

# Reliance and Jamnagar

*-Parimal Nathwani*

*'Nowhere have farmers had it so good as Jamnagar where many have fixed deals for as high as Rs. 3.09 lakh per 2.5 acre for non-irrigated land and Rs. 4.06 lakh per 2.5 acre for irrigated land with Reliance Industries Limited'* wrote Times of India in its 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 issue. Amidst this scenario, construction work at Reliance's Jamnagar SEZ is steadily progressing with 65,000 workers on the job at 11,000 acres proposed SEZ site and with majority of land already acquired. This is possible only in Gujarat and Jamnagar's people demonstrate farmers of Jamnagar shows the way for it.

Jamnagar could be a case study for social scientists and agro-economists to understand the acumen and skills of Jamnagar's farmers who willingly offer their lands for industrial development, make money and still remain farmers by buying farm lands in vicinity. In the process, they not only grow economically but also become partners in growth and economic progress.

Jamnagar's success in land acquisition in fact dates back to mid 90s when Reliance first decided to set up its world class refinery. After initial hiccups, it became a case of co-existence and empathy (to put in Phillip Kotler's words-*if we put our heads on same pillow, we will see the same dream*) so much so that land acquisition for SEZ also became folksy.

It happened like this. Government of India granted formal approval for Reliance's Jamnagar SEZ in March 2006. It got notified in April 2006. Detailed survey of land in a backward taluka of Lalpur in Jamnagar district was carried out. Navagam, Kanalus, Kanachikari, Derachikari and Padana villages' land was covered in the survey. The land for Jamnagar SEZ is mostly private and waste land, non-irrigated or single crop pattern land. SEZ has to be in a compact land block and therefore needs contiguous planning. Private land of these villages was acquired through negotiation with the genuine land owners. Price arrived at through negotiations was always more than market price. Then consent agreements took place between the land owners and the company. Only then the government land acquisition officer declared the '*consent award*' under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.

It is pertinent to note that the whole lot of private land is acquired for Jamnagar SEZ through consent only and no government agency was involved in the process of consent; except at the stage of declaration of '*consent award.*' Liberal, pragmatic and humane approach towards the private land owners by the company brought about miraculous results. The whole lot of 51 farmers who indulged into litigation against company and lost in High Court of Gujarat and the Supreme Court also readily and willingly offered their lands through consent awards; with no malice or any hard feeling on either side. This is Jamnagar. This is the farmer community of Jamnagar (*'...may his tribe*

*increase...*’ said Lord Tennyson). Very professional, business like, progressive, positive and with understanding.

Company also did not take shelter of provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894; for compulsion or force on farmers to acquire land; except declaration of ‘*consent award*’ which is merely a procedure. Reliance on its part has always stood in favor of development of community around to discharge its obligations to local people.

Like a good neighbor, Reliance has supported villagers simultaneously with its activities in all kind of developmental work. Health, education, societal relationship, cultural support and direct-indirect employment and business generation are the areas where the neighbors get priority. The practice initiated and inspired by our founder chairman Dhirubhai Ambani during the construction of existing refinery-cum-petrochemical complex; and continued by present chairman Shri Mukeshbhai Ambani for SEZ have contributed great deal in strengthening bonds of relationship with Jamnagar’s farmers.

To quote the Times of India again in order to conclude: ‘*the smarter among the farmers are pumping the compensation amount into buying huge tracts of land around the new SEZ limits to cash in on future expansion of SEZ. Others have bought LCVs, dumpers, JCBs, taxis and have leased them to RIL.*’

It is true. Jamnagar has plenty of glittering examples of farmers turning into a business man without quitting agriculture. In that sense, Jamnagar’s farmers are torch bearers.

\* \* \*

***(Shri Parimal Nathwani is Group President-Corporate Affairs at Reliance Industries Limited, Jamnagar)***