

Rebuilding lives: Stories of Struggle, Agency and Resettlement of the Development Induced Displaced in the suburbs of Kochi

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Abstract

This paper examines how does the contentious issue of displacement play itself out in a state like Kerala? The context of Kerala is important as it allows us to understand displacement experience in a state which has received much acclaim for its public action and public consciousness of its people. How would people in a state with historical precedence of struggles for improving their plight, across caste and class, react to something as life- destabilizing and rupturing as displacement from land acquisition? Does the displacement and resettlement experience in Kerala also contain violence and impoverishment as noted elsewhere in India?

Indeed, the displacement experiences of the state show a continuum of its historical pattern of a public, conscious of its rights and acting relentlessly to achieve the same. One finds the launch and execution of a prolonged struggle (agitations, litigations and so forth) for a fair compensation. What is remarkable is that the struggles have been primarily of the victims themselves but unlike in the earlier struggles, the support of political parties has been just cosmetic, the vacuum of which is filled by the civil society. The agency and skillful negotiations and bargaining of the people have eventually got demands accepted for some projects, although not for others.

The detailing of the struggles reveals that rather than fundamental protests against land acquisition on grounds of losing their agricultural land, ecological reasons, changing way of life and so forth, they were primarily about better rehabilitation packages and its execution. The absence of a fundamental protest is to do with people considering the land acquisition as inevitable. But it is also to do with the fact that for some sections of the displaced, agriculture for long had become unviable and difficult, and land acquisition therefore gave an opportunity to gain asset value for the land which was fast turning redundant, signaling a 'thinning of development dilemma' as happening elsewhere in India.

As result of their struggles, both collective and individual, one finds majority of them now resettled in reasonably fine looking houses after four years and more. Their narratives, however ask us to go beyond the obvious signs of progress to look at their accumulated debt. That the displaced had to go through the unnecessary and avoidable struggle of promises not delivered or delivered with long delay is quite characteristic of the stranglehold of the state's inefficient bureaucratic machinery failing yet again a timely delivery of the execution of decisions arrived at. The state also could not do much to help its displaced people suffering certain common issues across states of having to run around for restoring basic services without these being fast

tracked for them, hassles with tax for compensation amount and the unnecessary condition of banning land transferability for stipulated years.

Introduction

Two broad categorization of the Indian literature on development induced displacement is possible. First is about the displacement of rural and tribal population from their land, livelihood, socio-cultural milieu and way of life often leading to very stark consequences. The second set of literature deals with urban displacement comprising largely of the poor in the context of beautification or cleansing of cities. Both set of studies point out the ‘violence’ⁱinvolved in these displacement experiences, be it the brute force used by the state in the process of eviction or the shoddy offers of compensation and the failure to fulfill even them or the insensitive and at times naïve approach adopted by other institutions like judiciary. Examples from some parts of India like Ahmedabad and Delhi showed double violation of the displaced in terms of denial of their basic rights as citizens along with the suppressing of any budding dissent by the deployment of police in the eviction sites(Baviskar, 2011; Mathur, 2012). Significant number of the displaced is not resettled. Livelihoods, work and social relations and the daily order of lives are ruptured, quite often leading to impoverishment (Coelho et al., 2012).Literature also mentions about the opportunities and possibilities entailed in a displacement experience; for instance the squatting poor getting title deeds to a house as part of their resettlement, farmers understanding the potential of appreciating land value and demanding a due compensation for their land and so forth(Bhan and Shivanand, 2013; Sathe, 2014).

This paper examines how does the contentious issue of displacement play itself out in a state like Kerala? The context of Kerala is important as it allows us to understand displacement experience in a state which has received much acclaim for its public action and public consciousness of its people. The state has achieved many of the millennium development goals, which in turn is attributed to its pro-poor and pro-labour approach and people’s movements from below, largely mobilized and propelled by political parties (Heller, 1995; Jeffrey, 1992). Some of the very factors which led to scoring high in human development are also attributed for the downside of state’s performance, namely that of low domestic investment and growth. For instance, organizing and pushing of labour interests involved opposing technological advancement in industrial sector and mechanization in agriculture in turn slowing Kerala’s industrial growth (Oommen, 1981; Thampy, 1990).The state was clearly lagging behind in growth till mid-eighties; since then its growth has picked up. However the consumption oriented service sector led growth fuelled by the Gulf remittances is pointed out as transient and vulnerable. Wanting an image makeover, post liberalization, the government has been increasingly encouraging investment and inviting foreign capital in more productive sectors (like infrastructure, manufacturing, IT).

The paper seeks to understand how the negotiations of the development dilemma of land acquisition (for promoting a particular type of growth, investment and employment against other types of employment, and displacement of people from their land) take place between a state with a keen desire for promoting investment and a supposedly 'rights-aware' people? How would people in a state with historical precedence of struggles for improving their plight, across caste and class, react to something as life-destabilizing and rupturing as displacement from land acquisition? Does the displacement and resettlement experience in Kerala also contain violence and impoverishment as noted elsewhere in India?

This study examines these questions in Kochi, where the recent two decades has seen the launch of several mega development projects. Displacement experiences of six most recent development projects, the land acquisition of which happened after 2000, are examined in this paper. This study is part of a larger empirical research on poverty, inequality and violence nexus in the context of development induced displacement in Kochi. The paper, however speaks primarily from the methodology of intensive interviews of victims, many of who were at the helm of leadership in the struggles and who could therefore give an overall picture of their core struggles and achievements. A total of 15 interviews, conducted across 6 projects form the base of this paper.

Expectedly, people have reacted to land acquisition and resultant displacement. One finds the launch and execution of a prolonged struggle (strikes, agitations, litigations and so forth) for a fair compensation. The agency, skillful negotiations and bargaining of the people have eventually got demands accepted for some projects, although not for others. What is remarkable is that the struggles have been primarily of the victims themselves, with guidance and support from civil society.

There have been state violence, not so much in terms of brute force (in fact where the state has used physical might, it turned the tide very much in favor of the victims), but in the form of lack of co-ordination between different departments, inefficiency and delay, to state the obvious and of corruption and supporting the vested interests of the powerful as alleged by the victims. Having said that, one finds a thinning of development dilemma for some sections of the displaced as they could benefit from the opportunities entailed in land acquisition. Others see land acquisition as inevitable. Both groups then seek to maximize the gains possible within the situation through the struggle. Possibly as a result of their struggles, one finds majority of them now resettled in fine looking houses at the end of four years and more, although their narratives ask us to go beyond the obvious signs of progress. The paper gives a substantiation of these arguments.

The paper is divided into 4 sections. Section 1 gives a brief introduction to the six development projects covered in this study. Section 2 discusses the struggles, agitation and agency of the displaced of four projects which have resulted in achieving their demands to varying extent. It also presents two projects where the displaced did not agitate and the reasons behind it. The

resettlement of the displaced involving both opportunities and struggles are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 concludes.

1. A brief profile of the six development projects

GoshreeBridges

The construction of Goshree bridges was the earliest of the six development projects covered in this study. Goshree bridges was a much demanded and very welcomed project, as it connected three cut off islands, namely Vallarpadom, Bolgatty and the densely populated island of Vyppin to the main land of Ernakulam (earlier the access was only through boats). The three bridges also made way for the commissioning of subsequent projects like Vallarpadom ICTT and LNG terminal. The construction of the bridges involved the displacement of 33 families. The notification for land acquisition came in 2002 and families were evicted in the same year. The compensation promised involved cash for the lost land and house, a job for a family member and 3 cents of land. The provision for land was exclusively for the BPL families. Eleven BPL families got land in Malippuram, a village in the island of Vyppin.

Perandur canal widening project

The project was about widening of the Perandur canal and involved the eviction of around 36 families, who had squatted on its banks in two locations, namely KochuKadavanthra and Thevara. The displaced families did not have title deeds to their lands, however they enjoyed kaivashavakasham and have been paying tax. The eviction took place in 2006/ 2007. While evicting them, they were promised 1.5 cents of land and loan for house construction within 3 months as compensation. As a temporary resettlement, the families were taken to a largely unused government hotel named Libra in the city. Water and electricity was free. However there were serious issues of sanitation and water logging. Waste from the city was dumped in its premises and the hotel suffered the leakage and overflow from sewage tanks. It is only after more than 3 years, arrangements for their permanent resettlement is done. In 2010, twelve families were resettled in two newly built flats in Ernakulam and others were promised Rs. 5 lakhs on producing title deeds or the agreement for purchase of a house.

Smart city

Smart city, the commissioning of a special economic zone for IT industries, is one among the dream projects, supposed to show case Kerala's (and Kochi's) participation in the post liberalization growth attempts through economic investment including that of foreign companies. Smart city is located in Kakkanad, a town, which houses notable industrial parks of Kochi like KINFRA and info park. The project displaced 48 families. Land acquisition for the project took place in 2007. The notification for LA came in 2003. The compensation package comprises of cash for land and house, a few cents of land for rehabilitation with provision of all basic services,

provision of separate land for nuclear families, rent allowance, shifting charges, cash for demolishing houses etc.

Vallarpadom International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)

ICTT was yet another project inviting foreign investment to boost the state's economic growth. The project displaced around 316 families. The terminal per se did not displace people as it was built in the less habitated island of Vallarpadom. It is the National Highway road and rail link to the terminal which displaced people from seven villages. The land acquisition took place largely in 2008. The compensation package includes cash for land and house lost, job for one member of family, few cents of rehabilitating land with full facilities and rent allowance until land is properly developed and basic services provided.

Brahmapuram waste plant

The Waste plant in Brahmapuram was an ambitious project meant to address one of the most challenging problems confronting the city administration. The plant is meant for collecting the waste from different municipalities and corporation in Ernakulam and re-converting it. Both bio-degradable and plastic waste are supposed to be re-converted to other useful products like organic manure and plastic usable for construction purposes. The waste plant has not met several of its desired objectives, but importantly for this paper, it meant that people had to be evicted from the nearby areas. Displacement of people happened in two phases. Out of the around 65 families, around 20 people left by signing an agreement of sale of their land in 2007 to the corporation and the remaining families were evicted in 2010, by giving a compensation as is usual with displacement. The compensation package had only cash compensation for land and house.

LNG plant

Land acquisition process for the liquid and natural gas plant commissioned in Puthuvyppe took place in 2007. Around 20 families were affected. Majority lost only a portion of their land and only a few lost their entire land. The compensation promised included cash for land and house, a few cents of land for rehabilitation with access to basic services and one job for the displaced for every 5 jobs created in LNG. However the land was allotted only after 2 years and the facilities including basic services like electricity and water are still to come by even after 7 years of eviction.

2 Struggle and agency of the displaced

This section discusses the struggles and agency of the displaced people in getting a fair compensation. The struggle of Vallarpadom ICTT is given in more detail as the number of displaced were more and displacement happened from several locations in turn producing

location specific struggles, which in effect gave a more detailed understanding of the negotiations and bargaining involved.

Agency

“I told categorically that only after land is given, we will move out; I asked them how are we supposed to get land for this price offered as compensation? I have asked the collector myself that with this compensation amount, can we even purchase some loads of sand?...He is the collector, right; but whatever or who ever he is, he cannot go against justice and fairness; collector is also a protector of people and not someone who chases them away from their homes to become beggars of the street”.

Neither highly educated, nor employed Mary Agnus' categorical and unwavering awareness of her rights of a proper rehabilitation by and large represented the struggle of the ICTT displaced; mostly people with working class jobs, but keenly aware of the problems of a mere cash compensation based rehabilitation package. The national policy on displacement for roads and highways offered only cash compensation. Mary's agency probably is enhanced from her political experience as a panchayat member. Jasmine, a home maker having no conventional indicators of empowerment also gives a retort to the highhandedness of the land acquisition officer who suggests that they take the compensation amount offered and get land for themselves in far off places where land prices are low. This statement of the LA officer emanated from compensation norms that existed till then and practical suggestions to victims to cope with it, but it also indicates a general ease of offering a poor deal for the poor or the commoner. Of course the later struggles and agitations proved that the displaced would not settle for a poor deal. They demanded to take part in the development for which they had to bear hardships. As Selestian puts it “Don't the displaced also need development?” their major demand was land for land within the same village or region.

The displaced formed a co-ordination committee along with activists and their struggle included doing a 45 days long satyagraha at the heart of the city, staging protest marches, filing litigations and conducting several rounds of meetings and discussions with the officials and political leaders. The final compensation package which included land for land came about as a result of the prolonged struggles of the displaced.

Skillful negotiations and market like bargaining

The detailing of the struggles from leaders of different locations reveals the several negotiations which took place between the government and the people. To the question of why some people gave consent, while others protested, Suresh, a leader from Cheranallur, recalls that the ‘*consent*’ was the outcome of the threatening and cajoling stances taken by the district authorities, who were keen to speed up the commissioning of the project. A major threat was that if the people protested, they would not even get the District Level Purchasing Committee determined price, but would have to go to the court. Reportedly, people were also given false promises of land,

when such offers were not there in the first place and later when land was being offered, the authorities tried to cajole people to accept land elsewhere (rather than in the same village) saying that the land offered would get good asset value. The manner in which threats are issued, where they are told that they will be responsible for their plight is also revealing; for instance, the land acquisition officer says “time for DLPC negotiations is also over, but nevertheless will arrange it for you; I do not want forceful eviction and you will be responsible for it”.

Suresh said that in their eagerness for getting consent, the authorities even makes offers lying beyond their capacity. In one instance of negotiation, an officer, who keeps in regular touch with the leaders suggest giving land with ‘kaivashavakasham (possession without ownership rights)’, an offer which is declined by the leaders pointing out how the panchayats do not give permission to build house in a plot with only kaivashavakasham. What is striking is that these victim leaders garnered a good deal of legal information and used it as a tool in their negotiations, for buying more time and pushing a little more with their demands before their eviction. Suresh recalls an incident where he meets the threat of demolition by referring to environment protection act which ask for environmental clearance for road building, which is conditional on both rehabilitation and compensation, forcing the collector to leave for the time being. The right to information act (RTI) was used by leaders for different purposes like getting the plan of land development and reportedly finding some anomaly in the use of funds and getting the alignment of the proposed road/ rail to examine whether the displacement is unavoidable and suggesting alternatives. At the same time, those at the leadership have chosen not to press for certain concerns (like raising an hue and cry about anomaly in the use of funds) in case of them having some personal issues, like having some legal issues with their land, fearing the rebuke of a strong stand by authorities.

The absence of an objective criterion and the arbitrariness involved is best seen in the market like bargaining between government and the displaced; be it for cash compensation or for piling charges given for land development, people demand a high rate and government bargains for a lower, which then gets settled somewhere in the middle.

There have been location specific struggle. For instance, in Vaduthala, around 70 families faced eviction due to the rail construction proposed through a thickly populated area. The initial struggle in this region was about people protesting the idea of the rail itself. They pointed out how the earlier announcement of rail link to ICTT was through an extension of the existing ERG line. Till now, Justine feels unsure about the aborting of this plan, which he believes is to serve some vested interests, traumatizing people and wasting public funds. In Cheranallur people waged a protest against the discriminatory stance of giving 5 cents of land to Kadamakkudi village and 4.5 cents to the rest (following the declaration of an improved package meeting their demand of land for land), which after negotiations result in them getting compensation in cash for 0.5 cents.

Forceful eviction of Moolampilly: Turning the tide for the ICTT displaced

The negotiations of victims only managed to buy more time from the inevitable land acquisition and people were rapidly filtering out from the protest movement. It is then on February 6, 2008, when forceful eviction of people happens in Moolampilly turning the tide in favor of the ICTT displaced. The day is indeed a historical day for the displaced, the implications of which extend beyond this particular struggle. The small island village of Moolampilly shoots up to fame and gets etched in the displacement discourses of Kerala and India. Mahashwetha Devi, for instance refers to Moolampilly as Kerala's Singur and Nandigram.

Of the 22 families to be evicted from Moolampilly for the laying of National highway road to ICTT terminal, 12 families give consent by accepting the compensation. But 10 families stand firm on their protest. On that day, without any prior information district authorities arrive with their JCB to demolish the houses of the proposed evictees. The ten families initially think that the JCBs are coming for demolishing those houses, where people had given consent. But these JCBs turns to the protesting ten's houses. Houses are forcefully demolished, and things including cooking pots and children's books are taken away by the authorities. A lot of confusion and helpless crying follows. Children return home to find their houses demolished. The victims however garnered their presence of mind and call the visual and print media. A chance event facilitates this timely capturing of the visuals by media. The JCB immerses in the marshy land which gives some time for media to arrive. The forceful eviction gets aired, human rights commission intervenes and the land acquisition officer is made to apologise. The episode becomes the catalyst event invoking widespread criticism against authorities and inviting attention to the struggle. Government promised improved rehabilitation package, which came to be known as the Moolampilly package. However, the struggles of the people are not finished as the proper development of land (in many places the land offered was marshy) and provision of basic services remain incomplete. Victims still assemble together and press for the meeting of promises.

Smart City Rehabilitation: A rare successful finish to a struggle

Indeed, the story of smart city rehabilitation is worth much attention as it is so rare where the displaced express satisfaction with their rehabilitation indicating the possibilities of a win-win situation of meeting both the development ambitions as well as addressing the grievance of the displaced people. People demanded land for land within the same village. Initially when land acquisition was proposed in 2003, the compensation price offered was agreeable to the people. However as years go by and land acquisition gets delayed, land prices increase in Kakkanad (as mentioned before it is a dynamic industrial area). Compensation price became another major issue of contention. Agitations were launched in 2005 which continued till 2007 until a favorable package was offered to them. Mode of agitations included staging hunger strikes and dharnas near collectorate among others. This struggle was also widely reported in media. As in the case of ICTT displaced struggle, the struggle of the smart city displaced involved several negotiations and market like bargaining. For instance, Pareeth, the action council member recalls how the bargaining for land took place, where the government says 3 cents and people demand

10 cents, finally reaching consensus of minimum 6 cents. In another instance, they were shown a stretch of marshy land which they categorically refused saying that all the cash got in compensation money will be used up in land reclamation. Pareeth adds that if they had taken it up they would be like the ICTT displaced who even after years have not built houses in rehabilitation land.

The compensation package is noted earlier in the paper. The most happy part, as Pareeth says “ we did not have to leave the place itself. When our land develops, we should also stand to benefit. Isn't? In addition people felt a sense of improvement from the additional offers of the package namely those having less than 5 cents getting 6 cents, nuclear families being given separate landⁱⁱ and one lakh rupees for building house, getting house demolition charges (which Pareeth proudly reports as being exclusive to this package) and getting a proper approach road for some people who earlier did not have it. Equally important is the fact that there was speedy provision of rehabilitation land with basic facilities. In addition, the land offered was of good quality. All these cumulatively helped people to construct houses and settle down soon in the rehabilitation land itself. All 58 families have constructed houses in the rehabilitation land. They could get further gains like tax exemption on grounds of their land being agricultural land. Several factors went into the making of this success. Pareeth attributes much credit to the civil society leaders for their guidance, due to which they could take proper steps at the proper time as per the demands of the situation. For instance, in 2005, there was a threat of eviction from the district administration. People approached the court for getting an order of stay. While they approached the court individually, they prepared themselves as a group, that is, in case one individual's demand for stay is denied, then the next one can approach the court (they manage to get a stay).

That there was no divide of people in terms of those consenting and those protesting against land acquisition (as in the case of ICTT struggle) and people protesting in unity across political party affiliations were also mentioned as reasons for the success of the struggle. Pareeth also attributes its success to the fact that it was ambitious project and government wanted smooth operation. In fact an administrative official said during left government regime that this is a government which gave 10 cents of land for people and therefore the displaced should also get that. However this suggestion is ruled out on grounds of setting tough precedents for the following projects. The fact of land being readily available also contributed.

Goshree evictees' unfinished struggles: The misfortune of being the first

While the struggle of ICTT are still unfinished in terms of promises not being delivered, at least at the level of promises, the core demands of the people have been largely met. However, for some of the evictees of Goshree bridges, despite the struggle being the longest, their demands have not been accepted. As mentioned before the provision for land was exclusively for the BPL families. Since then the 14 APL families have been demanding that they also get the 3 cents of land.

What one finds is that with time, as a result of the victim's continuous struggles for their rightful compensation, the projects which came later like Vallarpadom International Trans-shipment Terminal and Smart City, as discussed above are offered better compensation packages with no BPL- APL discrimination. As one compensation package became a precedent for the following, Goshree suffered from the fact of being one of the first projects.

At the end of more than a decade long struggle, the Mulavukadu Panchayat has said that they were willing to give 3 cents of land to the 14 families. However, even today they have not got a clear nod from district authorities and GIDA who bears the cost of land acquisition. Although the struggles of these families for getting 3 cents of land have received media and public attention, probably their struggles suffered because they were few in number. The victims themselves were leaders of this struggle. For some reason they could neither galvanize the support of civil society leaders who could guide them nor could they form an association with other struggles.

Displacement without protest movements

While three of the six projects covered in this study contain the history of struggle and agitations, the other three projects speak of displacement without a manifested protest, although as would be seen, it is not an absence of real protest. The earliest of this is that of Perandur canal widening project evictees. The particularity of this project is that unlike other projects, this was a case of people squatting on government land and not having title deeds. This is probably the reason that the 36 families did not protest against their eviction. All they could do when faced with eviction notices was to bargain and get a stay order from the court for sometime. However as they were staying here for long years and were paying taxes, government did offer nominal cents of land and loan for rebuilding house indicating some degree of responsibility towards poor people in a state like Kerala. However promises are delivered only after the characteristic long delay. Promised a resettlement package by 3 months, they are finally resettled only at the end of 3 years. As mentioned before, the land acquired remains absolutely unused. The only demonstrative protest the evictees staged was when a contractor tried to rebuild the canal walls indicating the aborting of the canal widening project. They could also garner media support, when they suffered from acute problems in their temporary resettlement.

The eviction for Brahmapuram waste plant took place in two separate phases. Reportedly in the late 90s, the government acquired vast acres of land through a private party who purchased land from the people. People sold their land anticipating some private investment which would possibly give them jobs and raise the asset value of their remaining land. Little did they know that the land was being acquired for the commissioning of a waste plant. In 2005, when government gave the notification for the plant's commissioning, around 20 families agreed to give up their land for a price. In the context of an entire district administration backing the proposal of waste plant, these families saw the commissioning of the plant as inevitable and therefore left. Among those who left during the second phase in 2010, were people who protested against the commissioning of waste plant in their village. However despite their

protests and filing of cases, when the plant eventually got commissioned their demands consequently changed to their displacement with a fair compensation. This is the only case among the six projects where the struggle was in the pre-displacement rather than in the post displacement stage. People were forced to demand their own eviction. Since then, there have not been any protests but a routine of filing case in court for a higher compensation price. An interesting development which took place in between the two phases is the announcement of smart city project in the nearby village, which led to rise in land value. Thereby there is a vast difference in the compensation amount between the first and second phase evictees. This has disturbed the first phase evictees who have now approached the court for getting an equivalent compensation price.

Although the above discussed displacement, took place without much protest it actually represented either inability to protest or “choiceless willingness”. Unlike any of the projects discussed above, displacement with regard to LNG terminal, which got commissioned in 2013 was smooth as people entered consensus with district administration on the conditions of displacement. That they were offered a holistic package at the very outset, which included land for land with full provisioning of basic services is one strong reason for consensus. It also has to do with the fact that majority lost only a portion of their land or house and they could rebuild the house fairly quickly in the remaining portion of their land. However the promises have not been duly delivered and a minority of people who have no other land but the rehabilitation land continues to suffer.

External Support: Political Class and Civil Society

Across projects, the displaced deny getting support from political parties or panchayat leaders. In fact, to the question of why certain people were consenting to land acquisition, the role of local panchayat leaders were pointed out who did the ground work of cajoling people and threatening them with adverse consequences. The Moolampilly forceful eviction took place during the left government and the confusions of left party workers or members are particularly worth mentioning. There was the case of Augustine, who was a ground level supporter of the left parties, who feels terribly let down by his party, as the forceful demolition happened during the left government. There are others like Wilson, being a CPI party member who justifies the left government by saying how they later apologized for the forceful demolition. While the local level leaders have reportedly not taken much efforts championing the causes of the displaced, the two political fronts on forming government has brought in compensation packages, conceding to some of the demands of the displaced.

Historically many struggles of the people in Kerala, in the post independence period particularly, has been led by political parties. In this recent struggle of the displaced, however, political parties are replaced by civil society namely individual activists, writers and media. Their role has been quite significant. As mentioned by the leader of Smart City, the success of the agitations of the smart city was largely attributed to guidance and support of certain activists, which helped

them take the necessary steps as and when particular needs arose. The displaced in ICTT could engage in knowledgeable negotiations, partly because of the guidance from the activists. We also saw how the struggle of Goshree evictees has not got success, partly because they did not get a consistent support from civil society. Media has brought attention to the issues of the five projects, except that of the LNG displaced.

2. *Resettlement: Interweaving of Opportunities and Struggles*

The thinning of development dilemma: The struggles described above contained demands that were primarily about better rehabilitation packages and its execution. This led to the question whether the victims had fundamentally protested the land acquisition on grounds of losing their agricultural land, ecological reasons, changing way of life among others. While individually people mentioned resenting these losses to varying extent, these aspects never shaped into a collective demand. The underlying reason was that for many who lost their agricultural land, agriculture for long had become unviable and difficult due to high wages and labour shortage among other reasons, thereby becoming only a supplementary source of income. This was told by the leaders of Moolampilly (ICTT), Kakkanad and Brahmapuram. Brahmapuram had an additional dimension. Since it had several factories nearby like FACT, their water sources were polluted by its waste effluents which in turn caused damage to crops. People had largely given up agricultural activities. In the context of an absence of an economic rationale to hold onto land, an acquiring of land appear to present itself as an opportunity – of acquiring a higher value for the otherwise low priced and largely redundant land. What appears therefore is an absence of fundamental conflicts or a convergence of interests or a thinning of development dilemma.

Examining their lives after four years and more, one finds majority of them now resettled in fine looking houses across projects. Many refashioned their old tiled houses to concrete houses suiting modernity perceptions and better facilities. This is especially important in a context like Kerala, where building house is of great passion for both its use and symbolic value. For some, the compensation amount gave them an opportunity to repay existing debts (a possible factor shaping consent of some people). Some individuals have (or are trying to) built an extension to their houses for renting out as there are increased possibilities due to better proximity to the city.

Except for Brahmapuram and Perandur canal evictees, the other projects, be it the Goshree bridges, the ICTT road, smart city and LNG terminal brought definite advantages, some in terms of asset value gain rather than use value and some in terms of both use value and asset value gain. Displaced from cut off and remote islands like Moolampilly, Mulavukadu, Bolgatty acknowledge the definite advantage of easy and fast access to Ernakulam city because of ICTT road and Goshreebridges (just a ten minutes away as they acknowledge it)ⁱⁱⁱ. What becomes crucial for their economic well-being is whether they had any left over land post acquisition. As Pradeep who lost his entire 24 cents says about the development “What is of use to us, those who lost all land? If we had land remaining in the area, we could have lived like kings”. Therefore in

order to take part in the benefits of development it became imperative to demand land for land in the same or nearby region.

Some families owning very few cents of land were benefitted through the rehabilitation package which contained the promises of land. ICTT, smart city and LNG rehabilitation packages had a positive and egalitarian dimension to it of giving stipulated cents of land even if a family had lost only fewer cents than that.

Tensions between displaced and non- displaced: The apparent indicators of progress of the displaced have created some tensions between displaced and the non-displaced and the ironical referring of the displaced as *lucky* by the non-displaced. To the question of aren't the non-displaced lucky that they got the asset value gain without having the trouble of displacement and resettling, one non- displaced individual from a lower economic strata gives the response that for people like him who has only just land for the house, there is not much advantage, since that is for staying rather than selling. For the commoner from the non-displaced, the displaced got an opportunity to rebuild their houses and settle better.

Personal struggles, hardships and loss

The narratives of the displaced, however ask one to look beyond the obvious signs of progress. Wanting to counter the perception of rebuilding houses through compensation amount and wanting acknowledgement for their long struggles, people point out that the compensation amount despite the DLPC hiked price is not adequate in the face of rising land value and they have to resettle in fewer cents of land. Except in the case of smart city displaced, majority of the displaced in other projects rebuilt the houses in their own land and not in the rehabilitation land. Given the uncertainty of rehabilitation package and its delivery and with inflating prices day by day, people were astute enough to start rebuilding houses in any remaining land or in any additional land which they owned or by purchasing a few cents of land either in the same region or nearby areas. In some areas, where the price of land was already high and shot up post the declaration of project, people were forced to purchase land in more interior places. They point out their accumulated indebtedness and the associated vulnerability. Augustine puts it rather drastically, "we stand the risk of japthi (seizing of title deeds) and if it happens you would see mass suicide", indicating the absolute vulnerability of the coupling of indebtedness with the day to day existence of labourers like him (which again is crucially tied to their health). In some cases, women who had never done paid work have started going for work in order to meet their interest obligations. The demand of land for land could be seen as their efforts for cushioning the impoverishment impacts, as compensation amount is insufficient in rebuilding a house, resulting in accumulated indebtedness.

In the long course to resettlement, people stayed in rented house and had to start from scratch to restore the basic services like electricity and water connection (just like an ordinary person building a new house since nothing was speed tracked). The forcefully evicted in Moolampilly

had to stay in a school building until they got a rented house. Families with pregnant women, small children, elderly, and sick people especially suffered during these days.

People had to pay tax for the compensation amount. Although there was the provision of refunding of tax, many could not file a tax return in time amidst their twin pursuits of making a living and rebuilding a house, leading to a lapse of the refund. Even after so many years passing by, one finds people running for settling one matter or other related to resettlement. It is as though resettlement has become a full time job in itself. Again, the rehabilitation land was allotted with the conditionality of non-transferability for a stipulated number of years.^{iv}This has incapacitated some, as they could not raise a loan against this land for meeting their requirements. For the ICTT displaced, government agreed to give bank loans against the title deeds of rehabilitated land despite the condition of non-transferability. While some individuals mention that one is able to raise a loan against this land for house construction, it is not possible with regard to other purposes. Tommy, a displaced person of LNG project wanting to raise a loan for his daughter's marriage is facing this choiceless ownership of land, rendering him helpless even while having an asset. For the common man, whose social and livelihood strategies have often included pledging or selling the land for their needs like marriages and meeting hospital expenses, this condition is an unnecessary hindrance. As Wilson puts it "What if there are emergencies? Is there any point in hugging to your land?"

Some faced delay in getting compensation amount due to certain rules of compensation. For instance, the land and house acquired, by custom might belong to a particular person (mostly the male offspring) but the compensation rule requires it to be distributed among all the claimants. Due to this he/she may not get the DLPC price, but may be asked to approach the court for settling the compensation dues, thereby facing much delay. In case of them not having any other means to resettle, this delay would have adverse effects in rebuilding a house against the mounting inflation.

Although not the majority, there are families who have not been able to rebuild their houses even after years of eviction. Loosing entire land, having only a few cents of land to begin with, which could beget only a low compensation amount (even if they get more cents of land in rehabilitation, it was given after some years and some of the land have not been properly developed yet), having many claimants to the compensation amount, having some legal issues to their land and having other pressing concerns like getting their children married off or getting their children to go abroad are some reasons seen behind the inability to settle even at present.

Livelihoods have been affected. This aspect was particularly mentioned in Bolgatty and Brahmapuram, where people were engaged in fishing and cattle rearing. Relocating meant a weakening of work relations of a particular place and work getting affected to that extent. Some individuals had to change their occupation and some others had to make additional travel for pursuing the same occupation. There are a few who lost their workshops but have been compensated with additional two cents of land. Earlier it was mentioned how agriculture had

become only a supplementary income. At the same time people do resent the loss of the supplements to livelihood like firewood, some vegetables, coconuts and so forth especially when they have to purchase these after resettlement. Social relations and way of life have changed. There are also the intangible losses like that emanating from place attachment.

Conclusion

In the suburban context of land acquisition in the village

s around the city of Kochi one finds a thinning of the development dilemma, at least with regard to some sections of the displaced, much similar to what is happening in several contexts across India as pointed out by other literature on displacement (Sathe, 2014) (although it should not be generalized further). Since there was a convergence of interests, what then was important for them, along with others who found land acquisition as inevitable, was to get a share of the development benefits. The demand of land for land in the same region become crucial, not just for avoiding impoverishment impacts, but also to take part in the development for which they had to bear hardships. It is this demand which lie at the core of the struggles described in this paper. What is remarkable is the astuteness of the victims in framing this demand and their unrelenting fight to achieve the same. Skillful negotiations, gaining and using relevant information, staging street protests- they have used it all to get their demands accepted. Today, if they are resettled and indeed sharing some development benefits, as they themselves say, it is only because of their relentless struggle, both individually and collectively. Indeed, the displacement experiences of the state show a continuum of its historical pattern of a public, conscious of its rights and acting relentlessly to achieve the same. The only difference is that for the support for this movement, unlike in the earlier struggles, the role of political parties has been just cosmetic, if at all. Their non-committal stand signals an acute desire across political parties to join the investment drive happening across India. This vacuum of the political parties then gets filled by civil society; the different project displaced have benefitted from their guidance and support to varying extent. In Kerala however, no political party can afford to ignore an issue like displacement and respective parties on forming government have listened to the demands of the people and promised better packages.

Despite the pride of achieving the demands at least as promises, there is also the pain of a choiceless struggle forced on them. The questions the displaced ask contain a vision towards avoiding the avoidable pain, if not the pain of emotional and social losses. Could not rehabilitation cost be made part of the project cost given that allocating even a small percent from an investment worth thousands of crores, would allow people to settle better. Could not the delay be avoided? Could not all the procedures of resettling including water and electricity connections be fast tracked? For giving up land for public purpose, why are they hassled with tax for compensation amount? Why are they bartered with unfree land against their free land; land which they could use for the priorities which they choose? Given that there are no fundamental conflicts from a thinning of development dilemma and given that there are demonstrations of

win- win situations and possibilities of people rehabilitating with satisfaction (smart city), the pain appear as avoidable and non-necessary. Finally, the larger question of environmental degradation remains as paddy fields and wetlands are converted for development projects.

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ⁱViolence defined in a broader sense as done by the World Health Organization to include threats, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation or other acts of omission. The broader definition reflects a growing recognition among researchers and practitioners of the need to include violence that does not necessarily result in injury or death, but that nonetheless poses a substantial burden on individuals, families, communities and health care systems worldwide (WHO, 2002).

ⁱⁱ While land acquisition takes place for 41 families, 58 families are given rehabilitation land

ⁱⁱⁱSelestian, a leader from Moolampilly says that they are not against the project, in fact they themselves have given detailed memorandum to authorities asking for the holistic development of this region, like laying roads.

^{iv}Different projects mentioned different figures; some mentioned 7 and some others said 25 years which has been cut short to 12 years.