



Gujarat Society After Five Decades: Retrospect and Prospect

A Concept Note

Gujarat has entered into fifty years of its existence after the Bombay state was bifurcated into two language based states of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960. On one hand, in the mainstream social and political arena this occasion has been celebrated, especially by the Gujarat government under the rubric of 'Swarnim Gujarat', with much fanfare, planning grand events and a series of 'developmental' and large canvass programmes projecting the state's great achievements in various sectors as well as the bright future and prospects Gujarat envisages, holds and offers. But at the same time, the occasion calls for a serious reflection and introspection about its journey of five decades with reference to developments, characteristics and changes in its social, economic, cultural and political fabric. What had happened in the above spheres over this prolonged period and how to explain them? Which were the major watershed events, decisions in terms of policy and programmes, processes and activities, both at the stage of the Gujarat state as well as macro level that have shaped Gujarat's social, economic and political order in its present manifestation? Which course the state should take in future for the betterment of its population and its meaningful role in the larger context? These are some of the issues and questions that require serious probing and contemplation especially from the academic community as well as concerned people of Gujarat civil society.

Today Gujarat, with population of about 50 million (2001) spread over 1.96,000 sq. kms., is considered as one of the prosperous states of India with reference to various 'development' specific indicators. For instance, it has acquired the fourth rank in per capita income among major sixteen states in India and has maintained this rank for the last two decades or so. With 6 per cent share in terms of geographical area and a proportion of 5 percent of population of the entire country, the state contributes 21 percent of country's exports, 11 percent of its industrial production and 6.42 percent of the national GDP at constant price. Very recent figure indicates that Gujarat registers highest growth rate of 11.05 per cent among all states. The state's industrial policy document boasts that with regard to implementation of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Gujarat has been way ahead of other states. However, if we take into consideration similar other indicators of the category of 'Human Development' such as Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and sex ratio the state does not have satisfactory

record. Though in overall terms poverty has decreased in the state, government's own data indicates that percentage of households living below poverty line has reached above 50 per cent in state's rural areas. As a matter of fact Gujarat presents an extraordinary case of contradiction if we take into account and juxtapose mainstream 'development indicators' and the scenario associated with them against characteristics and conditions pertaining to human development and rights and social texture with its micro variations. For instance, on one hand, various indicators pertaining to industrial 'progress' posit a rosy and bright picture but if the other side of the same coin is looked at seriously, it provides dismal scenario with regard to factors such as pollution, degradation of land and forest, environmental degeneration, stagnant agriculture and quality of employment. Similarly, if we consider the development from the standpoint of social groups and regional variations, imbalance and disparities galore starkly over statistical and economic figures of affluence and prosperity. The deprived groups of adivasis, dalits, women, labour and minorities are still lagging far behind in terms of this mainstream set of 'development indicators' and process of their marginalization has intensified quite rapidly in globalization era, the state government being its main proponent. Similarly, as for example, the eastern belt of the state where adivasis inhabit largely, signs of 'development' in terms of infrastructure and other indicators are scarcely present. Certain social sectors such as education, health, labour, deprived groups, certain sub-regions etc. are neglected over a period as amply indicated by diminishing financial allocation for them in budget after budget. The state government's perspective and approach towards development with regard to this set of sectors need urgent attention and rectification.

Gujarat has also been undergoing paradoxical change with regard to the nature of its civil society. As on one hand, emphatic presence and proliferation of NGOs can be widely seen but looking at it other way round one can very well perceive disturbing decay in terms of effectiveness and meaningfulness of once vibrant civil society as clearly indicated by waning of interest group movements such as trade union movement, students movement etc. as well as decaying influence of constructive activities of Gandhian organizations. Recurrent communal tension and violence, identity politics with reference to groups of dalits and adivasis, issues pertaining to coastal areas and SEZ related 'development' and its impact on local communities, spread and influence of religious sects-related activities, ever growing urbanization and in-migration from other states, role and contribution of Gujarati diaspora, are some of the other integral and organic components and parts of canvas of Gujarat social order that require in-depth reflection.

Centre for Social Studies, Surat (CSS), a research institute, has been pursuing almost all the above issues in its research and academic endeavours since last four decades or so. It had organised international seminars on "Gujarat Society" in 1986 and 1994 in which scholars working on 'Gujarat Society' from all over the world participated. The CSS is planning to hold a three-day conference on the theme of "Gujarat Society After Five Decades: Retrospect and Prospects" on the eve of Gujarat state's completion of five decades of existence and it invites papers on relevant themes pertaining to various aspects and spheres of Gujarat society. Apart from issues and aspects briefly narrated above, themes and subjects related with literature, art, natural resources, education, health, and various others in relation to Gujarat society are also intended to be deliberate in the proposed conference. The Conference will address the following broad themes and sub-themes.

- Development and Marginalization with reference to groups of Tribal, Dalit, Women, Labour, Minorities and other backward groups.
- Issues pertaining to Governance.
- Globalization, Industrialization and their impact on environment.
- Impact and effectiveness of Civil Society organizations.
- Economic Growth, Human Development Index and Social Sector.
- Literature, other forms of Arts and Social Consciousness.
- Diaspora.
- State, political Institutions and Movements.
- Role of Religions and Sects.
- Communal Issues and Relations.
- Gandhian Thoughts and other Philosophical tradition.

The scholars who are interested in the above mentioned themes and aspects pertaining to Gujarat Society and those who are pursuing them in their on-going research are invited to contribute a paper to the proposed conference.

The Conference will take place during 18-19-20 January 2012.

The conference will be coordinated by a committee consisting of following members:

Prof. B Devi Prasad
Dr. Arjun Patel
Dr. Satyakam Joshi
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