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Chita Andolan (Pyre Protest): Rehabilitation, Tribal Rights and Development-Induced Displacement

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Recent Developments:

- The **Chita Andolan (Pyre Protest)** has resumed in **Madhya Pradesh** as families affected by the **Ken–Betwa Link Project** alleged that assurances regarding **rehabilitation, compensation and resettlement** remain unfulfilled.
- The renewed protest is being led primarily by **tribal women** from the affected villages of **Panna** and **Chhatarpur**, demanding implementation of rehabilitation commitments before displacement.
- The movement has revived the debate on balancing **large infrastructure projects, environmental conservation** and **rights of project-affected communities**.

Chita Andolan (Pyre Protest):

Overview:

- The **Chita Andolan** is a peaceful symbolic protest in which affected families sit beside funeral pyres to convey that the loss of their land, forests, homes and livelihoods is equivalent to **social death**.
- The movement seeks **fair rehabilitation, adequate compensation, secure livelihood restoration** and **timely resettlement** for families displaced by major development projects.
- The protest reflects concerns regarding **development-induced displacement** and the need for **people-centric development** that protects vulnerable communities.

Major Features of the Protest:

Nature of the Movement:

- Protesters gather beside symbolic funeral pyres with slogans demanding **justice before displacement**, highlighting the gravity of their socio-economic concerns.
- The movement is largely led by **tribal communities**, particularly **tribal women**, who are among the most affected by land acquisition and displacement.
- Protesters allege delays in compensation, rehabilitation packages, housing assistance and relocation despite ongoing project implementation.
- The agitation also highlights concerns regarding **forced eviction**, demolition of settlements and displacement before completion of rehabilitation measures.
- The movement raises environmental concerns relating to forest diversion, ecological degradation of the **Ken River** basin and possible impacts on the **Panna Tiger Reserve**.

Issues Associated with Development-Induced Displacement:

Social and Economic Concerns:

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- Displacement often results in the loss of agricultural land, forest resources, traditional occupations and community-based livelihoods.
- Tribal communities face greater vulnerability because their social identity, customary rights and cultural practices are closely linked with forests and ancestral lands.
- Delays in rehabilitation frequently lead to prolonged economic insecurity, social dislocation and reduced access to education, healthcare and public services.
- Livelihood restoration remains a major challenge, particularly where monetary compensation alone cannot replace land-based occupations.

Environmental Concerns:

- Large infrastructure projects may involve diversion of forests, habitat fragmentation and changes in river ecosystems.
- Projects located near protected areas require careful assessment to minimise impacts on wildlife habitats, biodiversity and ecological connectivity.
- Sustainable infrastructure development requires balancing developmental benefits with ecological conservation and environmental sustainability.

Legal and Policy Framework:

Constitutional and Statutory Provisions:

- **Article 21** guarantees the **Right to Life**, which has been judicially interpreted to include the right to live with dignity and livelihood.
- **Article 46** directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of **Scheduled Tribes** and other weaker sections.
- **The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013** provides for fair compensation, mandatory **Social Impact Assessment**, rehabilitation and resettlement of affected families.
- **The Forest Rights Act, 2006** recognises individual and community forest rights of forest-dwelling **Scheduled Tribes** and other traditional forest dwellers.
- **The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996** strengthens the role of **Gram Sabhas** in land acquisition, rehabilitation and management of natural resources in **Scheduled Areas**.
- The **Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, 2006** requires prior environmental appraisal and public consultation for specified development projects.

Significance of the Protest:

Governance Perspective:

- The movement highlights the importance of balancing infrastructure development with **social justice**, **inclusive governance** and **human dignity**.
- It reinforces the need for effective implementation of rehabilitation policies before physical displacement of affected communities.
- The protest underlines the importance of **participatory development**, where affected communities are consulted throughout the planning and implementation process.
- It emphasises that long-term project sustainability depends upon public trust, transparent governance and equitable benefit sharing.

Way Forward:

Priority Measures:

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- Rehabilitation and resettlement should be completed before displacement, ensuring housing, livelihood restoration and access to essential public services.
- Compensation should be timely, transparent and reflect the economic as well as social value of acquired land and livelihood resources.
- **Gram Sabhas**, tribal institutions and local communities should actively participate in project planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Comprehensive **Social Impact Assessments** should be integrated with environmental assessments to evaluate long-term social consequences.
- Independent monitoring mechanisms should periodically review rehabilitation, compensation and environmental safeguard commitments.
- Ecologically sensitive infrastructure planning should minimise impacts on forests, river ecosystems, biodiversity and protected areas.
- Livelihood restoration should include skill development, sustainable employment opportunities and long-term economic rehabilitation instead of one-time financial assistance alone.

Conclusion:

Towards Inclusive Development:

- The **Chita Andolan** illustrates that sustainable development requires balancing infrastructure expansion with constitutional values of justice, equity and dignity.
- Effective rehabilitation, meaningful community participation and environmental safeguards are essential for ensuring that development projects remain socially acceptable, ecologically responsible and economically sustainable