The Life Line of Gujarat

The Sardar Sarovar Project

Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), is the mega multipurpose Inter‐State water resources project. Mission is to harness the untapped waters of river Narmada which used to flood every year - for drought prone areas of Western India and promote sustainable livelihood and hydro power. It endeavors to transport 12.00 billion cubic meter of water every year to a distance up to 700 kilometers. The total cost of the project works out to be approximately Rs. 55000 crore. Sardar Sarovar Dam, is a concrete gravity dam across river Narmada,1210 meters in length and with a maximum height of 163 meters above the deepest foundation level. It has passed through a long journey and had to overcome many challenges on its way to completion.

In 1948, Iron Man of India, Shri Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel conceived the idea and its foundation was laid on 5th April 1961. There were hurdles which got eventually cleared over a period of time.

I was Director of Information in 1984.

The revival of construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam had become a major controversial issue with renowned NGO from Madhya Pradesh. Baba Amte taking lead against displacement of Tribals.

I took a bold step. I visited him in his Ashram and explained how Dam is needed for poor farmers of region and now displaced families are to be rehabilitated. With great simplicity He heard and understood and slowly withdrew from agitation. But agitation continued and construction also continued under order of apex court from time to time. But issue remained was permission related closure of gates.

This was received by intervention - Hon’ble Prime Minister – Shri Modi and fill up the reservoir upto full reservoir level of 138.68 m, facilitating live (usable) storage water. The Dam was finally dedicated to the Nation by the Hon’ble Prime Minster Shri Narendra Modi on 17/9/2017.

The project is meeting the challenges of food security and livelihood of farmers and drinking water needs of drought prone areas. With an ultimate planned annual irrigation of 1.8 million hectare, the project has so far created an Irrigation Potential (IP) of 1.611 million hectare by completing about 60,000 km long canal network. This progress is unprecedented in the history of the country.

Due to assured water supply, farmers now opt crop varieties for giving high returns to agriculture. The cattle and human migration has stopped with the avaibility of drinking water in all villages. This change has resulted into tripling of farmers’ income as well as the overall quality of the rural lifestyle.

DRINKING WATER SECURITY – A BIG RELIEF

In past, during the Pre‐Narmada scenario, tackling of water scarcity, in the water stressed area of North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kachchh, was a major challenge. Huge expenditure was required every year for temporary supply by tankers. In fact in 1984-86 Government supplied water to Rajkot city by train. But Gujarat is now comfortable even in severe drought condition due to the network of Narmada canals and drinking water pipeline laid in the last decade. This services 8628 of the villages, 165 towns and 7 Municipal Corporations drinking purposes. Narmada canal is also linked with Sabarmati river. Ahmedabad now has Sabarmati river round the year with state of art River Front Project.

Narmada water is also supplied to Aji Dam, Saurashtra and (Kachchh District) after travelling more than 600 km from Main Dam and after lifting by 54 m in a series of three pumping stations. This has provided a great relief to people and cattle in summer. That is why Narmada water is “The Lifeline” of Gujarat.

In the history of world, perhaps it received maximum barriers-obstacles which were overcome by state leadership and administration. It is the largest project but has taken more than 60 years to complete it.

The credit goes to Shri Narendra Modi‐both as C.M. of Gujarat and P.M. of country who gave finishing touch by his consistent follow up and also removed all the constraints. He thought of having the statue of Sardar allabhbhai Patel on Dam Site - which is the biggest statue of its kind in world.

We recently visited Sardar Sarovar Dam – now famous of Statue of Unity.

In fact I have had visited site time and again – but this visit was after long interval when Statue of Unity project was functional.

We were amazed to see number of tourists. But most revealing was there are electrical autos run by young Tribal girls. Public Relations – Guides, Technicians – we noticed, also were, locally recruited so were number of small shops by locals. This was along with a variety visiting places Zoo, Shree Yatra, light and sound shows, evening arti, rafting – so and so forth.

But entire local economy surrounding area up to Rajpipla on one side and Dabhoi on other side had got transformed and people have picked number of micro-enterprise opportunities.

Normally when the Dam get constructed up-stream area get neglected. This is opposite with Statue of Unity becoming national and international hub and providing high income of thrust to locals – who are tribals.

We spoke with our guide Zubin who had left a job in Merchant Navy and came back to Rajpipla to pick up job in Statue of Unity and Sub-divisional Magistrate Shivam. They stated that Hon’ble Prime Minister is a frequent visitor and visits each place personally and gives new ideas and assignment and seeks to know its progress. Because of his personal attention – the Statue of Unity got completed in a record time to be a world level center of attraction.

Development of Sardar Sarovar Project – is an llustration of how vested interests – national and international – try vigorously to obstruct a developing country and its development enhancement income of rural society and making it self-sufficient for food, energy and water security. How they delay. But also shows Indian Public Leadership overcome this with leader like by Shri Narendra Modi – who made them unsuccessful and achieved two remarkable objectives –

1. Drought proofing Gujarat – with assured water supply for drinking water and agriculture across the state to convert Gujarat Agriculture into sustainable growth and meet challenges of Urban and Rural Water Supply.
2. It rehabilitated families who have land had got submerged. provided local employment – income to Tribal families residing in and around The Dam site by world class State of Unity project.

It also shows how Gujarat as a whole – its people, its political leaders like Shri Narendra Modi who brought all parties, civil society members and the administration to get together to make this happen.

India needs continuous leadership of Shri Modi – his vision determinate – trust – manage such challenges and turn around the country from Developing to Developed Nation.