Abstract

The focus of the research project was to study the politics of the processes of land acquisition for development projects in Kerala, especially the acquisition of agricultural wetland areas. The researcher used a Qualitative Collective Case Study method to understand the processes of land acquisition by the state. The two cases undertaken included the land acquisition for the National Highway Connectivity for Vallarpadam International Container Terminal Project (ICTT) passing through seven villages falling in Kanayannur Taluk and the proposed acquisition of 472 acres of land from Thuravur, Manjapra, Matur villages in Aluva Taluk, both falling in Ernakulam district in Kerala. Going beyond a state versus people dichotomy, the study looked into the role of different stakeholders involved in the micro politics of land acquisition and conversion, and the varying interests entailed. The study also looked into the nature of conflicts and struggles around present day land acquisitions, which can open up space for a dialogue process pertaining to the real concept of development. In the study the social and environmental issues arising out of a land acquisition project was also looked upon. The study also looked into the legal and institutional mechanisms in the context of which these land acquisitions takes place.

From the thesis, it can be seen the land acquisition process for a development project is not an isolated activity and has to be evaluated on the basis of three major aspects involved. One is the rationale of the development project itself in the context of the rupture of the present development model in ensuring social and environmental justice. The second aspect to be looked into is the topographic (ecological sensitivity, food and water security etc) and demographic patterns (population type, population density etc) as well as the nature of land relationships (extent of land reforms and land distribution, pattern of land ownership) that characterise the population. The third aspect is the ‘packaged’ compensation/rehabilitation offered to the project affected people without an integrated and futuristic vision, in the absence of an effective rehabilitation framework. An undermining of the red politics (social justice) and green politics
(environmental justice) through the negation of the political questions on development, topography, demography, land relations and rehabilitation are inherent in the current conventional narratives of development, which focuses its interest on unbridled economic growth. Negating or suppressing these significant political questions that determine a rational development process is leading to a culture of depoliticisation in the state. Involvement of multiple stakeholders – respective governments, bureaucracy, court, media, political parties, people – in varying extents as well as multiple processes can be observed in the depoliticisation of these political questions.

(Key words: land acquisition, dispossession, environmental degradation, displacement, depoliticisation, Kerala)