



Development Induced Displacement, SEZs and the State of Farmers in India: Some Insights from the Recent Experiences

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Abstract: *Due to incessant scientific advancement, the era of globalization has attained a new degree of developmental height wherein governance is vying for 'inclusive growth' and 'capacity building'. But behind such admired development achievements lays the grave for the underdevelopment of millions of marginal farmers whose land is utilized for the sake of attaining the national goal; creating the paradoxical situation of 'crisis of success'. By virtue of a claim of sustainable and inclusive growth of marginal farmers and labourers, the development endeavors carried out in the recent past, contrarily, proved to be the bane, as it aggravated the problem of involuntary displacement, loss of land and livelihood, unemployment and human rights violation, and hence negating the chances of creation of a egalitarian society. By the introduction of SEZs in 2005 on the pretext of rural development, industrialization, augmentation of foreign currency reserves and employment generation, the government opened the flood gates to Multi National Corporations (MNCs) and big industries, further aggravating the problem of development induced displacement and making the situation worse for the farmers. The fluid condition of land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation Acts in India, despite many revisions and amendments, act as catalysts to strengthen hegemonic minorities against the feeble, majority representing proletariat. The situation has set-up a battleground, where fierce struggle, protests and violence is seen on the streets of India between the government, MNCs, industrialists and planners on the one side and farmers, labourers, marginal communities supported by exponents of civil society, human rights activists, NGOs and environmentalists on the other, destroying the tranquil environment.*

Keywords: SEZs, Farmer, NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization envisages a new phase in the history of humankind. It also converges with the detonation in transportation and communication media, thus turning the world into a 'global village' (McLuhan 1962). Under the influence of global currents and to emulate the western developmental paradigm, in the post-globalization era, development policies in India marked a shift in orientation due to diffusion of neo-liberal ideas and conviction for social accountability towards the marginal and deprived communities. The 21st century evinces the complete transformation in policies of governance, which now vie with sustainable development, inclusive growth and 'capability building' (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011) in order to make life comfortable and establish an egalitarian society. In contrast to such admired and much hyped development initiatives another analogous demeaning phenomenon is also shaping up, which is a continuous source of challenge to development planners, NGOs and exponents of civil society. It is in the form of underdevelopment and involuntary displacement of millions of marginal farmers whose land is utilized for the accomplishment of development agenda and attaining a national goal that irrevocably undermines and questions the notion of social accountability. However, despite deep embedded paradoxes in the development paradigm and endeavors, people and nations are in a mad race to produce luxury and comfort. As a result, 'the gigantic urge of development activities saw man reaching to such a threshold where their endless craving has not only resulted into the environmental squalor but also led to the exclusion and underdevelopment of their fellow brothers' (Verma 2012:237).

Most ironically, at such a moment, when the contemporary global society has entered into the 'information age' known as the 'knowledge society' having 'reflex characteristics' (Giddens 1990) in terms of transparency, dissemination of information, awareness and social accountability; a large proportion of the socially marginalized and economically deprived populace, mostly relying on agricultural lands for farming activities and forests for natural resources, are involuntarily displaced due to development projects. They are forced to live in a communication vacuum having no information at all about their present and future destiny and thus get exposed to greater 'improvement risks' (Cernea 1996) and eventually fall prey to 'development pathologies' (Oommen 2014).

Involuntary displacement, ecological alteration and environmental degradation have always been companions of development. 'All developmental projects require large chunk of land which is not easily available in the densely populated urban areas as occupied by intellectually, economically and politically empowered populace' (Verma 2004: 15). Consequently, for the



inception of development projects, the planners generally fall back to the rural and tribal regions inhabited by illiterate, unaware, poor and underprivileged natives. Hence, as an offshoot of scientific advancement, on the name of industrial development and attaining national goal, a large number of the marginal overtly lose their dwellings and livelihoods and covertly, their culture, civilization and bonding with the natal place.

The rapid augmentation in instances of development induced displacement swiftly brings our sharp attention towards the intent politics which govern the planning of such development projects where in the powerful garner benefits and deprive the marginal to the extent of extinction. While analyzing the discourse of such developments, the central issue that confronts us here is that of the 'relationship between knowledge and power' (Pieterse 2001: 8). In today's world knowledge is power and vice-versa. Eventually, some one who controls power invariably make sit operational through control over knowledge, science and technology and subsequently governs society to meet their own specific interests. This viewpoint evinces that, 'development thinking performs a role of representation, of articulation and privileging particular political and class interests and cultural preferences' (ibid.: 8).

With this background, for the convenience of analysis, the paper is broadly divided into four parts apart from the introductory section and conclusion. The introductory part begins with raising debate of the problems of involuntary displacement by placing the discussion in a theoretical domain. The first section, 'Development Induced Displacement in India: An Overview' provides retrospective analysis of development projects in India causing dispossession on with the implicated statistics. In the second part of the paper, 'Recent Developments in India: Introduction of SEZs in 2005', the post SEZ scenario is discussed by highlighting government prerequisite of incessant development for sustainable inclusive growth, employment generation, boost in revenue generation and to augment foreign currency reserve and; its backlash in terms of forced dispossession, loss of agricultural land and source of livelihood, increase in unemployment amongst the marginal and farmers and eventually loss of revenue. In what way the inception of SEZs in India is proving detrimental to the rights of the farmers is under lined in the third segment, 'SEZs in India: Centre of Systemic Deprivation, Human Rights Violation and Violence'. The section emphasizes the issues of systemic deprivation caused to farmers and labourers through development policies triggering irreversible chain of human rights violation and violence inflicted on them. The penultimate fourth section, 'Changing Contours of Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy in India' discusses at length the origin and evolution of land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation laws in India with their highlighted significance, the modifications and amendments done in the policies on pretext of making them more inclusive. Last, in what way these policies violate basic human rights of the dispossessed farmers. A summary of the entire discussion with highlighted findings is provided in the conclusion part of the paper.

DEVELOPMENT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Development induced displacement is not a new phenomenon in India, however, earlier displacement were caused largely due to multipurpose river valley projects like dams and mining activities. We have ample evidences suggesting displacement dates back to the age of the Gupta dynasty. In the middle ages, Jai Samand Lake built near Udaipur in the eighteenth century removed many families from their habitat. However, displacements did not utterly shatter and disrupt lives of affected people because of the smaller population and abundance of barren land. In the colonial age, displacement was caused in various places in pursuit of raw material for the Industrial Revolution in England, 'for coal mines in Raniganj, tea garden in Assam, coffee plantations in Karnataka etc.' (Fernandes 2008: 89). Post independence intensified forced dispossession in India due to a population explosion, intensive agglomeration in density of populace and urgent need to fulfil development endeavours of millions of citizens. Apart from erection of mega industrial, mining, river valley dams and other infrastructural projects, some other construction initiatives embarked upon recently, have caused wide spread in voluntary displacement in India.

Dubey (2008) rightly mentions in this regard, 'now human population are being uprooted by numerous other development activities; industrialization; infrastructure building including construction of highways, ports, airports, power stations; relocation of slums and, the more recent entry, the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Now the land is being acquired for private companies for building factories, malls, parks, swimming pools, hotels and night clubs' (Dubey 2008: xv).

Due to negligence and the apathetic attitude of the policy planners, at present, no precise figure is available for the number of people dispossessed. The estimates of the World Bank Environment Department indicate that every year roughly 10 million people are displaced worldwide due to dam construction, urban development and transportation and infrastructure programs. In an estimate the last decade has observed resettlement of 80 to 90 million people due to infrastructure programme. This number is shockingly high, but still fails to account for large numbers of the displaced living in the vicinity of or downstream from projects whose livelihood and socio-economic milieu might be adversely affected by the project and not directly physically ousted from legally acquired land.



While focusing on the Indian condition, ‘alarmingly, the sheer magnitude of the problem is staggering. According to one estimate, some 60 million people have been displaced in India since independence’ (Dubey 2008: XV; Mathur 2011:1), ‘most of whom have never been properly resettled’ (Mathur 2008: 3). Resettlement researches indicate that during the last four decades, over 20 million people have been resettled in India due to the inception of development projects, but as much as 75 percent of them have not been rehabilitated. Ironically, more than 40 percent of the displaced population was tribal and poor farmers dependent on agriculture and forests.

In what way the development projects are taking their toll on the marginalised can be seen in the report of the Working Group on Development and Welfare of Scheduled Tribes. Their report submitted during Eighth Five-Year Plan (1990-95); highlight the rehabilitation state of displaced Tribals by mentioning that out of the 16.94 lakh people displaced by 110 projects studied by them, about 8.14 lakh were Tribals. Taneja and Thakkar (2000) point out that estimates on displacement in India from dam projects alone range from 21 million to 40 million.

The displacement enumerations clearly indicate that development planners have planted explosive landmines by ousting millions of farmers and marginalized people from their habitat.

The emerging situation has set up a modern battle ground where in the bourgeoisie (MNCs and capitalists) and the proletariat (farmers and marginalized) will be fighting for the establishment of supremacy.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA: INTRODUCTION OF SEZs IN 2005

Even though the state of development induced displacement is not portraying a rosy picture, nonetheless, the Government of India, in gross neglect of ground realities and by getting carried away by the wave of LPG, inviting MNCs to establish industries in India by offering agricultural land at concessional rates. Offering ‘old wine in a new bottle’ in the name of sustainable inclusive growth, acceleration of rural development, for linking agricultural society close to urban and industrial set-up, employment generation, improve foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows and thrust to export of goods, and for bringing overall prosperity and equity, the Government of India passed the act on Special Economic Zones (SEZs)¹ in the year 2005 under the influence of first modern zone set up for Shannon Airport in County Clare, Ireland.

‘India was one of the first in Asia to recognize the effectiveness of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) model in promoting exports, with Asia’s first EPZ set up in Kandla in 1965. With a view to overcoming the shortcomings experienced on account of the multiplicity of controls and clearances, absence of world-class infrastructure and an unstable fiscal regime, and to attract larger foreign investments in India, the Special Economic Zone policy was announced in April 2000.

Five years later, the SEZ Act, 2005 was also introduced and in 2006 SEZ Rules were formulated. According to the Act, a Special Economic Zone is a specially demarcated area of land, owned and operated by a private company, which is deemed to be foreign territory for the purpose of trade, duties and tariffs. SEZs enjoy exemptions from customs duties, income tax, sales tax and service tax.

The central dissimilarity between the policies of SEZ and EPZ is that even the private developers can build SEZs. Most importantly, up to 50 percent of the total space of SEZ can be utilized as non-processing area for the building of other commercial and social infrastructure.

In order to provide smooth sailing, the SEZs rules, inter-alia, provide for drastic simplification of procedures and for single window clearance on matter relating to central as well as State governments.

Owing to a significant shift in the economic policies, the government ‘allowed the private sector a major role in the development process, which, until recently, was exclusively a public sector affair. The new policies proactively seek investment from domestic as well as multinational corporations by creating an investment-friendly environment. In order to touch greater heights in economic growth, policies are being further liberalized and laws amended overnight’ (Mathur 2011: 1) to bestow space to the giant multi-national companies. Under the existing situation, ‘any large investment, especially foreign direct investment (FDI) coming to India, is now seen as the success of the economic reform agenda’ (ibid.:2). ‘Government, obsessed with achieving higher and higher economic growth targets, is trying to attract private investments in sectors as varied as power generation, manufacturing, mining, roads, airports, and housing, to name a few. SEZs for large private corporations, including MNCs, are being set up to accelerate the development process,’ (Mathur 2008: 3).

¹Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Act 2005, a modified version of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Policy in India, passed for the creation of physical territories within the country for the purpose of integrated development of industries and other commercial activities. Under the SEZ Act 2005, these areas enjoy special privileges from government like tax concessions, exemptions from labour and environment legislations.



By shutting eyes to the appalling tribulations, under intense enthusiasm to set up SEZs, States of India put their best foot forward to woo investors especially MNCs by offering cheap agricultural lands situated at strategic locations like the vicinity of urban-industrial centres catering to sea, river or road for easy transportation to suit business. As a result, SEZs mushroom all across the length and breadth of the country, swallowing up millions of farmers mostly from economically backward and marginalized communities under constant scare of involuntary displacement. Notwithstanding the fact that approximately 70 per cent of the population in India today still depends on agriculture and land for sustenance and any move to push them out from their native place would directly snatch their bread and butter.

Nevertheless, falling in line with the new initiative ‘the central government has given approval to a staggering 513 SEZs in 19 States; 250 of these have been notified. Reportedly hundreds more have been proposed to the Board of Approvals, and the majority have received what is known as “in-principle approval”. The area being acquired by all the SEZs with “in-principle approval” is already close to 200,000 hectares (2,000 sq. km., or greater than the area of Delhi in the National Capital Region’ (Asher and Atmavilas 2011: 319-20). The effort to industrialize India by entertaining MNCs and opening floodgates for SEZs happened in utter laxity and deterrence to the intermittent situation which underlines that ‘the population in India has grown rapidly over the years, and is currently growing more in one week than the entire European Union’s population grows during a full year. Due to high population density it will not be possible any more to undertake a project without displacing huge numbers, even in the remotest forest and mountainous areas’ (Mathur 2008: 3). As Upendra Baxi has rightly remarked in this context, “No development without displacement” is the mantra of the developers everywhere’ (Baxi 2008:17).

It was done in unseemly haste to create investor friendly conditions, regardless of what happens to the livelihoods of farmers whose lands will be gone for a pittance. Subsequently, just after the initial SEZ approvals in the year 2006, an estimation of displacement armingly reveals that ‘close to 1.14 lakh farming households (each household, on an average, comprising five members) and an additional 82,000 farm worker families, who are dependent upon these farms for their livelihoods, will be displaced. The total loss of income to the farming and the farm worker families, then, is an astounding Rs.212 crore a year’ (Asher and Atmavilas 2011:320). The fact that land lost to SEZs, predominantly agricultural and typically multi-cropped, is capable of producing close to 1 million tons of food grains simply implies significant amplification in food insecurity. The CAG report, ironically, unravels the truth behind the forced acquisition of land from farmers by pointing out the inherent flaws and misuse of land acquired on the name of SEZs. ‘Out of 39245.56 ha of land notified in the six States (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha and West Bengal), 5402.22ha (14%) land was de-notified to be used for commercial purposes. The CAG report indicates that several of these lands were acquired using “public purpose” clause, they certainly did not serve the objectives of the SEZ act’ (Singh 2015:2).

Despite knowing that the ‘performance of the Indian State in resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) of those displaced by development projects is not satisfactory at all. The R&R policy hardly moves beyond monetary compensation as a remedy to undo development-induced impoverishment. Compensation alone is structurally incapable of addressing the resettlement issue’ (Bose 2014:239).

The whole exercise is done on the pretext that ‘the power to acquire “land” for private parties in the name of “public purpose” already exists with the government, under the colonial and draconian Land Acquisition Act (LAA) 1894. Therefore, within a few months of passing the SEZ Act, State governments issued land acquisition notices under the LAA for some of the proposed SEZs. With the rampant use of the Act, Pandora’s box flew open, and what followed was a slew of coercive means for the seizure of land. These were met with protests. It was evidently highlighted then that the principle of “Eminent Domain” would be exercised by the State to make available land for SEZs. Several instances of opposition from land-owners and farmers, fisher communities, Dalits, and indigenous communities started to be reported. The stories that first hit the national news were from Jhajjar (Haryana), Raigad (Maharashtra) and Nandigram (West Bengal) in May 2006’ (Asher and Atmavilas 2011:318).

SEZs IN INDIA: CENTRE OF SYSTEMIC DEPRIVATION, HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION AND VIOLENCE

For the first time in the history of involuntary displacement a new trend was observed in India after the 2005 SEZ Act. It is noteworthy that the ‘a divas is alone constituted nearly 40 percent of the displaced population in the post-colonial period until the 1990s. But the location of the SEZs in agriculturally rich peripheries of urban centres has affected the middle class and small peasantry, who have been at the centre of the struggles against SEZs, be it in Raigad, Jhajjar, Gagret, Nandigudi, Vizag or Kakinana. While the stakes of agricultural labour, tenants, sharecroppers and other affected communities can not be denied, the middle class land own ers have been at the helm of the opposition in many areas,’ (Asher and Atmavilas 2011:332). It is indicative that the ambit of victims of involuntary displacement has further expanded in the post SEZ regime by incorporating, not only the Dalits and A divas is but also, middle class farmers, peasantry and share-croppers.

Hence, the effect of globalization is seen more prominently amongst the stakeholders and issues of information about the proposed land acquisition, awareness about the rights and duties, ways of showing protest and demand for just rehabilitation



package surfaced much more persuasively with the addition of middle class farmers. They became more vociferous by the inclusion of NGOs, exponents of civil society and human rights activists with the aid of both electronic and print media.

By and large, with sustained effort, the exponents of the rights of the displaced manage to ascertain that the 'SEZ policy is inherently unfair and biased; its emphasis is on industrialization, science and technology, ruthless exploitation of natural resources and letting loose of market forces, completely ignoring and eroding the cultural and social sensibilities, identities and distinctiveness of its subjects' (Pandey 2015: 318).

These acquisitions have immense implications on the agricultural sector; in terms of setback to farming, agriculture and allied activities, productive opportunities lost, food in security, rising unemployment in rural areas and displaced livelihoods. Farmers are not adequately compensated for the land acquired from them.

'In several cases, the land sought to be or actually was acquired was fertile, multi-crop agricultural fields providing the only means of livelihood to the small and marginal farmers owning the lands. The affected people see in this land grab a nexus between the State and the corporate sector' (Dubey 2011: xi).

Developers and promoters of SEZs get land cheaply – almost one-fourth or less of the market price. With the minimum required processing area being 35 per cent, it is likely that the policy may be misused for real estate development rather than for industry and generating exports. In all probability, it is a 'real estate scam' in the making, cautions an eminent economic expert. Alarming is the 2014 (report no. 21) report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is eye opening. It asserts that, 'Big portions of land were lying idle in almost each State. Approximately 52 per cent of the land allotted remained unused even though some lands were allotted in 2006.

In Andhra Pradesh 48.29 per cent, Gujarat 47.25 per cent, Karnataka 56.72 per cent, Maharashtra 70.05 per cent, Odisha 96.58 per cent, Tamil Nadu 49.02 per cent and West Bengal 96.34 per cent SEZ land remained idle. In descending hierarchy, State-wise the maximum number of operational SEZs are Andhra Pradesh (36), Tamil Nadu (28), Karnataka (22) and Maharashtra (19)' (Singh 2015:1).

The data exposes the existing paradoxical nature of development paradigm wherein, on the one hand government is lamenting not having sufficient resources to implement social security and welfare schemes and, most ironically, on the other industries and business is provided a cosy environment for an exponential boost in income. The fertile, multi-cropped agricultural land remained unused after acquisition is proving sore to the farmers.

Rather than ushering comprehensive economic development the much glorified SEZs is resorting into clusters of heightened economic activity further widening the gulf between the zones experiencing development vis-à-vis impoverished surroundings boarded by the farmers and other marginal. 'A tragic manifestation of the malaise in the agrarian sector has been the incidents of farmers' suicide on an unprecedented scale' (Dubey 2011: xi).

The global experiences support this by reiterating that, 'worldwide experience with resettlement has shown that people who are displaced do not easily recover, much less improve, their previous standard of living. Failed resettlement projects create new pockets of poverty where none existed before. For those affected, development has been too often experienced not as an opportunity, but as disruption and impoverishment. Such displacement not only puts affected people into grave impoverishment risks, but also causes a setback to the entire poverty reduction effort. As one observer puts it, "Truly, development is a very contradictory affair if it reinforces the very poverty that it aims to eliminate" (Mathur 2008: 3-4). Hence, critics rightly term SEZ as 'island of affluence' amidst the 'sea of deprivation'.

Smelling the paradoxical nature of development evolved by SEZs in India, resistance movements spread across the regions. In the southern region, Muthanga forest land struggle at Waynad in Kerala by Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha figured up. Western and central India saw farmers protest against SEZ in Raigad against land acquisition by Reliance in Greater Mumbai. In the eastern region, violent struggle in Singur and Nandigram (West Bengal) made constant headlines against SEZs being held responsible for triggering large-scale dispossession along with a divas struggle in Jadugoda against uranium mining and displacement.

The North east region also joined the movement at Doyang and Tongani in Assam against forcible eviction from forests. Farmers protest against Reliance SEZ in Jhajjar, Haryana and farmers struggle against land acquisition for Trident SEZ at Barnala in Punjab is the most discussed instances of the northern region.

Thukral has rightly put it, 'The psychological preparedness for displacement is never given consideration. What happened in the case of Nagarjuna oustees is bound to result. Even though they had been informed about their impending displacement, they did not vacate their land. Finally, many had to be forcibly evacuated by the army. In the case of the Rihand project, the oustees were not informed in advance. When the waters were released they had, literally, to run. In the case of the Koyna dam too, people were completely unprepared. The waters rose so quickly that the residents had to run for life barely giving time to bring out household goods. The water came and everyone cried Run! Run! So also the oustees of Pond dam caught unaware,' (Thukral 1992: 15).

In another incidence, for the construction of Rihand Thermal Power Project in the Singrauli region, the project authorities choose monsoon season for evacuation of land when it was raining heavily and the whole area was flooded.



‘With the help of 200 police personnel the agricultural land was doused, standing crops were destroyed and people were forcibly thrown out of their places. The poor had no place to hide and had to spend days and nights in monsoon without roof over their head. By that time they had not even been paid the compensation for the land’ (Verma 2004: 224).

Constant resistance and protests against the forced acquisition of agriculture land for SEZs started producing results. Bowing down to the fierce agitation waged by the farmers,

‘Goa State government was forced to cancel creation of SEZs under pressure from popular and political protests. In September 2008, natives from 22 villages, which were targeted for the acquisition for the proposed Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries’ SEZ, participated in the first- ever referendum on the issue. The result of the referendum was a resounding “No” to the SEZ in Raigad. On 2 October 2008, eight villages in Tiruvanamallai district passed resolution at their gram Sabha meetings against the government move to acquire 2,200 acres land – most of it under cultivation – for the expansion of the Cheyyar Special Economic Zone’ (Asher and Atmavilas 2011:333).

In addition to the forced dispossession, compensation payment in pittance, neglect of just and equitable rights and violation of human rights of the displaced, the impending SEZs are under constant attack for being replica of capitalism by evincing maltreatment of labour, violence exerted against them and eventually socially and economically excluding them from the fruits of development. Pandey affirm by mentioning that,

‘Unregulated markets treat human labour as a commodity to be bought and sold, vulnerable to exploitation. The so-called modern welfare state is supposed to be inclusive in its approach towards the poor and the marginalized. But the creation of SEZs as a product of neo-liberal policies of the Indian State has led to structural violence.

People are excluded because they lack the means to participate in the market. This kind of development basically promotes “accumulation through dispossession” i.e. accumulation of material wealth through inequality and deprivation’ (Pandey 2015:320).

Changing Contours of Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy in India The outburst in development-induced displacement is one of the most serious issue plaguing development planners causing wide spread concern and demanding immediate attention in India. The acts concerning land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) in India play an instrumental role in this regard. Let us have a critical look at these enactments:

Sensitization towards the ever growing and all pervasive problems of R&R began in the 1980s with a shift in orientation towards protection of human rights of the displaced. The attention of the NGO movement as well as that of some donor agencies has been drawn around the Sardar Sarovar Project during the early 1990s. Ensuing years have seen lots of hue and cry favoring for enactment of a sound National R&R Policy (GOI 1995; 1996) in India, in genius enough to solve the problems of the oustees. Subsequently, efforts are constantly paving toward the composition of a national policy on R&R. However, in the meanwhile, some states enacted state-wise R&R policies along with Company-wise and sector specific policies developed by some private and government infrastructure companies.

In 1989, a draft National Policy on Developmental Resettlement of Project Affected Persons was formulated with the initiative of NGOs, which was opened for discussion. The first major breakthrough in this regard took place in the year 2004, when the Government of India notified a national rehabilitation policy known as National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NPRR) 2003 (GOI 2003). NPRR 2003 (GOI 2003) was applied to such projects that were displacing more than 500 families in masses in the plains and 250 in the hills or the schedule area. The policy guaranteed free site to the project-affected families (PAF), whose house has been acquired. In addition, various monetary packages were promised to affected families depending on the extent of their land loss. Most importantly, the policy recognized the claim of the rural artisan, small trader and self-employed PAF by promising financial assistance of Rs. 10,000/- for construction of shops or working sheds. The positive aspects underlying NPRR 2003 was its broad definition of PAF and ‘agricultural family’. It made provision for a separate rehabilitation agency for the execution of R&R work. Lastly, it restricted R&R benefit to those who have resided in the affected area for 3 years before the notification under section 4(1) of the Land Acquisition Act. By this provision, it prevented outsiders from buying land in the affected area and in turn grabbing most of the rehabilitation benefits. But the act was under criticism for not making any provision to refute forced acquisition of land. It hardly gave any space to the farmers to be heard by the government machinery against forced acquisition.

In December 2012, the third version of the bill was released after several rounds of deliberations between various ministries and subsequently passed in 2013. The bill claims that:

‘...it is a bill to ensure, in consultation with institutions of local self government and Gram Sabhas established under the constitution, a humane, participative, informed consultative and transparent process for land acquisition for industrialization, development of essential infrastructural facilities and urbanization with the least disturbance to the owners of the land and other affected families and provide just and fair compensation to the affected families whose land has been acquired or proposed to be acquired or are affected by such acquisition and make adequate provisions for such affected persons for their rehabilitation and



resettlement thereof, and for ensuring that the cumulative outcome of compulsory acquisition should be that affected persons become partners in development leading to an improvement in their post-acquisition social and economic status.....' (GOI2012).

The RTFCTLARR2012bill(LAARAct2013)allows for the acquisition of the land albeit with prior consent of Gram Sabhas or councils. However, no clear procedure as to how consent may be ascertained is mentioned and while Gram Sabhas and urban local bodies are to be consulted, resolutions taken by these bodies find no legitimate mention. The steps to be followed, if there is no consent, are also not mentioned.

As a filler to patch up the controversies and shortcomings surrounding the Act of 2013, the government brought an other very ambitious bill in 2015 (LARR 2015) with much fanfare. Mr. Amit Shah, the president of the ruling BJP party hailed the LARR 2015 bill in a statement given to the Times of India on May 19, 2015 by mentioning that, 'not one inch of the land acquired under the proposed new law will be used to favour any company. The land bill is purely aimed at ensuring that development reaches villages. Roads, railways and defence production units will be set up. Land will be acquired only for projects that will create jobs' (Salve 2015: 1). However, the new bill of 2015 proved no less controversial and fatal and eventually pitted against farmers interests than the previous one.

A comparison between the LAAR Act 2013 and LAAR bill 2015 will prove helpful to unravel the controversies surrounding the latest bill of 2015.

'In the new bill, there is no approval required for schemes under these categories 1) defense, 2) rural infrastructure, 3) affordable housing, 4) industrial corridors and 5) infrastructure projects including Public Private Partnership (PPP) schemes of the central government; whereas the LARR Act 2013 requires that consent of 70 per cent of the land owners to be obtained for PPP projects and 80 per cent of the land owners to be obtained for private projects. The LAAR Act 2013 requires doing a social impact assessment to identify affected families and calculate the social impact when the land is acquired. The LAAR Act 2013 imposes certain restriction over irrigated multi-cropped land and agriculture land, whereas there is no such provision in the LARR 2015. In LARR 2013, only those companies who are registered under Sec 3 of the Companies Act of 1956 could get permission to acquire land for private schemes; however as per the LAAR 2015 any private firm which is working in collaboration with a non-governmental organization or any other organization can get land for a private business. The LAAR 2013 states that if land remains unused for five years it should be either returned to the land owners or to the land bank, the LAAR 2015 removes the time restriction of five year period. The LAAR 2013 mentions that if an offence is committed by the government, the head of the department will be held responsible unless he could prove that the offence was committed without his knowledge or he had exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of that offence; the LAAR bill, however, replaces this provision and states that head of department can not be prosecuted until the government puts a prior sanction. In a nutshell, the LAAR Bill 2015 makes the environment for business not just very comfortable but also gives them a way to creep in to people's land without much hassle' (Singh 2015: 2-3).

CONCLUSION

The most promising, pragmatic and fascinating progeny of development and scientific advancements, paradoxically, unravels an altogether contrary picture. Its credibility for bringing inclusive growth, sustainable development, equity and equality to society failed miserably. Empirical evidences across the nation bestow a solid indication that an unholy alliance between 'knowledge and power' is incongruously utilized by the powerful hegemonic bourgeois to amass personal wealth. It is manifest in most development planning where in even a single penny of expenditure for erection of industry is calculated and the marketing of the product is planned well in advance for escalation of profit. However, the advance planning does not provide space for social issues including proper rehabilitation of the dispossessed on whose land the development project is constructed. As a result, the much publicized, glorified, people's friendly and poverty eliminating mega development projects considered as the product of a high degree of scientific advancement and the hallmark of excellence ends up bringing tribulations of involuntary dispossession, 'impoverishment risks', 'development pathologies' and eventually undermines the possibility of 'capacity building'. Movements of farmers, landless labourers and people shailing from marginalized communities are rampant in contemporary times against the forced acquisition of land, payment of compensation in pittance, unemployment, food insecurity and ultimately violation of human rights. The agitation against forced land acquisition further aggravated in the aftermath of SEZ policy in India with the inclusion of NGOs, exponents of civil society, environmentalist and human rights activists. Government in ability to formulate a concrete and water tight land acquisition and R&R policy, despite their best effort in the last 3-4 decades, added fuel to the fire. In a mad quest of inviting MNCs, accelerating export and import and augmenting foreign currency reserves, the government by and large has remained apathetic and callous towards of the victims of development projects and as a result, the land acquisition and R&R policies formulated remain piecemeal and project specific and thereby provide greater space for discrimination and exclusion. Due to high population density, lack of barren land and development necessities, the problem is bound to be aggravated and reach beyond proportion in future. The volatile condition reminds us to rethink and re-plan our scientific development paradigm by making it more people's friendly. Only then, the goals of sustainable development and



inclusive growth - socially, economically, ecologically and environmentally accountable - can be attained and its rewards be enjoyed by all citizenry in a homogeneous manner.

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