**Foreword**

I first met Dr. Kirit N. Shelat in Kutch in 1977. At that time he was part of the Rural Development Department. He had developed guidelines for micro level planning for poverty-ridden families. We developed a long term association. We were in Kutch working on agricultural and rural livelihood programmes.

While his last book Mapping Development(May 2004) documented the development processes that helped Gujarat’s rapid growth over the past 40 years, he has, in his present book documented the development of agriculture and its unique features. The concluding chapter focuses on the major issue that faces our country today - “What Ails Our Agriculture?”

This is a wonderful book. It covers almost all aspects related to a healthy sustainable longterm growth of our primary sector - agriculture. It outlines a strategy for removal of rural poverty. Dr. Shelat paints two pictures. The former shows that sustainable agriculture growth can occur even under adverse circumstances. He has taken the illustration of Gujarat. More than half of its area is in semi arid to arid zones. With clear, determined, well-implemented action plans backed by strong political will, it reached out to all its farmers. The latter illustrates how society gets disrupted due to farmers’ suicides and the spread of Naxalism.

Gujarat developed well-designed programmes for rapid growth in agriculture. This was followed by re-structuring of the agricultural sector including re-orienting its administration. It has been brought about through active participation of farmers and voluntary agencies. In recent years, Gujarat has become the number one state in the country in agricultural development.

Sadly we see what happens when State Governments don’t act with such clarity. We have farmers who through indebtedness and in utter despair commit suicide. We also see that the younger generation takes up the destructive route of embracing Naxalism. This is disrupting the basic fabric of our society. This has not remained a scattered or isolated case of insurgency. More than a quarter of our country is under such turmoil. This is expanding in other areas at a very fast rate.

This reminds me of our Lakhpat experience. Lakhpat is one of the most difficult habitats of Kutch district. It has scarce population, saline soil, and scanty rainfall. This makes sustainable agriculture very difficult. There are large patches of wasteland and fallow agriculture land developed over years. Even in this difficult area, water conservation under watershed approach backed by scientific agri-culture has brought changes. Sustainable agriculture has been made possible. Migration has been reduced to a minimum. There is upcoming greenery all around creating a green belt. The farmers’ eagerness to adopt modern farm practices was amazing. In fact the implementation involved about twelve youths of the area who were locally trained. This remarkable story should confirm our confidence in the Indian farmer. He has the capacity to learn, adopt, implement and grow. What he needs is focused assistance and guidance. Kutch district earlier suffered from recurrent droughts. Even when the rest of the state had no problem, Kutch was affected. This required large-scale migration of human and cattle resources. Many of its people migrated permanently. But now, all this has changed. With the scientific agriculture supported by a massive water conservation programme and the availability of Narmada water, Kutch now grows the best of cotton and horticultural crops like grapes and Kesar Mangoes. It has huge energy plantations. These were never heard of. The regular migration of cattle and people has almost stopped.

The country has seen a breakthrough in agriculture production. There are many achievements that we can be proud of. We had a history of importing food grains. There were famines in which people and cattle perished due to lack of food, fodder and water. We have now emerged as a very strong nation. There is self-sufficiency on the food front and even export. However, the other side of the picture, which the author has narrated, is quite true. It needs immediate attention of all those who are interested in not only sustaining agriculture but also in keeping the democracy alive.

The author has rightly stated, “In the same village with similar land and the same crop, one farmer makes a profit and becomes prosperous, and another farmer becomes poor and commits suicide.” He has added that “All farmers or their children do not commit suicide –some of them go the wrong way – take the law in their own hands – start a government of their own – call them Maowadis, Naxalites, whatever you like. It is poverty and helplessness, which drives them to such groups.”

Both these groups and others who live hard lives are people who are left out of development processes. The violence in rural areas is dangerous. Its ramifications are far more serious than people realize. It is not merely a law and order problem. It requires a comprehensive development approach. It needs to be tackled. If it is not done, we may end up losing the fruits of democracy. I like the suggestion to re-activate district and village level administration, but more important is to make the Chief Secretary accountable to the persons and or families who are left out of development process.

Some of the most important chapters in this book relate to micro-level planning with a soil health card for every farmer and a new extension and management approach under the Krushi Mahotsav model. These have been recently introduced in Gujarat. They have a great impact on the farmers by improving their condition and developing sustainable agriculture. But the most interesting is the concluding chapter "What Ails Our Agriculture?”.

Dr. Kirit Shelat recently retired as the Principal Secretary of the Agriculture and Co-operation Department of the Government of Gujarat after forty years with the Government of Gujarat. One of his most outstanding contributions during his tenure was the introduction of “Micro Level Planning” for every village for agriculture and introduction of Soil Health Card based on soil health and moisture analysis to guide each individual farmer for selecting crops which can be effectively sustained. This has been effectively implemented in Gujarat.

Dr. Shelat’s book is a must for all students of agriculture. It will also be of interest to all thosewho are concerned with agriculture including administrators, politicians, corporate leaders and responsible citizens. They will enjoy reading this wonderful story about how the essential path for sustainable agriculture growth and poverty removal in our rural area can be implemented if there are determined minds.

22, April, 2007 Shri Kantisen Shroff

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