

Book Reviews

Gujarat laid bare

A critical study of development and displacement in Gujarat

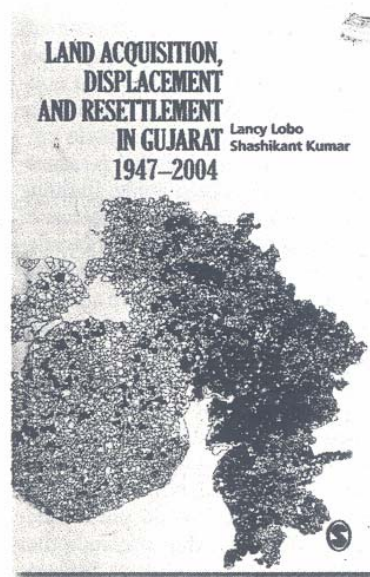
BY LAWRENCE SURENDRA

When Bharatiya Janata Party president Nitin Gadkari was asked by a television channel to comment on the summons issued to Chief Minister Narendra Modi by the Special Investigation Team looking into the Gujarat riots of 2002, he rose in defence of Modi by saying that the minorities in the State had the highest per capita income compared with any other region in the world. Cynics would probably say that the per capita income was bound to rise further if the populations of the minority communities were reduced through periodic pogroms.

Gujarat has been in the news, one could say, for all the wrong reasons. The genocidal events of 2002, which is perceived to have been masterminded by Modi himself, have badly scarred the State's image. However, Modi and his cheerleaders, including some industry Captains, have claimed that Gujarat under his watch has become the foremost "developmentalist State" in the country. Much of Modi's claims to glory are also intended to bury his absolute disregard for the due process of law and the basic principles enshrined in the Constitution.

For the sake of Gujarat's development and that of the country, it is necessary to take a closer look at the State to ascertain whether the claims about high rates of growth are borne by facts. A look further back in time rather than the period of Modi's chief ministership is necessary in order to place the State in the larger context of India's development objectives.

First of all, in 1980, exactly 20 years after its creation and long before the Modi dispensation came on the scene and the Tata-Ambani-Mittal industrial hype involving Gujarat began, Gujarat was among the three fastest-growing States. Since then it has more or less occupied that position. Apart from its long history of mercantilism, Gujarat, like Punjab, is one of the few States with a long history of migration to foreign countries. The remittances from abroad further fuelled trade and mercantilism and resulted in rural prosperity to some degree.



Land Acquisition, Displacement and Resettlement in Gujarat, 1947-2004 by Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar; Sage Publications, New Delhi; pages 3,003, Rs.895 (hardback).

On the other hand, it is also a part of Gujarat's reality that the bulk of the State's people, 77 per cent of whom constitute Other Backward Classes, Dalits and Adivasis, live in severe conditions of the impoverishment and marginalisation. The conditions of the latter two groups are particularly bad. At the same time, communal riots, which have broken out periodically since 1969, have often served the purpose of consolidating the OBCs on the one hand and oppressing the Dalits, the deprived Muslim minority and the poor Parsi landowners on the other.

Communal riots were among the strategies of the rising industrial capital in Gujarat over the decades. Behind the facade of the high economic growth, there are other, more critical, development indices that show the real story of "development and growth" in Gujarat.

The dancer and activist Mallika Sarabhai, in a recent open letter to the actor Amitabh Bachchan, who accepted Modi's invitation to be the brand ambassador for Gujarat, asks, "Did you know that our poor are getting poorer? That while the all-India reduction in poverty between '93 and 2005 is 8.5 per cent, in Gujarat it is a mere 2.8 per cent? That we have entire farmer families committing suicide, not just the male head of the household?"

She goes on to state: "With our CM, hailed as the CEO of Gujarat, we have once again achieved number one status - in indebtedness. In 2001, the State debt was Rs.14,000 crore. This was before the State became a multi-national company. Today it stands at Rs.1,05,000 crore.

And to service this debt, we pay a whopping Rs.7,000 crore a year. Meanwhile, our spending on education is down, no new public hospitals for the poor are being built, fishermen are going abegging as the seas turn turgid with effluents, more mothers die at [child] birth per thousand than in the rest of India.... One rape a day, 17 cases of violence against women, and, over the last 10 years, 8,802 suicides and 18,152 'accidental' deaths of women are officially reported."

In order to unravel the nature of development and to know how economic growth takes place and who it benefits, researchers have to remove painstakingly the layers of propaganda and lay bare the facts and figures. Creative approaches are needed to dig out the facts and analyse the data. Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar have done just that in *Land Acquisition, Displacement and Resettlement in Gujarat* - a rigorous work which is not only rich in quality but is a minefield of ideas in terms of methodology, empirical research and the tools used.

The ostensible purpose of all development and economic growth in a developing economy is claimed to be the removal of poverty, employment creation, and income generation, and not just generation and accumulation of wealth by a small percentage of the population. If that is the case, why is it that development causes such large - scale displacement and impoverishment of people?

The authors, in this published study, originally titled "Development induced displacement", have logically chosen the process of land acquisition, displacement and resettlement to study the process of development in Gujarat in great detail.

Referring to development-induced displacement, the social scientist Dr. Ghanshyam Shah, in his 'foreword' to the book, says, "We do not have precise authenticated information...regarding land acquired and families displaced under various development projects. Such a state of affairs continues to exist despite the hyper 'knowledge world' having sophisticated fourth-generation advanced information technology, statistical and managerial skills, and numerous surveys for future planning. This speaks of a casual and callous mindset of policymakers, planners and private investors towards those who are displaced."

The Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and the damage they are causing to local communities and livelihoods form part of this mindset. It is in the face of such "forced development" in the name of SEZs that works such as the one under review are important models for similar studies to be undertaken across the country.

The work of Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar covers almost 60 years and since no secondary data were available within any of the government departments of Gujarat, they laboriously scanned 80,000 gazette notifications and coded and recoded the information in order to maintain uniformity in presenting the measurements of land in their study. In doing so, the authors created a database of revenue land, region-wise and decade-wise. They state that "40 per cent of the 18,638 villages of Gujarat are affected" and that "Special Economic Zones will aggravate the problem".

The SEZs, particularly in the case of Gujarat, the authors point out, are acquiring more land than they require. Comparing the 15 million persons displaced during the traumatic Partition days of 1947 with the 60 million displaced after 1947, they conclude that awareness on the subject of displacement is weak, possibly because those displaced are the poorest of the poor and mostly tribal people or Adivasis.

DETAILED APPROACH

The authors provide a detailed approach to the study and the methodology used, which is unique in terms of land-related field studies and should serve as a useful model for similar detailed studies that will be required in other States. The work analyses not only the displacement in terms of different types of projects but also the trends in land acquisition and the families affected. The authors look at the consequences and the impact of these on the people and conclude the study by addressing a series of important policy issues.

Here are some samples. Gujarat's sex ratio continuously declined from 942 in 1981 to 934 in 1991 to 921 in 2001. More interestingly or rather tragically, in the 0-6 age group the sex ratio declined steeply, reaching a ratio of 600 females to 1,000 males. Even more significant is the fact that the decline accelerated during the liberalisation decade -1991-2001.

In agriculture, Gujarat's production of cereals and other food grains in the industrialised phase of 1991-2001 declined to nearly half of what it was in 1990. In the past two decades, Gujarat has been losing agricultural land at a faster rate than it did between 1960 and 1980.

In the context of the Narmada Valley Project and what it is supposed to achieve, it is significant to note, according to the authors, that "even after 60 per cent of Gujarat's irrigation potential has been utilised, the State claims in its socio-economic report that the output of the agriculture sector in Gujarat has been largely dependent on the south-west monsoon".

In her open letter, Mallika Sarabhai says: "In the 49 years since it [the Narmada project] was started, and in spite of the &.29,000 crore spent on it, only 29 per cent of the work is complete. That the construction is so poor that over the last nine years there have been 308 breaches, ruining lakhs of farmers whose fields were flooded, ruining the poorest salt farmers whose salt was washed away. Whereas in 1999, some 4,743 of Gujarat's villages were without drinking water, within two years that figure had gone up to 11,390 villages."

Gujarat holds a mirror to the kind of development that is without the corollary of accountability and just governance and shows what kind of nightmares can await the country if the majority of its poor and impoverished citizens are treated as if they are second-class citizens in an apartheid state.

Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar, through their painstaking effort and deep commitment to the powerless and impoverished people, show us, as Ghanshyam Shah points out, "how the problems caused by development could be tackled in a just way, making the current model of development less painful to the affected".

***Frontline*, April 23, 2010, p.81**