

IMPACT OF PARANDHUR GREENFIELD AIRPORT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY

AUTHOR – ISHWARYA S* & MS DIVYA S**

* STUDENT AT VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED STUDIES (VISTAS), PALLAVARAM, CHENNAI

** ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED STUDIES (VISTAS), PALLAVARAM, CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

India's rapidly expanding aviation sector reflects the country's broader shift towards industrial growth, urbanisation, and stronger global connectivity. The proposed Parandhur Greenfield Airport in Tamil Nadu is a key example of this development. It is expected to improve regional connectivity and position the State as an important aviation hub.

However, alongside these expected benefits, the project has also raised serious concerns among local communities. Issues such as land acquisition, displacement of farmers, environmental degradation, and the protection of basic rights have become central to the debate.

This paper examines the tension between the State's power to acquire land and the fundamental right to livelihood guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. To explore this issue in depth, the study combines legal analysis with observations from the affected regions. It analyses important legislation such as the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, along with relevant constitutional provisions and judicial decisions.

Further, the research highlights the lived experiences of people from 13 affected villages. It explores how displacement disrupts their lives—through loss of income, breakdown of traditional agricultural practices, environmental damage, and increasing resistance from local communities. The study also compares India's land acquisition framework with those of countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, in order to identify gaps and suggest possible improvements.

KEYWORDS : Parandhur Airport, Land Acquisition, Eminent Domain, RFCTLARR Act 2013, Right to Livelihood, Public Trust Doctrine, Displacement, Sustainable Development, Judicial Review, Agrarian Economy.

INTRODUCTION

India's aviation sector has been expanding at an impressive pace, reflecting the country's broader movement towards industrial growth, urban development, and global integration.

Infrastructure projects such as highways, ports, and airports are increasingly seen as symbols of economic progress. In this context, the proposed Parandhur Greenfield Airport in Tamil Nadu represents a major step towards

strengthening regional connectivity and boosting economic opportunities.

At the same time, such large-scale development projects often come with significant social and environmental costs. One of the most pressing concerns is land acquisition, particularly when it affects rural and agrarian communities. For many people, land is not merely a source of income but also a foundation of identity, culture, and security. When land is acquired, it disrupts not only livelihoods but entire ways of life.

The doctrine of eminent domain allows the State to acquire private land for public purposes, provided that compensation is paid. However, the practical implementation of this doctrine raises critical questions about fairness, transparency, and justice. This is especially relevant in the case of the Parandhur Airport project, where thousands of residents across multiple villages face displacement.

This paper seeks to examine the legal, social, and economic implications of the project. It focuses on the balance between development and the protection of fundamental rights, particularly the right to livelihood under Article 21 of the Constitution.²¹⁸

LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING LAND ACQUISITION

The legal framework for land acquisition in India has evolved, largely in response to criticism of earlier laws. The colonial-era Land Acquisition Act of 1894 gave the government sweeping powers, often at the cost of fairness and accountability. This led to widespread dissatisfaction, particularly among displaced communities.

To address these concerns, the government enacted the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (RFCTLARR Act).²¹⁹

This law introduced several important safeguards, including:

1. Fair compensation based on market value
2. Social Impact Assessments (SIA)
3. Rehabilitation and resettlement provisions
4. Greater transparency and participation

Despite these improvements, challenges remain in implementation. In many cases, affected communities argue that compensation is inadequate or delayed, and rehabilitation measures are insufficient.²²⁰

THE PARANDHUR AIRPORT PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW

The Parandhur Greenfield Airport project is proposed as a second major airport for Chennai, aimed at reducing congestion at the existing airport and supporting future growth. The project covers thousands of acres of land across multiple villages, most of which are primarily agricultural.

While the government highlights the economic benefits—such as job creation, improved infrastructure, and increased investment—local communities have raised serious concerns. These include loss of fertile agricultural land, displacement of families, and long-term environmental impacts.²²¹

For many farmers, the land being acquired has been cultivated for generations. The emotional and cultural attachment to land makes displacement particularly difficult, even when compensation is offered.

IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The impact of the project on local communities is both immediate and long-term. One of the most significant effects is the loss of livelihood. Agriculture is the primary source of income for many families in the affected villages. Once the

²¹⁸ Article 21, Constitution of India

²¹⁹ Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013

²²⁰ Government of India Reports on Land Acquisition

²²¹ Tamil Nadu Government Project Proposal Documents

land is acquired, alternative employment opportunities are often limited.

Displacement also leads to social disintegration. Communities that have lived together for decades are forced to relocate, breaking social networks and support systems.²²²

In addition, there are psychological impacts. Uncertainty about the future, loss of identity, and fear of inadequate rehabilitation create stress and anxiety among affected individuals.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Environmental issues form another major aspect of the debate. The proposed site includes wetlands and water bodies that play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. These areas support biodiversity, regulate water flow, and contribute to groundwater recharge.

The construction of an airport in such a region could lead to flooding, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity.²²³ Environmental activists and local residents have raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of the project.

RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD AND CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The right to livelihood has been recognized as an integral part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. In several landmark judgments, the Supreme Court has emphasized that the right to life includes the right to live with dignity.²²⁴

When land acquisition leads to displacement without adequate rehabilitation, it raises serious constitutional concerns. The State has a responsibility to ensure that development does not come at the cost of fundamental rights.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

A comparison with other countries provides valuable insights into alternative approaches.

United States

In the United States, the principle of eminent domain is also recognized, but it is subject to strict judicial scrutiny. Compensation is generally based on fair market value, and affected individuals have strong legal remedies.²²⁵

United Kingdom

The UK follows a more structured approach, with detailed procedures for public consultation and compensation. There is a strong emphasis on minimizing displacement and ensuring fairness.²²⁶

China

China's approach is more state-driven, with rapid land acquisition for development projects. While this allows for faster implementation, it often raises concerns about inadequate compensation and lack of transparency.²²⁷

Comparison with India

India's legal framework, particularly after the 2013 Act, attempts to balance development with social justice. However, implementation gaps continue to create challenges.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite progressive legislation, several challenges persist:

1. Delays in compensation
2. Inadequate rehabilitation measures
3. Lack of awareness among affected communities
4. Administrative inefficiencies

These issues reduce the effectiveness of legal protections and increase public resistance.

Conclusion

Legal, constitutional, and socio-economic aspects of land acquisition have been critically analysed in the current paper with particular

²²² Field Study Observations from Affected Villages

²²³ Environmental Impact Reports

²²⁴ Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)

²²⁵ U.S. Eminent Domain Laws

²²⁶ UK Land Compensation Act

²²⁷ China Land Administration Law

focus on the acquisition of land belonging to farmers for the development of infrastructural facilities like the upcoming Greenfield airport at Parandhur. Analysis of historical development, legislation, judicial interpretations, and comparative viewpoints indicates that land acquisition is indeed an extremely sensitive topic, especially where livelihoods of farmers are concerned. Another important finding of this research study is that although India has been able to develop a comprehensive legal framework in the form of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, the difficulties with implementing it continue to exist. The law has provided for conducting the Social Impact Assessment, providing fair compensation, and rehabilitation; nonetheless, delays, lack of transparency, and poor enforcement can often lead to dissatisfaction on the part of those being affected by the acquisition. For farmers whose means of earning income come from their agricultural land, losing access to their lands would mean loss of livelihood in the long term, which may not be compensated by Monetary compensation. Moreover, through the study, it becomes clear that the problem of the acquisition of productive agricultural lands poses a huge threat to food security, environmental sustainability, and economic development. About the project under consideration, protests on the part of local inhabitants against the conversion of land and water resources can be regarded as evidence of the existence of certain discrepancies between legislation and reality. When comparing the case of India with that of other developed countries like the USA, UK, and China, we see that Indian legislation provides better protection than its practical application. To summarise all of the above, it should be pointed out that the conclusion which can be made concerning the issue at hand is the following. The process of land acquisition in India is well legislated but faces practical difficulties. There exists an urgent need to go beyond

compensation schemes and pursue a new approach in development.

SUGGESTIONS

Taking into consideration the findings discussed above, the following recommendations are proposed with respect to improving the legal and practical mechanisms of land acquisition, especially agricultural lands:

1. Prefer Non-Agricultural and Barren Lands:

The government should opt for non-agricultural lands and/or barren lands for development projects and acquire agricultural lands only as a last resort.

2. Improving Social Impact Assessment (SIA):

The process of SIA needs to be transparent, impartial, and participatory to provide a fair evaluation of the views of the affected farmers.

3. Replacement of Agricultural Land:

Alternative agricultural land should be offered to farmers wherever feasible instead of just providing compensation money.

4. Payment of Proper Compensation:

Apart from just the value of the land itself, compensation should include future earning potential and its socio-economic impact on the farmer.

5. Providing Long-term Rehabilitation:

Instead of temporary relief, the displaced farmer needs to be provided with assistance for long-term rehabilitation in terms of employment and other benefits.

6. Care for Vulnerable Groups:

Additional care should be provided to women and elderly farmers who would have problems in the process of displacement and rehabilitation.

7. Taking Farmers into Confidence:

There should be full transparency and participation of the farmer community in the entire process of land acquisition.

8. Strict Judicial Supervision:

Judicial oversight will be necessary to ensure that there is no abuse of power during the acquisition process.

9. Protection of the Environment:

All projects should comply with environmental legislation, and harm to lakes, wetlands, and ecosystems should be avoided.

10. Policy Reviews and Monitoring:

Government authorities need to conduct regular reviews of land acquisition policies and monitor the enforcement of laws and schemes.

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