

BOOK REVIEWS

Development-induced Displacement in Gujarat **AMITA SHAH**

(Land Acquisition, Displacement and Resettlement in Gujarat: 1947-2004 by Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar (New Delhi: Sage Publications), 1009; pp 114, Rs 895.)

In large agricultural economies where land plays a critical role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural well-being of people, their displacement due to land alienation becomes a complex issue not amenable to any easy analysis. The subject of development-induced displacement, therefore, keeps bouncing back in academic debates, policy discussions, and at times, in the form of protests by project "affected" communities.

It is, however, ironical that an issue influencing millions of poor and marginalised people often remains neglected even in terms of getting to know its broad affects, let alone addressing the matters of redressal and justice against a range of losses. Indeed, neglect of even preparing an inventory of the displaced and project- affected people (DPS/PAPS) suggests an act of gross marginalisation of those who pay the price for development that often, though not always, has growth-inducing impact on an economy.

It is in this context that the book by Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar makes a significant contribution, breaking the enduring silence of convenience by the State as well as the gainers of development, on the one hand, and on the other, of those voiceless millions who lose their land, livelihood, life and identity in the process of displacement.

Estimates of Gujarat DPs/PAPs

This is a book that presents for the first time systematic information and database on development-induced displacement in Gujarat, a state which has vigorously pursued policies of rapid industrialisation since its formation in 1960. The exercise involves a mammoth work of scanning nearly 80,000 gazette notifications in different districts of the state, while also looking into the land acquisition processes and discussing with state officials and legal experts.

One of its important features is the primary data collected from households affected by infrastructural projects at selected sites in the state. The estimates of the DPS/PAPS have been presented against the backdrop of a larger picture of displacement in India and its various other states in Chapter 1, followed by a broad description of historical pattern of development across regions within Gujarat.

As against the estimated number of nearly 60 million DPS/PAPS in India over the past 50 years, Gujarat accounts for nearly 2.5 million such persons. This amounts to around 5% of the state's population. However, the numbers of DPS/PAPS at best are good estimates as suggested by the information available from the scattered sources. The extent of displacement in Gujarat indicates that about 50,000 families (or 2.5 million persons) have been displaced from about 19.6 million hectares of land constituting around 20% of the state's geographical area. Of these, displacement of 9,400 families from 9,800 hectares of land had already taken place before the 1950s, whereas about 87,000 ha of land had been acquired during 1981-90. The pace seems to have continued since then. Not surprisingly, close to 60% of the total acquired land and displaced families were on account of water resources projects, whereas 23% of the land and 33% of the families were affected by projects related to transport and communication. This leaves, among others, the projects related to industries and urban development, respectively with 5.7% and 4.38% of the total land acquired (Table 3.1).

Need of a Careful Scrutiny

While this is crucial information and nearly absent in the discourse on land acquisition and displacement in the state, the figures presented in Chapter 3 and elsewhere in the book need careful scrutiny to help readers grasp the magnitude of the problem. A few observations may illustrate this point.

For instance, the national level estimates of about 60 million DPS/PAPS (on p 8) do not match with the figures presented in Table 1.2 (p 9), where the number for selected states adds up to 157 million. The same holds true for Gujarat. Similarly, against an estimated number of 2.5 million DPS/PAPS families in Gujarat (p 8 and p 56), the source-wise details presented in Table 3.1 (pp 54-55) add up to 4.07 million in Table 1.2 (p 9). Lastly, the estimate of 3.5 million hectares of area under land acquisition constituting close to 20% of the geographical area needs scrutiny in light of the official statistics on land-use.

In any case, the estimated land under acquisition (presented in Table 3.1) is 3.1 million hectares. Also, the estimated number of families seems to have been worked out on the assumption that "one plot acquired is equal to one family dependent on that" (footnote to Table 3.1). The validity of this assumption calls for examination, especially when it has been used for generating the estimate of DPS/PAPS - the central thrust of the exercise. While these aspects require a much careful treatment, they nevertheless highlight the difficulties associated with gathering such information for a meaningful discourse on a critical issue such as this.

Gains and Losses

In the later part, the authors deal with processes of land acquisition and their impact on the DPS/PAPS, drawing mainly from case studies. Much of the discussion reinstates frequent omissions, and at times, blatant violations of even the minimal protection expected to be provided under the otherwise flawed laws on land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation in most states in the country. Having examined the consequences of displacement, particularly in the past two decades, the authors have, as several others, observed a mixed scenario of the impact of land acquisition and compensation mechanisms adopted in the state.

The volume, however, falls short in analyzing the implications of the types of projects that have displaced people from their homes and lands. This is important, especially in the light of the fact that as many as 90% of the displaced families have suffered due to projects related to irrigation, and transport and communication. Such projects are likely to have a positive direct and indirect spill on overall rural economies, including a segment of the poor households, though somewhere else in the state. The fact, however, remains that those who gain and those who lose are often different sets of people. Hence, their gains and losses do not cancel out. A similar scenario may prevail with respect to development of roads and transportation. A critical issue, increasingly gaining ground in the public domain is whether those who lose out in the processes of development have been consulted at all. And, what kind of space they ought to be entitled to while deciding the future management of natural resources, which are integral to their socio-economic and cultural existence. A somewhat more nuanced analysis of this aspect, therefore, would have added value to the otherwise such an information-rich study.

Resettlement policies

The policies discussed towards the end more or less echo the contemporary discourse on both the Land Acquisition Act and also the resettlement and rehabilitation policies at the national and state levels. In this sense, the book makes a timely and significant contribution to the otherwise poor and weak debates on displacement and development and provides a basis for evolving an appropriate framework for decision-making and transparency to be placed in the public domain.

To an extent, the authors agree with the compelling need for diversion of land in the wake of ongoing transformation in the socio-economic-cultural arena, and yet, question the relevance, legitimacy and very important, the nexus through which the State as a protector, provider and promoter of development seems to be operating.

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