

Development Induced Displacement and its socio-economic impact on local communities: A Case Study of The Teesta Low Dam Project Stage III (TLDP III) in Darjeeling, West Bengal.

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“The Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas has been identified as an earthquake prone zone and right now it isn't a question of ‘if’ the great earthquake strikes but ‘when’. In short by building a dam on the Teesta river, are we damming ourselves?”

- Neelkamal Chhetri.

With the acceptance of the doctrine of liberalization, privatization and globalization in 1991-92 by the then Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, began a phenomenal growth of the Indian economy. (Pradhan) Since then there is no looking back. India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world today. Keeping this view, one cannot just ignore the immense significance and importance of hydro-electric development to this entire venture, as the first Prime Minister of independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, strongly upheld dams to be the ‘temples of modern India.’

In the year 2000, the Government of India with a view of doubling the electricity generating capacity by the 12th Five Year Plan sanctioned a host of dam construction projects in several states of the country. One such project sanctioned was the Teesta Low Dam Project Stage III with the capacity to generate 132 MW of power, in the district of Darjeeling, West Bengal. The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) was entrusted the project on November 2000. Despite local resistance from the local residents, NGOs, and the environmentalists on various issues the project was commenced in 2002. In this study I look at the socio-economic impact of the said project upon the local inhabitants.

Darjeeling :

Darjeeling, famous for the three T's – Tea, Timber and Tourism, is a small land-locked district, representing an irregular triangle. It is the northern most district of the state of West Bengal in the foothills of the Himalayas. As mentioned in ‘L S S O'Malley's Bengal District Gazetteers – Darjeeling’, Darjeeling falls naturally into two distinct tracts, the Tarai immediately beneath

the Hills and the ridges and deep valleys of the lower Himalayas. Though with a small area of 3149 sq. kms., it ranges in altitude from 300 to 12000 feet above sea-level. According to the 2011 census report, the population of Darjeeling is 1.8 million. The majority of the populace are Gorkhas of ethnic Nepali background along with indigenous ethnic groups such as the Limbu, Rai, Magars, Gurung, Tamangs, Lepchas, Bhutias, Sherpas and Newars. Other communities that inhabit Darjeeling include the Marwaris, Anglo-Indians, Chinese, Biharis, Tibetans and Bengali. The most commonly spoken languages are Nepali, Hindi, Bengali and English. The entire region is administered by the Gorkha Territorial Administration, a semi-autonomous body under the state of West Bengal. With the world heritage sites like the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (toy train), wildlife sanctuaries, and snow covered mountain ranges with a pleasant weather, Darjeeling is probably one of the most preferred holiday destinations in India.

River Teesta:

River Teesta or Tista originates from Tso Lhamo in North Sikkim at an elevation of 5,330 m (17,487 ft.) above sea level in the Himalaya. It is a perennial river fed by both rain and snow-fed lake. The emerald-coloured river is then fed by rivulets, which arise in Thangu, Yumthang and Donkia-La ranges and flows past the town of Rangpo where it forms the border between Sikkim and West Bengal up till Teesta Bazaar. At Teesta Suspension Bridge, which joins Kalimpong with Darjeeling, the river is met by its main tributary, the Rangeet river. At this point, it changes course southwards flowing entirely into West Bengal. The river hits the plains at Sevoke, where it is spanned by the Coronation Bridge which links the Northeastern states to the rest of India. The river then courses its way to Jalpaiguri and then to Lalmonirhat district of Bangladesh, before finally merging with the mighty Brahmaputra at Fulchhori in Gaibandha. The total length of the river is 309 km (192 mi) draining an area of 12,540 km². Great changes have taken place in the course of some of the rivers in Bengal and the adjoining areas, during the period since 1500. Teesta is a part of the eastern Himalayan complex which has been declared a biodiversity hotspot by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This whole region is endowed with rich biodiversity and is a home to numerous indigenous species of the region.

The Teesta River originates in the Himalayas and flows through the Indian States of Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where it flows into the Brahmaputra. Flowing through the length of Sikkim, the Teesta River is considered to be the lifeline of the state. The

Teesta valley in Sikkim is rich in biodiversity, and the river provides livelihoods for the residents along its entire length. The Teesta River has become a contested battleground between the government and the indigenous communities in Sikkim. The government of India hopes to dam the entire stretch of the river both in the state of Sikkim and West Bengal. These dams pose a threat to river communities and the rich biodiversity of the region. Studies of potential projects along the Teesta River lack the rigorous environmental and social assessments necessary and fail to properly address potential long-term cumulative impacts the dams will have.

The Dam:

The government of India plans to build a host of dams along the Teesta river, both in the state of Sikkim and West Bengal, through which the serpentine river flows, to increase its electricity generation capacity of the nation. Teesta Low Dam Project Stage III (hereafter TLDP III) was one of them that were sanctioned. The project was handed over to the NHPC by the based on the MOU signed between the NHPC and the government of West Bengal on 15/11/2000. TLDP III which was to generate 132 MW of power had a budget of 768.92 crores as per the 2002 price level. Amidst much protest and criticisms from various organisations and environmental groups, the project got all the required clearances from the concerned government department, and set on long journey of construction with a lot of natural as well as human induced hurdles on its way until it finally became completely operational with the commencement of its last Unit i.e. Unit 4, for commercial operation.

Some the issues that it had to face at the initial stage was those regarding its negligence in preparing the EIA report, without much consideration and proper study and survey of the fragile ecology of the area, as the entire zone falls under the seismic zone IV and the complete disregard of the rehabilitation process. Environmental groups such as the North-Eastern Society for the Preservation of Nature and Wildlife (NESPON), Darjeeling NGO Network and local villagers criticised the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) for allegedly violating the provisions of the EIA Notification of 1994 under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 by denying access to information about the project and participation of the local community in the so-called consultative process adopted by the NHPC.

NHPCs claim of TLDP being a 'low and run-of-water dam have also been questioned by many. As the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) declares all dams above the height of 15 metres to be categorised as large dams, TLDP III has barrages whose heights are almost

double than the criteria required to be considered a large dam. The steep and fast rising of the water level, submerging almost the nearby entire forest land and threatening villages that lie along the National highway in no way considers TLDP III to be a run-of-water dam.

The Damned:

It has been stated in various newspaper reports and articles that around 25000 people in the area benefits from the Teesta. (The Statesman: 2001) When the dams are constructed on it, all of them will be rendered jobless because more than 70% of the inhabitants in the area are illiterate and unskilled. The only skill they have is their hard labour which they employ in all way possible to feed themselves and their family. The residents of this area mainly survive on three major activity that sustain their livelihood – rafting, quarrying and running small eateries along the National Highway 31A. The first two – rafting and quarrying – have been completely closed down following the commissioning of the TLDP III from December, 2012 whereas the eateries are on the verge of being closed down because of the shifting of the local inhabitants due to the rise in the water level. Though there are other sources of their livelihood such as cattle rearing, collection and selling of firewoods, labouring at construction sites at different locations but these are rather not enough to sustain a family of 5-6 members and are also not a constant source of earning, thus infringing and threatening an individual's very fundamental right to live.

(1) Rafting and The Rafters:

Darjeeling – the 'queen of the Hills' - is one of the popular tourist destination from the British Raj itself due to its favourable climatic conditions and being well adapted for the purpose of a sanatorium. Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the Hills and thus creates a lot of job opportunity and wealth. Unfortunately in this age of globalisation and intense competition, tourism in the Hills cannot survive on the reputation of its climate alone. Tourists, both international and domestic, have nowadays more money to spend, are better informed about a wide range of travel options and look far beyond climate for their choice of a tourist destination, thus demanding a better value for their money.

Darjeeling with its varied topography of beautiful mountain and rugged rivers has been a preferred destination of adventure tourist and eco-tourism. Tourists come to Darjeeling for trekking, hiking, whitewater rafting, kayaking, paragliding, rock climbing, fishing and mountain biking. To cater to this new adventure tourism, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council

(DGHC) – the autonomous body formed after the signing of the agreement with the Government of West Bengal ending a two years of violent agitation for the separate state of Gorkhaland and which looks after the administration of the district under the strict vigilance of the state government – in 1991, introduced this facilities along with river rafting on the fast-flowing river Teesta. This – the whitewater rafting in Teesta - had gained remarkable popularity amongst tourist visiting the Hills. It had created new job, new business and a boost to the local economy.

In 2009, a body legally registered was formed by the local rafter owners called the ‘Teesta Rangeet River Rafting Owner’s Association.’ (Rangeet is a tributary of Teesta which meets at a place called the Triveni, a picturesque location for picnic spot and a perfect home for a wide variety of fishes such as the mahseer, the katli, the fresh-water shark and others.) A sport which started with a mere two owners and three rafts now has twenty-five owners and fifty rafts. More than three hundred families, directly or indirectly, depend on this sector for their sustenance. For some it is the only way to feed his family. Each ride charges Rs. 2500 per ride, which gets distributed among the Association, guide, helper and vehicles transporting the raft and the riders back to the starting point. There are chains of individuals who make an earning from this sector – guide, helper, transport vehicle owner/driver, camera-man, gear changing rooms, restaurant, etc. A ride covers a distance of 10-11kms along the swift and rapid, meandering Teesta. During peak season there are around 20-25 rides per day. Thus one can calculate the income it was generating and contributing to the local economy and to the tourism industry as a whole. All the guides are license holders and have gone through professional training under the National Institute of Water Sport (NIWS), Government of India.

Besides booming the local economy, it had also had a considerable contribution to some social aspects. Employment generation was a huge outcome. A significant amount of the local youth got engaged with this sport which was thrilling, adventurous and all the more income generating. One of the social evil it did away was the regular theft that had plagued the locality and the other areas in its vicinity. Use of drugs by the youth had drastically disappeared and they were more focused into physical fitness and stamina building as rowing the raft down the mighty Teesta was no child’s play. A certain improvement in the standard of the living of the local residents was witnessed. Children went to better schools, family ate well and also contributed to local associations and organisations. As the NH31A runs parallel to the river for around 30 kms., there are frequent accident happening along the highway. The rafters have also formed a voluntary rescue squad to save those people trapped in jeeps, trucks and buses if they

fall into the river or sometimes retrieve the bodies of relatives who have drowned in the river. This act of humanity, as per a rafter was in gratitude to the Mother Nature for giving them the opportunity to earn a decent living. The entire family was happy, so was the entire locality.

It seems the accelerated drive for development by the Government agencies could not see or bear the happiness and smiles of its subjects. Development for whom and at what cost is the questioned regularly being asked and thought about by the affected inhabitants as well as the conscious people of the entire region? Yes, who does not want development? We also want development and prosperity, but not at the cost of our livelihood and ancestral lands and homes being snatched up, laments a resident. Following the commissioning of the TLDP III from December, 2012, there is the steep rise in the water level thus barring the flow of the river. There is the total absence of rapids barring the adventure and fun of river rafting, thus rendering many jobless and leading many into mental apathy. Thus there has been a considerable rise in drug intake by the youths once again in the area and many have resorted to drinking to drink up their worries and pain. It has also led some to withdraw their children from private nursery schools and send them to government schools which are indeed less costly but in a bad state, both in standard of teaching and infrastructure. Why not the Government first solve these sorry affairs or in their very own words 'develop' this sector than to threaten and uproot the already existing booming sector?

The rafters, though most of them school dropouts, very well knew about the consequence of the said dam before its construction actually began. They had held many meetings and talk with the officials of the NHPC and also addressed their plea through the local political outfit. At such meetings, they were given assurances by the NHPC officials that there will only be a considerable rise in the water level and it would not reach the rafting sites and at no cost the rafting business would be affected. These NHPC officials were then backed by the political outfits of the area that had their own political and individual interest being vested by the dam construction. With such assurances and backing the work began without any further hindrance until December, 2012 when the dam was finally commissioned and within few days of blocking the river, there was an immense rise in the water-level submerging a vast area of forest and agricultural land along the shores of the river. More than 8 to 10 kilometres of land up shore have been completely flooded and submerged under water affecting not only the rafting business but threatening the lives and household of the resident living along the entire shore of the river. The mighty flowing river within a month turned into an artificial lake. Rafting now became impossible and completely defunct.

As compensation the NHPC have promised to provide with some motor boats to ride it in now stagnant Teesta. Some? How many and who all will get it and when? No one knows this. If they were to ever get these motor boats, will it able to feed the affected three hundred families and also cater to their other needs? Is that what is called a compensation? The rafting association had also come up with the idea and suggested the NHPC officials to form a rescue body of 20-25 members with a substantial pay to save people and retrieve dead bodies as accident are a frequent occurrence along this coarse and bumpy highway, but to no avail as it was a straight no-no from the authorities. No one knows why? Rough calculation proves that it would not even require one percent of the revenue the dam would generate to pay them once it becomes fully operational.

So the question that loom large among the victims and all those concerned are: What now? How are the three hundred families who were dependent on rafting for their livelihood going to make their ends meet? What about the future of their children, their education and their upbringing? What about those who have lost all hopes and resorted to drinking and drug use? What about the money the sector was generating and the contribution it made to the entire tourism industry of Darjeeling? What sort of development is this? At what and who's cost? Who is going to bear the responsibility and pay for it? What alternatives do you have for these rafters who are both, illiterate and unskilled whose only possession is their labor and their hard work.

(2) Quarrying:

Another booming sector of this region is quarrying. Similar to rafting here too a whole chain of individuals, from labourers to suppliers, truck owners to drivers, contractors to a whole bunch of construction agencies are related and depend on it, one way or the other. As Mr. Neelkamal Chhetri states in a newspaper article (2001), the stone and sand quarries that lie along the banks of the River Teesta to be a multi crore rupee sector, generating benefits for all aspects of the Hill economy, starting from the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation which levies rents, to the local residents who are employed as labourers; from the local truck owners to the hamlets that lie along the river Teesta. The construction industry in the area has also benefited which gets its supplies of sand and stones at cost-effective price.

There are a total of five quarry sites at the vicinity of the TLDP III namely Peshok Jhora, Ravi Jhora, Geil Khola, 29th Mile and Suntalay Jhora which has completely being closed down as the dam down-stream became operational (Jhora is Nepali term for a small, but fast flowing

natural stream). These Jhoras carry along with them boulders and rocks which get accumulated where the Jhoras meet river Teesta. These boulders are then picked up, dried and then beaten into pebbles of different sizes as per the demand, by the local inhabitants who work as labourers at these sites, majority of them being women folks. As per the report of one of the resident who runs a privately owned quarry office in the nearby Kalimpong, a total of seven to eight hundred locals work as labourers at this quarry sites and including all, there are about twelve to fifteen hundred individuals benefitting from this sector. As per him, a labour working on the site, both men and women earns a regular daily wage of Rs. 300 per day. The construction work of the entire region depended on this quarry for cost-effective supply of sand and stone. There was a regular supply of these sands and stones to the neighbouring state of Sikkim.

With the commissioning of the dam, the entire stretch of the shore where this Jhoras met the Teesta and where boulders get accumulated is totally submerged under water. It has now become impossible to extract sand from the river bed due to extreme increase in water level. The water level has risen to such heights in such a short period of time that it has become evident that in a few years like the quarry, the entire village that lies along the shore of the river will get washed away or completely submerged under water. The irony is that the NHPC has, in a straight way, rejected to compensate the victims of this menace. Though the victims had approached the officials but to no avail. The officials were not even ready to hear the plea and the grievances of these poor, innocent and desperate labourers. Moreover these innocent souls were petrified to go and demand their compensation from the NHPC officials, as one of them laments, *'who are we to go and demand? We do not have any influential individual or political outfit that can voice our concern and get us to talk with the officials. They are out of reach for us.'*

The only feedback they have received as compensation was to relocate and resettle the affected families at the colonies at Mungpoo which the NHPC had build to relocate people whose households are or will be submerged by the fast rising water level of Teesta. Mungpoo is some 15kms. from the river and the highway where there is no work or any scope to run a business and to make two ends meet. The NHPC just wants to relocate and resettle them but are not ready to provide any job, not even to a single member of the household. What do they think of these victims, resettle and then die out of hunger and starvation? Who is going to feed them and take care of their other needs?

Robin Pradhan, a 29 years old quarry labourer, in anguish recollects the days he worked in the quarry just below his tiny little hut where both he and his wife, Sudha, worked from morning till late evening, sweating in the days heat and humid weather, for a small amount which they get paid at the week's end. The income though little, was enough for Robin and his wife to feed their family of four and give their children a proper upbringing. Six years old, Ravi went to a nearby primary school whereas two and a half years old Shristy, was home all day. It was easier for the couple to keep an eye on their daughter while labouring due to the closeness of their hut from the quarry site, just few metres walk.

Robin wants his son to be a government employee so that they could all have a secure and comfort life. Here lies another irony, the government which is so determined to uproot Robin and his family from their houses and snatch their only source of living thereby jeopardizing his very dreams for his children, wants his son to work for the government. Such innocents are these poor souls. With certain remorse, he mentions those days in the quarry to be the days of joy and toil.

As of now after the quarries are all submerged under water and defunct, like many affected victims, Robin and Sudha are both working on the construction sites of protection walls. (Protection walls are walls being build up by the NHPC along the shore of the river, fearing the land might just get washed away by the rising water). What after the construction of this protection walls are over? Has the NHPC thought of any alternatives for these poor victims? What is to become of them? Robin feels that he will have no option left but to travel to far off locations to labour on different construction sites with less pay and different working conditions. This, he fears, will have ill effects on his family and his familial as well social life. What about Sudha? Will she has stop working and look after her children and the household? Will the income of a single person be able to sustain their family? More than themselves, they are worried about their children and their future.

This was a sad and a deplorable account of one of the many affected victims. Does anyone care for these innocent victims who have completely no say in determining their future? Whose responsibility it is to hear and redress their pains and pleas? Is it the state government, the centre, the NHPC, the local political outfit, the NGOs or no one? Do these people deserve an answer or a solution to all their queries and worries? These are some of the issues that the concerned authority needs to focus upon and redress at the earliest before the very existence of these poor victims are subjected to jeopardy.

(3) Local Eateries:

This is another important sector where almost 60 -70% of the entire stretch along the shore of the Teesta, where I conducted my fieldwork, (Teesta Bazaar, Geil Khola and 29th Mile) depends upon as the only source of income generation. Due to the suitable geographical locations of this hamlets along the National Highway 31A which connects Sikkim to West Bengal, Kalimpong and runs straight to Siliguri - the gateway to the entire north-eastern states - the number and the business of the local eateries in this area have been increased phenomenally. These eateries serve a wide range – from mineral waters to tea, coffee, rice, rotis, momos, thukpas and a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian curries. After a harassing drive for more than an hour along the sharp bending turns and bumpy roads these sites have become a must stopover for almost all the drivers as well as the passengers in the vehicle. All of these eatery owners earn a satisfactory amount of money to sustain their lives, for children's education and save a little for future emergencies.

The spread of the very news that a dam would be constructed on Teesta in close vicinity to their village spread like a wild fire among the villagers and had given many, countless sleepless nights. They all got united and were determined to fight the authorities and prevent the dam from being constructed but could not. Almost all blamed the local political outfit of that time as they, according to the villagers and reports, stated had negotiations with the NHPC officials. *'Those were the times of politics of terror. Whosoever raised his/her voices against the outfit was either politically victimised and in many cases either just disappeared or murdered. Once there was the negotiation between the two, then that was the end of it. No one dared raise the issue again,'* recalls a victim. The NHPC and the outfit had assured that once the construction work begins as well as when the dam becomes operational many jobs will be created, there will be electrification of many villages and it will lead to the development and prosperity of the entire region and its inhabitants.

The local communities could not avail of any of the above stated assurances. On the contrary they are forced to leave their ancestral home and businesses and re-settle in an entirely new location. It has not even been a year since the dam was commissioned and already the protection walls which has been built to hold the land from getting washed away have shown signs of cracks following two days of persistent rain in the area, thus increasing the chance of being washed away anytime in coming days, weeks or months. These happened just few days before I began my fieldwork. The solution provided by the NHPC was to avoid sleeping at

affected houses during the night. All the affected households were asked to rent a room nearby, at higher altitude, far from the river. The NHPC will bear the room rent for four months till October. They can continue with running their businesses during the day but were very specifically told not to sleep at night. The thing that startled me the most was that the NHPC would bear the compensation for household articles but will not be responsible for loss of life nor will compensate for it. My immediate reaction was – what if the houses and individuals are washed away during the day? The solution was straight and simple – you can run and save yourself during the day and even if you were to fall on the river it would be easier to rescue you. To me it seemed less of the solution and more of a suicidal strategy.

The NHPC authorities and the local residents all are aware that the entire region – especially the 29th Mile and Geil Khola and some parts of Teesta Baazar – will be under the Teesta in some years. The residents also know that they will have no option but to settle for some small compensation and leave everything behind to restart their life again in a completely different locality. This is one of the very reasons why the NHPC is keeping on dragging the tussle for compensation between its authorities and the local communities so that the inhabitants would be forced to vacate the area at meagre compensation. The next version is that, though the NHPC have already provided the option of resettling the affected households to its colonies in Mungpoo, especially built for resettlement and relocation purpose, and also compensate them with cash according to the valuation of each affected family, the inhabitants are adamant at not shifting to the new colony until jobs for them are assured by the NHPC. None of these individual has a secured job and all depend on running their local eateries for income. Meena Sherpa, an activist who has been very vocal in raising the plight of the community responds, *'how long will the money they give us last? None of us have a regular source of income except for these small eateries that our ancestors set up. What will be of us then? Who will feed us and our children? Are we then to starve and die?'*

The demand of the local inhabitants has been very clear and simple. They have unanimously told the NHPC authorities that they do not want huge amount of cash or the colonies. Their only demand is a certain patch of land along the highway and some cash so that they could re-set up their businesses again. There has been no negotiation nor discussions nor any sort of assurances upon this on the part of the NHPC authorities.

Another important problem lies with the land issue. All the lands where these villages have been settled are forest land. None of the resident has any legal document which proves that

they are the legal owners of the land. The residents claim that they have been living in the area for more than four to five decades and have been regularly paying their house taxes to the local Gram Panchayat Office which proves them to be the rightful claimant of the land. This seemed a bit unclear to me. All this confusion was cleared to me by a Land Reformer Officer of our area. As per the Forest Act of 1927, no one can claim a right over the forest except a grant or a contract have been made in writing by the government or some person upon whom such rights have been vested. With the decrease in the forest area over the years for various purposes the department is very clear about not seceding even a small portion of the forest land whatsoever for any purposes. About them living in the land for more than five decades which rightfully gives them the authority over it, his response, *'it has just been a fake rumour that has spread and there is no any sort of legal provision for it as such.'* So is the entire issue over for the local resident? Has their dark future being already sealed?

Thus many questions arise as one assesses the situation: what will happen to all this houses and their rightful owners when the water level further rises in the near future. What will the local inhabitants do – leave the place with no job, no income and no future at all or will the NHPC and the government will assess their plight and the situation and accede to their demand? Looking at the condition of the protection wall which was constructed incautiously and without much concern, what if someone gets washed away today, tomorrow or the day after? Who will claim the responsibility – the government, the NHPC or the resident themselves? Who will speak for these poor souls? Do the poor and the meek not also have a right to live and have a decent life? Some of these questions might be answered in the days that will come but the larger question that might always remain is – Is it right to persecute some just for the sake of development?

Conclusion:

Millions of people have been displaced in India since the development work carried pace. Not even half of them have been resettled or rehabilitated. Regardless of it, neither the central government nor the state government have enacted any effective legislation to improve this situation. (Dreze, Samson, Ray: 1997) Satyajit Ray in “The Dam and the Nation (Ray: 1997)” argues that the Government of India does not have any sort of definite national policy on issues relating to resettlement and rehabilitation and it thus becomes the sole responsibility of the relevant project authorities. A lot also depends upon the political affiliations and organizational power of the displaced persons and ‘given that the displaced persons often belong to the tribal and the marginal groups, there have been few instances of successful resettlement in India and plenty of disasters.’ (ibid)

Similar has been the situation in the affected areas of Teesta project. The displaced people because of their lack of political affiliation and ignorance about the human right policies neither have any assistance from the centre nor the state government. The project authorities are more into completing the project than assessing the critical issues of resettlement and rehabilitation. The most paramount matter has been the absolute silence of the government over the entire controversy. The government's silence and the handling of the whole situation by the project authorities give rise to scepticism of the government's accountability and seriousness over its citizen's rights and their well being.

Ray's further argument of government's policy of cash compensation to the persons displaced by development projects resemble or are much worse than the way things are being carried out in the affected regions of Teesta. The oustees have been promised of cash compensation by the project authorities but there lies immense scepticism about the amount and the time of the said promise, as 'cash compensation is usually much below the replacement value of land.' (Ray: 1997) Though all are hesitant to accept any sort of cash compensation, there demand is for a direct provision of land as compensation – 'the land-for-land policy' (ibid).

Land being a limited resource in India and the lack of appropriate land reforms, they are apprehensive of the time when they will have no other option but to accept whatever they will be given – inadequate and little. As S. Parasuraman argues, people are normally shifted to the resettlement sites at the last minute. There emerges a situation wherein people have no other alternative but to shift irrespective of whether they have received the compensation, land and other benefits and once they shift it reduces their bargaining power. (Parasuraman: 1997) The silence and the prolonging of decision over the issue of resettlement in the TLDP III project area point to this fact.

Various social and economic inequalities inherent in the Indian society undermine the economic and the political capacities of the affected group of people and also lead to division among them. (Parasuraman: 1997) In the affected region of the Teesta, though there is much understanding and agreement among the people, it lacks a common platform to raise its voices and concerns, lacks a 'strong public action to confront the government and to protect the rights of the affected people.' (Parasuraman: 1997) Though all the affected people are worried about the situations and do come together for meetings and several other discussions and deliberations, a common platform or an organised body is absent from the entire scene. The sole reason for this being the fear of political victimisation. Local level politics is very dominant in the area and the bilateral relation and mutual understanding between the leaders and the project authorities prevents many from even venturing out for processions and other demonstrations. The authorities also employ different strategies to woo and get the influential individuals of the area into confidence especially the local level political leaders, preventing the formation of any such organization or common body. Such divisive policies has had serious social and political consequences

on society. Any gains the displaced may hope to get depend on how strongly they are going to challenge and fight the government and other dominant groups. (ibid)

The three point solutions that Ray provides in the concluding remarks of his essay appear very apt for achieving successful resettlement for all the future projects including the TLDP III. (i) to formulate a National Policy on resettlement and rehabilitation incorporating improved compensation measures, (ii) to have a legislative reform to implement the provisions and to protect the basic constitutional and human rights of the displaced persons from the excessive powers of the state. (iii) to adopt a 'voluntary resettlement' approach i.e., to take into consideration the consent of the person being displaced in order to provide them the appropriate condition to acquire adequate and decent resettlement packages for their better sustenance. (Ray: 1997)

The above mentioned three point solution sound viable enough for the welfare and the emancipation of the poor ignorant souls who become victims of the development drive which rarely benefits them in any way. The irony is that it is they who pay the price for the sake of other. The problem of displacement and the resettlement and rehabilitation crisis in the TLDP III project site though being one of its kinds is the part of the much larger crisis faced in the whole of India. Displacement and the entire subsequent process relating to it have a dreadful impact on the physical as well as the psychological state of the affected inhabitants. This over some time will have a negative impact on their social being leading to certain disjunction and rupture inside the community.

Displacement can thus be viewed as a process with a chain of events leading to various social, political, economic, psychological and environmental imbalances and conflict. To counter or to prevent such a crisis it becomes the responsibility of all the stakeholders, including the displaced persons, to take stock of situation, discuss, analyse, debate and come forward with reforms and policies so that along with development the rights and dignity of the people are upheld and safeguarded.

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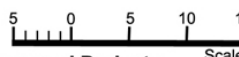
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Operational and Proposed Dams on the River Teesta.

Teesta River Basin

LEGEND

- International Boundary - - - - -
- State Boundary - - - - -
- River and Dam Axis - - - - -
- Lake
- Head Race Tunnel - - - - -
- Place .



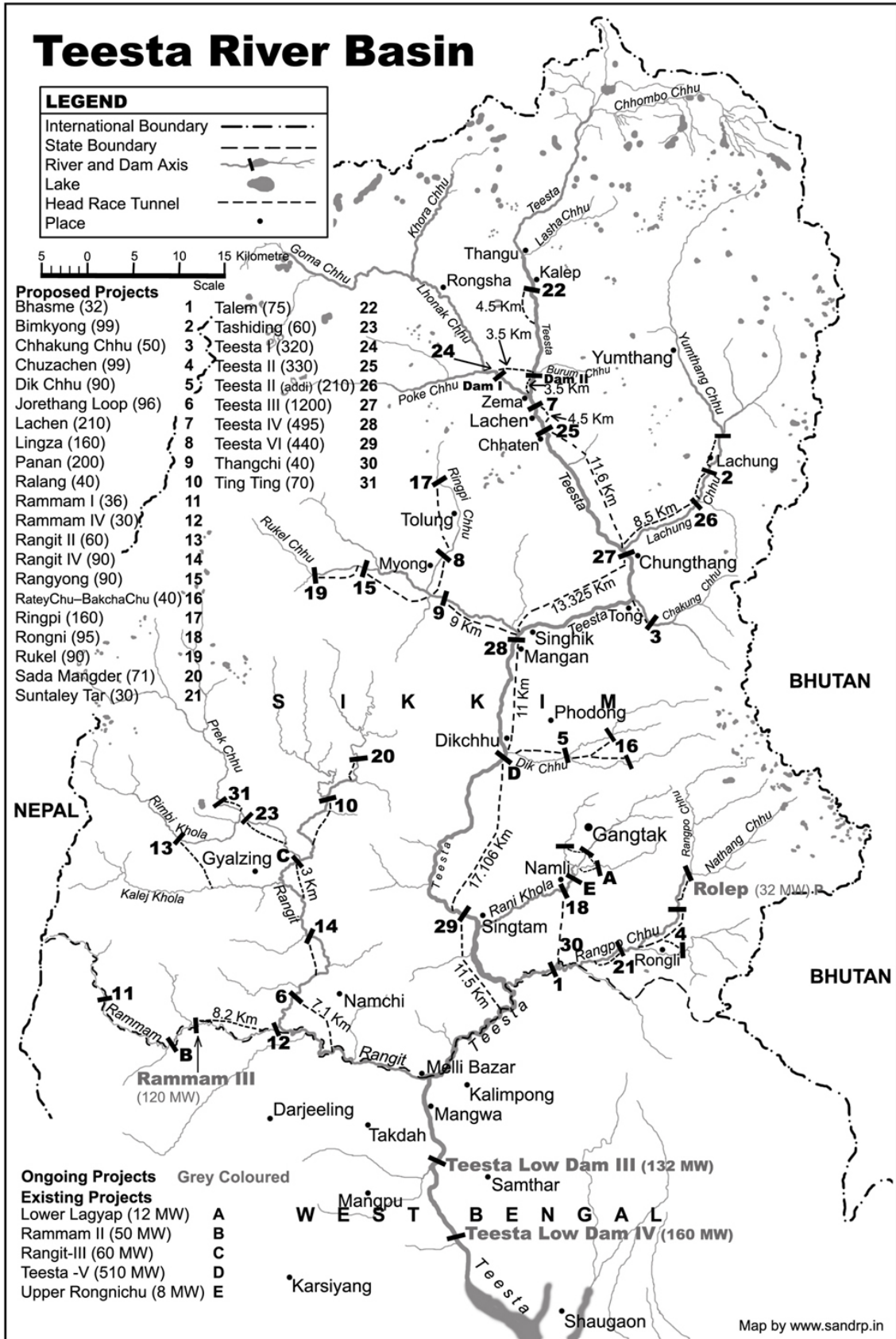
Proposed Projects

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|----|------------------------|----|
| Bhasme (32) | 1 | Talem (75) | 22 |
| Bimkyong (99) | 2 | Tashiding (60) | 23 |
| Chhakung Chhu (50) | 3 | Teesta I (320) | 24 |
| Chuzachen (99) | 4 | Teesta II (330) | 25 |
| Dik Chhu (90) | 5 | Teesta II (addi) (210) | 26 |
| Jorethang Loop (96) | 6 | Teesta III (1200) | 27 |
| Lachen (210) | 7 | Teesta IV (495) | 28 |
| Lingza (160) | 8 | Teesta VI (440) | 29 |
| Panan (200) | 9 | Thangchi (40) | 30 |
| Ralang (40) | 10 | Ting Ting (70) | 31 |
| Rammam I (36) | 11 | | |
| Rammam IV (30) | 12 | | |
| Rangit II (60) | 13 | | |
| Rangit IV (90) | 14 | | |
| Rangyong (90) | 15 | | |
| RateyChu-BakchaChu (40) | 16 | | |
| Ringpi (160) | 17 | | |
| Rongni (95) | 18 | | |
| Rukel (90) | 19 | | |
| Sada Mangder (71) | 20 | | |
| Suntaley Tar (30) | 21 | | |

Ongoing Projects Grey Coloured

Existing Projects

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Lower Lagyap (12 MW) | A |
| Rammam II (50 MW) | B |
| Rangit-III (60 MW) | C |
| Teesta -V (510 MW) | D |
| Upper Rongnichu (8 MW) | E |



Map by www.sandrp.in

Teesta Low Dam Project Stage III.

