all DUs were built under

beneficiary-led construction¹² and for majority of them only the existing structure was enhanced, and they were not built as a completely new unit.

Conclusion

It is very important to understand that displacement is a multi-dimensional phenomenon of which physical location is only one of the most significant outcomes. Most of the resettlements continue to be involuntary and forced. Legal and policy instruments still continue to be dominated by notions of displacement as 'sacrifice' in the interests of larger public purpose. Public purpose, whose definition is at best elusive and the process of determining it is arbitrary, usually non-participatory and based on criteria never clearly defined. The success of development programmes cannot be judged merely in terms of their effects on incomes and outputs, and must, at a basic level, focus on the lives that people can lead. This would mean tangible benefits like lower morbidity and mortality and an increasing level of education, increasing incomes through opportunities of employment and livelihood and empowering the displaced people through building capacities by their participation in the entire decision-making process of the development project and resettlement.

In case of Bilaspur, it was a post-Independence project where concept of resettlement and rehabilitation was not as clear as today and they failed to visualise future of oustees. The results of poor planning and execution of rehabilitation is visible in the town that created a situation where three to four families are compelled to reside on a small piece of land. Moreover, on-going programmes such as PMAY are unable to benefit large number of families in Bilaspur or make any substantial changes in the lives of the oustees, with respect to their housing needs, owing to its restricted scope and design.

Further unplanned development cannot be prevented, until the authorities extend its current boundary limits which would open up new spaces for development. Also, strict monitoring and control of development activities as per building bye-laws and adherence to the Development Plan of Bilaspur by Municipal Council Bilaspur and Town & Country Planning Department, Bilaspur to ensure planned development in the town in future are also essential. The economy of the town can be ushered in by available, but, untapped resources such as encouraging fisheries as major activity in the Gobind Sagar Lake, exploring possibilities of water sports and other recreational activities in the lake, popularising recreational activities, like paragliding in adjacent Bandla Hills, etc. There is a lot of scope in making Bilaspur a tourist spot if available natural resources in and around the town are developed and utilised in a sustainable way.

The period of building the Bhakra Dam was during the time of a newly independent nation—whereby an environment of patriotism, sacrifice and nation-building was prevalent. However, the sufferings and hardships borne by the next two generations to get their lives back on track articulates the feeling of betrayal of the people who have been simply forgotten by the nation. Hence, there is need for formulation and implementation of specific targeted policies and programmes

aiming to improve the living conditions, habitation, provision of education to the new generations and livelihood opportunities to the oustees of this project as well as those displaced by other projects of similar nature, at least in the hope to heal their sufferings.

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Notes

1. Launched in June 2015 with an aim to provide affordable housing to the urban poor. It is proposed to build 20 million houses for urban poor including economically weaker sections (EWS) and low income group (LIG) in urban areas by the year 2022 through the financial assistance of ₹2 trillion (US\$31 billion) from the Central government.
2. The executive head of the district, an administrative sub-unit of a state, responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the district.
3. A measure of land area, usually used in South Asia, varying locally from 1/5 to 1 acre.
4. Kharif crops or monsoon crops (including millet and rice) are domesticated plants cultivated and harvested during rainy (monsoon) season in South Asia, which lasts between April and October depending on the area.
5. Rabi crops are sown in winter, around mid-November and harvested in spring (April/May) in South Asia. These include cereals like wheat, oat, barley, maize; seed plants such as mustard, sesame, coriander, cumin, etc.; and vegetables like potato, tomato, peas, etc.
6. The princely state of Bilaspur had its own land acquisition Act and land was acquired according to the provisions given in the law.
7. In Himachal Pradesh, IPH is responsible to provide water and sewer-related services apart from irrigation facilities.
8. The terms redevelopment and rehabilitation have been used interchangeably in the PMAY scheme guidelines. However, it is to be noted that both bear different meanings.

9. Pucca housing refers to permanent dwelling units, built with bricks and cement.
10. *A beneficiary desirous of availing this assistance shall approach the ULBs (Urban Local Bodies) with adequate documentation of land owned by them* (Government of India, 2016, para 7.1).
11. Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh said that all the left-out Bhakra Dam oustees would be provided plots for construction of their houses in Bilaspur town within 2 years (*The Times of India*, 2013b). During Statehood function in Bilaspur, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh announced that left-out Bhakra Dam oustees will be allotted plots within 4 months (*The Tribune*, 2015).
12. Under beneficiary-led construction there are two options. If beneficiary owns a piece of land and have no *pucca* house either on his name or any other family member, he/she can construct a new DU. Otherwise, he/she can also enhance structure up to 30 sq. m (323 sq. ft) including existing built-up area.

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