

Gujarat (India): The great land grab

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The Gujarat “development” model depends on acquiring, often forcibly, huge tracts of land and making them available at below market prices to industries, destroying village economy and fraternity

SHAKTI SINGH, the sarpanch of Jaspara village in Bhavnagar district of Gujarat, is an affluent farmer. On an ordinary day, he spends most of his time shuttling between Bhavnagar town and the 10 hectares of mango gardens owned by his family, sorting out the logistics of selling his farm produce for the best price. Storing the mangoes, employing people to work on his fields, dealing with traders and middlemen, and promoting and modernising agriculture in his area are some of the tasks that consume most of his time. The best-quality Kesar, the local mango variety of this region, is all exported to the United States and Russia and other European countries. At the end of the year he makes around Rs.8 lakh from his mangoes. Those who work on his fields on contract earn about Rs.3 lakh annually. The sale of vegetables, cashew nuts and coconuts through the year helps Shakti Singh and his workers make some extra money without too much investment or work.

However, in the last few months, Shakti Singh has been busy preparing court papers and holding public meetings. The proposed nuclear plant in the area would not only eat up most of his farms but would rid the entire region of its affluence. Known as the Mithivirdi Nuclear Energy Project, it will be the biggest nuclear plant in the country with a proposed capacity of 6,000 MW at an initial projected cost of Rs.64,000 crore. However, if the project goes through, it will directly affect 15,000 people in 24 villages. More than 1.5 lakh people in 152 villages in the region will be indirectly affected owing to the plant’s possible environmental hazards. Farmers in this area will lose their lands and a large number of landless labourers will lose their employment.

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P.S.

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<http://www.frontline.in/cover-story/the-great-land-grab/article4666181.ece#.UYFH0ZxXcPo>.gmail