

## CHAPTER - 6

### CASE STUDY - I

#### LAND ACQUISITION AT SINGUR

##### 6.1. Introduction

In the last chapter, we have examined the revised land acquisition policy declared by the Government of West Bengal after the Singur episode. In this chapter, it is proposed to examine and analyse the episodes at Singur, which is an important area of study since it changed the political ecology and development scenario of the state. Immediately after the assembly elections in 2006, the then Left Front Government began to implement the policies of industrialisation which was declared in its election manifesto. The ruling left front started an intense campaign to win a big-ticket project and took measures to make the state an attractive investment destination. The much-coveted 'Nano' project of Tata Motors Ltd (a small car with a promised price-tag of only ₹1 lakh) was announced as an elusive ticket, lured away from Pantnagar, Uttarakhand state with fiscal incentives the details of which were never made public before. The government announced that the TATA Nano project would turn West Bengal into an important automobile hub of the country and will create a chain of downstream ancillary industries, and the establishment would attract many more investments thus increasing industrial output and employment (Chandra, 2008).

As the economy is remodelling from agriculture to industry and a vital process of structural change is on, the question of security in terms of livelihood turns up. In the district of Hooghly, district agriculture is still the predominant economic activity and the primary source of livelihood the rural people. Agriculture contributes a significant proportion of district income. Almost one-third of the total income of the district comes from agriculture. As per 2001 census,

14.95 per cent of the total workers were engaged as cultivators and 24.31 per cent as agricultural workers (Census of India 2001).

Moreover, a significant per cent of total workers are engaged in agro-based household industries. Hooghly is an agriculturally prosperous district of West Bengal. The land use pattern of the district demonstrates a high proportion of net sown area as a percentage of the total reported area (about 70.01 per cent in 2005-06) (Hooghly District Statistical Handbook,2006). However, there is a decline in the net shown area and a steady rise in the area under non-agricultural use. Thus, a gradual shift from agriculture to non-agriculture is found in the district. It appears that by and large, a significant rise in the non-agricultural area took place at the cost of agricultural land.

## 6.2. Profile of the Project Area

Singur had a total population of 276,413, of which 223951 were rural and 52,462 were urban.



There were Males constitute 51 per cent of the population and females 49 per cent. Scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes population percentage were 17.02 per cent and 1.47 per cent respectively. Singur has a mean literacy rate of 76 per cent higher than the national average of 59.5 per cent male literacy is 81 per cent, and female literacy is 71 per cent (Census, 2011). As per poverty estimates received from the household survey for families living below poverty line(BPL) in 2005, rural

poverty was 18.39 per cent (District Human Development Report: Hooghly, 2011). The topography of the region reflects the characteristic of the lower Gangetic Region comprising old alluvium and new alluvium soils.: Old alluvium comprises lands in North and South Dinajpur and Malda districts. Soils are lighter in higher situations, and heavier in lower situations, mildly acidic to neutral in reaction (pH 5.2 to 7.0); reasonably fertile over most of

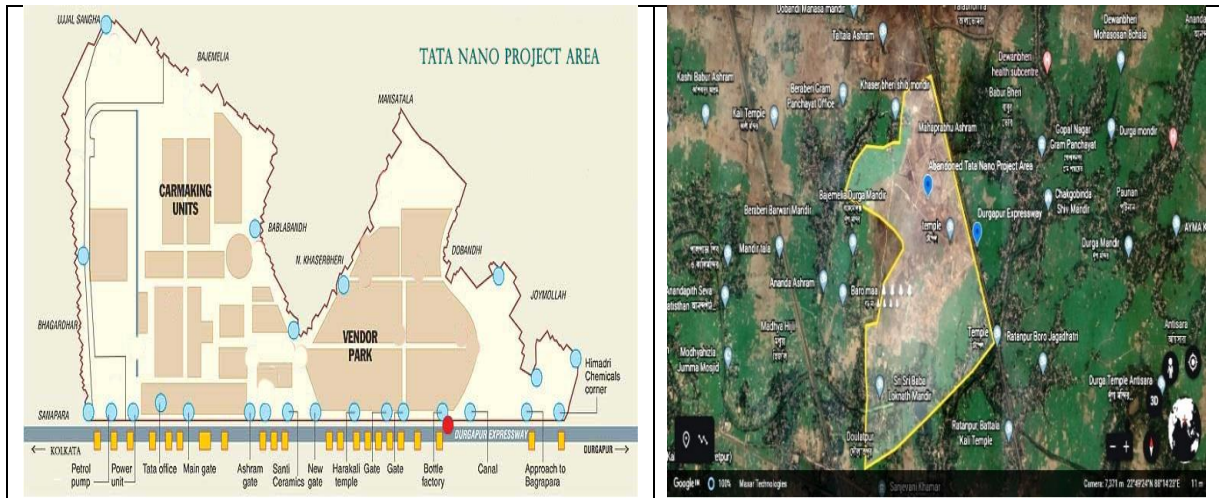
the sub-region; rainfall 1500-2000mm in Upper and 1300-1500mm in lower parts, the considerable area is flood-prone. New alluvium Covers Hooghly in which soils are deep, mostly neutral in reaction (pH 5.5 to 7.0) and fertile; rainfall 1350-1450 mm; most productive area of the State (District Human Development Report : Hooghly, 2011)

The site for the establishment of the Tata project(Nano) was chosen in the block of Singur in Hooghly district. Singur railway station is located at a distance of 34 Kilometres from Howrah Station on the Howrah-Tarakeswar route. It is two kilometres ahead of Kamarkundu junction, the crossing point of Howrah-Bardhaman chord and Howrah-Tarakeswar lines. It is approximately 40 Kilometres from Kolkata, but with easy access to the city via the Durgapur Expressway(National Highway-2). The land affected spread across five *Mouzas*<sup>1</sup> - Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Singherbheri, Bajemelia, and Khaserbheri. The area comprises a total of 16 Gram Panchayats where the majority of the people are involved in agricultural activities to meet their livelihood. It has an average altitude of 14 metres (45 ft.) and is located on the Ganges delta, which is most fertile.

---

<sup>1</sup> A *mouza* corresponds to a specific land area within which there may be one or more settlements. In the colonial era, the term referred to a revenue collection unit in a *pargana* or revenue district. Although the concept has declined in importance, it is still used for land revenue administration.

## Map 1 and 2 Villages in Singur Block where from Land has been Acquired in 2006



Source: Google Earth(2019), Tata Nano Abandoned Plant, Singur, Retrieved from <https://earth.google.com/web/@22.83682872,88.21873257,11.49349807a,6040.44025529d,35y,0.00000001h,45.03227517t,0r>

The process of urbanization and industrialization has contributed significantly towards changing the land use pattern of the district. Several important roads, for example, the National Highways run along elevated surfaces. The changing topography and land use-pattern have their maximum impacts in areas where urbanization is accompanied by large scale industrialization. Singur ranks 15th in terms of percentage of area devoted to crop cultivation but the leading block (ranking first) in the percentage of area devoted to cultivation. Blessed with natural and topographic advantages, Singur has achieved remarkable growth in agricultural produce, followed by setting up of numerous jute-mills that catapulted this district on the top rung of the growth ladder. The land is fertile and situated on the banks of rivers which enables people to get at least three times of production especially cash crops like potatoes and vegetables. Most of the respondents were also informed about the availability of the sufficient quality of water being made possible surrounded by rivers like the Ganges help them to continue a similar pattern of cultivation with volatile market conditions. However, few respondents had agreed about changes in cultivation patterns during interim periods when market rates of the common product had been downgraded, and they often incurred loss.

However, this situation remained for a shorter period again; they were motivated to cultivate the products of the same breed. The agro-friendly atmosphere, climatic conditions with the fertility of the soil, people's interest and motivation all together in the entire Eastern region of the country portrays quality and superiority of the area in agriculture production.

Though agricultural progress has been a more successful process of socio-economic development in the study area, the agricultural development along with small scale agro friendly industries have framed the vital role of Gangetic Bengal. Stakeholders in the production process are accountable to those who are toiling and moiling on land in the capacity of the landowner, tenants or *bargadars*. Sociologists use the framework of the mode of production and relationship with the land in terms of classes in the agrarian society (Bardhan, 1982) in distinguishing landowner and working peasants. It is found that the relationship is maintained cordially in the form of sharing produce between the landowners and the cultivators. It is a major concern in the peasant society when capitalism expands that the dominant classes attempt to establish the political, legal and ideological methods necessary for its functioning and stability. In this process, they encounter the ideological practices which originated in social relations in subordinating capitalism that lead to modernization. In the study area, the primary production was cash crops for more monetary benefits and market based capitalist approach was seen before peasants lost their land in the project sites. Sometimes more quantum of production in market prices also caused increase of frustration developing strained relationship among landowners and other stakeholders.

### 6.3. Land Reforms and Agricultural Holdings

We now consider the size and distribution of agricultural holdings and the impact of land-reforms at the Singur Block as well as the district of Hooghly as a whole. We find Table 6.1, that an overwhelming majority (85.64 per cent) of the operational holdings are marginal,

covering more than half of the total cultivated area of the district. If we consider small and marginal holdings together, they constitute 97.18 per cent.

Table 6.1 Land Distribution of Operational Holdings over Size/Classes in the District of Hooghly

Size-Class	Per cent of holdings	Per cent of the area
Marginal	85.64	57.596
Small	11.539	28.412
Semi-medium	2.523	11.381
Medium	0.294	2.471
Large	0.005	0.14
Total	100 per cent	
The average size of Hooghly(in Hectares)	0.660 Hectares	

Source: (Hooghly District Statistical Handbook,2006)

Notes: Marginal- Below 1.0 hectare

Small- 1.0 hectare and above but less than 2.0 hectare

Semi-medium- 2.0 hectare and above but less than 4.0 hectare

Medium- 4.0 hectare and above but less than 10.0 hectare

Large- 10.0 hectare and above. It includes mostly institutional holdings

From Table 6.2, we find specific information on the progress of land reforms in the district. There was a steady increase in land distribution up to November 30, 2006. The majority of these beneficiaries are people belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Again the common area distributed (area of land distribution divided by the number of beneficiaries) is more or less constant.

Table 6.2 Land Distributed and Number of Beneficiaries in the District of Hooghly

Area of land distributed(Hectare)	Numbers of Beneficiaries							
	SC		ST		Others		Total	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent
5260	33241	46.40	13692	19.11	24710	34.49	71643	100

Source: (Hooghly District Statistical Handbook,2006)

The percentage of distributions of various categories of agricultural workers in the Singur block are given in Table 6.3. A large percentage of workers are agricultural labourers (about 44 per

cent) in the block. This portion of the agricultural workers is most vulnerable. A closely related group is the marginal farmers who add up to 34.96 per cent for the block. About 78.86 per cent of the agricultural workers belong to these two vulnerable categories. Distribution of patta holders is an indicator of land reforms. This is observed that only 2.92 per cent of patta holders are in the block.

Table 6.3. Percentage of People Engaged in Agriculture in Singur

<i>Bargadars</i>	<i>Patta holders</i>	Small farmers	Marginal farmers	Agricultural Labourers
8.36	2.92	9.86	34.96	43.90

*Source: (Hooghly District Statistical Handbook, 2006), (B.L. and L.R.O., Hooghly), (Agricultural Census 2005-06: West Bengal, 2006)*

The far-reaching Singur controversy was initially sparked at the government's decision to acquire 997 acres of agricultural land in order to set up the TATA small car (Nano) factory.

#### 6.4. Process of Land acquisition and Resistance

After its massive victory at the Assembly elections in 2006, the Left Front Government formulated industrial policy to provide relief and better livelihood for the people and to solve the problem of unemployment in the State. In carrying out of the declared policy of the government, the Tata Motors Ltd. entered into negotiations with the Government of West Bengal for infrastructural needs related to the venture. In a letter addressed to then Principal Secretary of the Commerce and Industries Department of the Government of West Bengal dated January 19, 2006, Tata Motors Ltd. specifically stated that their team had visited the state and met the representatives of the government. It also expressed its willingness and consent to establish the factory which was reciprocated of the full assurance of the government in the venture. The relevant portion of the proposal is presented hereunder, which was agreed:

Table 6.4. Agreed Scheme of Land Requirement

Sl. No.	Aspect/Parameter	Requirement	Remarks
01.	Land (including vendor park)	1000 acres	I) 75 percent for Tata Motors Ltd. land 25 percent for Vendor Park II) Unconditional flexibility for allotment to vendors III) Land to be graded/stabilised and given, or the cost to be reduced from the land cost. IV) Land title on out-right sale basis, or long lease of 99 years transfer of title after the lease period, without condition.
02.	Land used for Township and schooling		I) Land for the township to be given at 50 percent of rate applied for factory land. II) Schooling land to be allocated free of cost or Government to promote the establishment of prominent schools in proximity.
03.	Power (including vendor park)	100 MVA	Quality of power (50 Hz +/- 3 per cent), availability from 2 sources, regulatory voltage +/- 5 per cent
04.	Water (including vendor park)	15000 cu.m	Potable water as per Indian Standards (IS-10500)
05.	4-lane approach road to the site and 6-lane road around the boundary of the plant.		The approach road to be available within 3 months from the date of land allotment.

Further Discussion was held between Tata Motors Ltd. and a team from the Government of West Bengal having 'Record Note' available within three months from the date of land allotment. The compensation to be awarded was initially calculated on the following basis: landowners were to receive ₹8.7 lakhs per acre for single-cropped land and ₹12.8 lakhs per acre for double-cropped land; registered *Bargadars* were to receive 25 per cent of the value being offered to owners. However, no arrangement was made to compensate for the unregistered *Bargadars*. WBIDC itself admits: "according to a local enquiry, the total number of unrecorded *Bargadars* is about 170. Till date, 60 such unrecorded *Bargadars* have applied to Collector requesting that they be considered for some compensation to be paid to them" (Status Report on Singur, 2006, p. 2)



Table 6.5. The Timeline for Acquisition and Compensation Payment

Issuance of notice under section 4(1) of the Land Acquisition Act 1894	July 19-24, 2006
Issuance of Notice under section 6 of the Land Acquisition Act 1894	August 29-31, 2006
Declaration of Award:	September 21-23, 2006
Commencement of Payment of Land Acquisition:	September 25, 2006

Source: 1Source: Status Report on Singur, Government of West Bengal, 2006

The announcement of the project caused almost immediate apprehensions about the loss of land and livelihood. The first instance of organised agitation against the move occurred during the visit of a Tata Motors team and WBIDC officials on May 25, 2006, when a group of local peasants gathered to block their entry to the site of the project. Soon after, a *Krishi Jami Raksha Committee* was formed, which organised its first demonstration on 1st June in front of the local block development office (Banerjee, 2006). Between 9th May and 27th September, there were nine meetings between various departments of the government and local representatives, including four from the *Krishi Jami Raksha Committee*. However, in spite of extensive consultations, even the government's records suggest, no consensus emerged from these meetings on how to move the process forward (Mohanty, 2007). The protests escalated rapidly and brought together a motley political coalition, spearheaded by the Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee, PDS ( Party of Democratic Socialism), as well as the SUCI (Socialist Unity Centre of India a Left party outside the ruling coalition). Their specific demand was the return of 400 acres of land to the unwilling farmers (plot-holders who refused to part with their land and did not collect compensation cheques, although some were absentee businessmen and landlords) (Sau, 2008) (Sau, 2008). The movement got widespread support from different human rights groups, civil rights activists, legal bodies and social activists like Medha Patkar, Anuradha Talwar, writers Mahasweta Devi and Ruchit Shah, writer-activist Arundhati Roy and other intellectuals, including, theatre, artist and film personalities like Aparna Sen and Shaoli Mitra, Subhprasanna Bhattacharjee. Other prominent citizens also lent their support to the

cause of the farmers. They all demanded the abandonment of the project and return of land to the landowners.

On September 25, 2006, the day when disbursement of compensation had to be commenced, the local block office was surrounded by thousands of protestors, claiming the process be stopped. What happened during the following hours is not clear, but the police finally resorted to a *lathi*-charge that resulted in the death of one and caving several injured. Just before the beginning of fencing operations in early December, another phase of violent clashes took place, and the government responded by imposing prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code initially, one month but later indefinite, in order to continue fencing operations. A group of civil society members including prominent personalities Aparna Sen and Shnaoli Mitra tried to visit Singur on 7th December 2006 in response to increasing reports of police atrocities but were turned back by the police citing restrictions under Section 144 (The Times of India, December 8,2006). These incidents gradually brought about a change of opinion against the process of entire industrialisation among a large section of the middle-class urban intelligentsia.

Ceremonial inauguration of construction of the factory took place on January 21, 2007. In a major embarrassment to the government, the Calcutta High Court, in a judgement passed on February 14, 2007, held that imposition of prohibitory orders under Section 144 in Singur amounted to administrative highhandedness and misuse of power (The Times of India, February 15,2007). Mamata Banerjee called a *Bangla Bandh* (state-wide strike) on 1st December, protesting against police brutalities and demanding the return of the 400 acres, which the landowners were unwilling to give up. She then went on a 25-day *Anashan* (hunger-strike), only to withdraw call at the request of the President and the Prime Minister on 28th December (Ananda Bazar Patrika, December 1,2,29,30, 2006).

Construction of the factory continued throughout in 2007 and the first half of 2008 amidst regular protests and agitations that often turned violent. There were several reports of disruption of work, assault and intimidation of workers and officials at the site (Hindustan Times, September 6, 2008). The saga also played out in the state assembly with the government coming under severe criticism for its refusal to publicly reveal the details of the deal, particularly the concessions given to Tata Motors Ltd., under the clause of 'trade secrets' (The Telegraph, October 13, 2006). A Left Front partner like the CPI and RSP also questioned this dictum of 'trade secret' for land being acquired 'in the public interest' and demanded transparency (Banerjee, 2006). There was even a public reproach from none other than Jyoti Basu (The Telegraph, October 13, 2006).

A fresh bout of intense agitation centred on the return of land to the unwilling farmers was led by Mamata Banerjee in August 2008 and brought work at the site to a complete standstill. This led to a series of inconclusive negotiations between the government and the opposition and finally to led to Tata Motor's withdrawal of the project on 3rd October 2008 (Adhikari, 2011)<sup>2</sup>.

In the press conference, Chairman of the Tata Group, Ratan Tata stated:

"This is a decision that has been taken with a great deal of sadness because we came here two years ago, attracted by the investor-friendly policies of the current government, which we still have a great deal of respect for, the leadership of Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. And all through the two years that we worked, we are very appreciative of the support that the government gave us and the facilitation that they provided. Unfortunately, we also faced great agitation and great aggression on the part of the opposing parties, which have been the sole reason for us to take this decision" (The Telegraph, October 4, 2008).

---

<sup>2</sup> The project was eventually relocated to Sanand in Gujarat, where it took around 14 months to build the factory and start production, compared to the disruptive 28 months in West Bengal.

## 6.5. The Departure of the Tata Motors

The exit of the Tata Motors from Singur was a significant setback for the Left Front Government, but it did not necessarily mean success on the part of the protesters. The primary demand of the protesters, as articulated stridently by the Trinamool Congress and its leader Mamata Banerjee, was to release approximately 400 acres out of 997.11 acres of land acquired by the government and distribute the same to the 'unwilling farmers'. The unwilling farmers were defined as those who opposed the acquisition of their lands and refused to accept the compensation offered to them. This demand remained unfulfilled till the left front was in power. The land acquired for the project remained un-utilised for any purpose. The Tata Motors abandoned the small car project at Singur but did not hand over the land, measuring around 645 acres, back to the state government which they received from the government for the establishment of the factory. Those amid the willing farmers who not only agreed to the acquisition and accepted the compensation but also wanted the industry to be established in their area were dissatisfied. The unwilling farmers who kept the protest agitation alive for five long years failed to get a suitable answer. It is against the above circumstances that the first major decision taken by the Mamata Banerjee-led government that came to power in May 2011 was to return the lands acquired from the unwilling farmers of Singur. To fulfil the promises made to Singur's struggling farmers during the protest movement led by her, Banerjee took the initiative in getting new legislation called the Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011 (hereinafter referred to as the Singur Act) enacted, within a month after coming to power. In fact, this was the first Act passed by the state legislature after the new government came to power. A special law was considered for returning the acquired lands to a section of the erstwhile landowners, as the existing Act does not allow the transfer of a part of the acquired lands back to them. However, the state government could not reap any political benefit from

the Singur Act by taking over lands leased out to the Tata's and distributing lands to the unwilling farmers as provided therein, because the Tata group moved the court challenging, among other things, the constitutional validity of the said Act. In a judgment, a division bench of the Calcutta High Court has declared the Act to be unconstitutional. In all probability, the state government filed an appeal before the Supreme Court against the order of the division bench of the high court and the validity of the Singur Act remained uncertain. In 2016, the Supreme Court of India quashed the West Bengal Government's acquisition of 997 acres of land for Tata Motors and ordered its return to 9,117 landowners.

Table 6.6 Singur Land Acquisition Issue: A Timeline

May 2006	Tata Motors declares Nano small car plant at Singur in Hooghly, West Bengal.
July 2006	Mamata Banerjee opposes the plant on fertile agricultural land.
December 2006	Demonstrations against the acquisition begin.
December 2006	Mamata Banerjee holds 26-day hunger strike
January 21, 2007	Tata Motors starts manufacture of Nano car plant in Singur.
January 18, 2008	High Court at Calcutta upholds Singur land acquisition, following which farmers and NGO moved the Supreme Court of India challenging the Calcutta High Court order.
August 24, 2008	Mamata Banerjee starts indefinite <i>dharna</i> at outside the car plant
September 2, 2008	Tata Motors suspends work on Nano Plant.
September 3, 2008	Governor of West Bengal Gopal Krishna Gandhi plays mediator; Government and Trinamool agree to hold dialogues.
September 5, 2008	The Government of West Bengal and Trinamool Congress started negotiations.
September 7, 2008	Talks break down.
October 3, 2008:	Tata Motors decided to leave Singur.
October 7, 2008	Tata Motors announces new Nano plant at Sanand in Gujarat.
May 20, 2011	Mamata Banerjee sworn in as Chief Minister declares first Cabinet decision to return 400 acres of land to unwilling Singur farmers.
June 14, 2011	Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Bill, 2011 passed in West Bengal Assembly.
June 22, 2011	Tata Motors moves Calcutta High Court challenging the Bill.
September 28, 2011	Calcutta High Court single bench upholds the Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011.
June 22, 2012	A Calcutta High Court division bench holds the Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011 as unconstitutional and void.
August 6, 2012	The West Bengal government challenges the Calcutta High Court order in the Supreme Court

August 31, 2016	Supreme Court sets aside land acquisition for the Tata's Nano project in West Bengal's Singur, and orders state government to return the land to all within 12 weeks.
-----------------	---

## 6.6. The Burning Debates

The number of owners of the acquired lands in Singur was 13,491. Out of them, the unwilling owners constitute (according to the schedule at Part II of the Singur Act, 2011) 2,689 persons or 19.93 per cent of the total affected people (The Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. As per the schedule at Part I of Singur Act, 2011<sup>4</sup>, there are around 189 owners to whom the payment of award could not be made by the collector, as their cases were been referred to the court for settlement of land ownership-related controversies. This leaves around 10,613 persons or 78.67 per cent of the total number of owners who had surrendered their lands and had taken payment of the awards<sup>5</sup>. The figures seem to suggest that the Singur movement was supported by only one-fifth of the persons affected. Although they owned a little over one-fourth of the acquired land (257.26 acres out of the total acquired land of 997.11 acres), more than 78 per cent owners had under their control about 67 per cent of the acquired lands, some portion of the acquired land having the characteristic of vested lands or lands for public use, such as roads or being locked up in court cases (4.45 per cent). For 78 per cent of the landowners, there was no serious problem with the setup of car project on their lands. The objection came from a group which constituted not more than 20 per cent of the landowners. It has been observed that the Singur movement was not only a movement of the owners of the land but a much larger section of the peasantry intimately connected with land for their livelihoods. They include sharecroppers, both registered and unregistered, agricultural

<sup>3</sup> Government of West Bengal. (2011, June 20). Retrieved May 2, 2019, from Land and Land Reform & Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department: [https://sarthac.gov.in/view-act-file?file\\_id=2246](https://sarthac.gov.in/view-act-file?file_id=2246)

<sup>4</sup> 3

<sup>5</sup> 3

labourers, landless cultivators and lessee cultivators (those who cultivate other's lands on a short-term lease, usually for one season or for raising one crop) apart from the owners. All these groups, along with others involved in agricultural marketing, were claimed to have been affected by the acquisition procedure and, as such, were seen as part of the agitation. However, at no point of time during the movement, no such demand was raised for them by the Trinamool Congress –that lead the movement. The only demand was for returning agricultural lands to the unwilling owners. There was no mention about any relief for the share-croppers and the agricultural labourers in the Singur Act, many of whom are reported to have been a part of the movement, because of the alleged loss of their livelihoods after the acquisition of the lands. Thus the movement ultimately turned out to be one for the landowners only and not for other groups of the peasantry, particularly for the share-croppers and agricultural labourers. Thus the question arises as to why such people as the agricultural labourers particularly for whom lots of jobs were available within and outside the construction site – remained with the movement is a puzzle that remains to be unexplained.

## 6.7. The Narratives of Land at Singur

The Interim Report of the Citizen's Committee on Nandigram and Singur and (2007) observed: "According to the Status Report issued by the CPI(M), most of the affected area is mono cropped. They, however, seem to have used a land survey of the early seventies after which several deep tube wells have been sunk, and many shallow hand pumps set up, increasing soil fertility enormously. According to villagers, most of the land is under four to five crops. We did find very green fields and relatively prosperous village homes. The people are very

humiliated that their land has been described as poor in quality and their labour devalued as a backward form of work.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, one of the questions that emerge on scrutiny of the Singur episode relates to the question why the state government chose such a fertile area like Singur for a project that required large scale acquisition and transformation of agricultural land into industrial usage. While it is understandable that the acquisition of some cultivated land was unavoidable, the fact that the government completely ignored the fertility levels of the area is inexplicable.

Nirupam Sen tried to explain the decision in the following statement:

“When the TATAs decided to shift the project to West Bengal, their main thought was that this project would do much good for the state. We showed them several areas, but they chose Singur. Due to the importance of the project, we saw no reason to disagree. The nature of the land - whether it was mono or multi-crop - was never taken into account.” (Jababi Nirupam, 2008)

Given its location, Singur is understandably one of the best possible sites from an entrepreneur’s point of view. However, it is surprising that Sen admits that the fertility of the land was never a concern for the government. In fact, it is pointed out that the government did not even know about the nature of the acquired land in consideration of its fertility. Historically, the Singur area was predominantly low land. The fact that almost all the *mouzas* in the area have the suffix *bheri* in their names is a testimony to the fact<sup>7</sup>. Over the years, most of the area had been developed by the local people on their own initiative, but it was never recorded. There are two reasons behind this: (i) the land record system in our country has always been incomplete, and (ii) the farmers themselves never informed the position or status of their land

---

<sup>6</sup> Source: “Interim Report of the Citizens Committee on Singur and Nandigram”, 23rd March 2007. <http://singur-singur.blogspot.co.uk/2007/03/interim-report-of-citizens-committee-on.html>; accessed 27th July 2012.

<sup>7</sup> *Bheri* means ‘low-land’. So the names Bera-bheri, Singher-bheri, Khasher-bheri indeed indicate that these areas were once low lands.



to the government in order to avoid increased tax rates that would have been imposed on the developed lands. Local administration was also not active enough to take the initiative and identify the changes or conversion that took place. Therefore, in our records, most of the area remains *Sali* (Single crop, low land and no irrigation), and only a small proportion is *Suna* (Multi-crop, higher level with irrigation) (Sen N. , Jababi Nirupam, 2008).

This admission could not explain why the government did not bother to verify its records before approving the project. What is even more perplexing is that in the face of widespread contrary reports in the media, declaring that Singur was indeed a highly fertile area, the government maintained a stoic opposition. The following is an excerpt from a television interview with the Chief Minister (Buddhadeb Bhattacharya) that was broadcast in CNN-IBN (Now CNN-NEWS<sup>18</sup>-a 24-hour English satellite TV channel) on 25th February 2007 (Agrarian Impasse in West Bengal in the Liberalisation Era, 2007), almost ten months into the entire episode.

When the chief minister was asked whether he had decided to give them (the Tata's) fertile land, knowing that it was the only way they would come to Kolkata?

Buddhadeb Bhattacharya admitted that what has been said about the nature of the land (is not right) - maybe the report is not up to date.

When he was again asked whether he acknowledged the point, he replied that the major portion of the land was mono-cropped and he remained stick to that.

The reasons behind such discrepancy between the official and public versions (as well as the doggedness of opinion expressed by the state) have rarely been questioned. In this connection, the crucial role played by of the alternative bureaucratic channels of the party be may be held responsible on which the government relied more. This role of the local political managers of his party might have provided wrong information and the Chief Minister admitted this narrative which can be traced from an interview:

**Interviewer:** How do you know that? If your report is not up to date, how can you say that the major portion of land is mono-crop?

**Bhattacharya:** Then, how can they (the citizens' committee) know that?

**Interviewer:** Because they visited it. They have spoken to the farmers.

**Bhattacharya:** I know these agrarians people better than them, particularly. My colleagues are working there, my party, along with my peasant's organisation, knows better than these people (Bhattacharyya & Bhattacharyya, 2007).

## 6.8. Finding and Analysis

A questionnaire survey made on the various type of stakeholders such as resident landowners who live in Singur and non-residential landowners who did not live in Singur along with Registered sharecropper (Related to the small owner) Unregistered Sharecropper (Related to Agricultural Labourer), shown in the table below:

Table 6.7. Moujas (Villages) and Category of Farmer Respondent

Sl	Respondent	Moujas					Total
		Gopalnagar	Beraberi	Khaserbheri	Bajemelia	Singherbheri	
1	Resident land owner	35	31	16	9	6	97
2	Land owner living outside of village	3	4	-	2	-	9
3	Registered sharecropper (Related to small owner)	11	5	4	2	3	25
4	Unregistered Sharecropper (Related to agricultural Labourer)	16	8	11	14	9	58
	Total	65	48	31	27	18	189

(Source: Field Survey, 2016-2018)

### ▪ Socio-Economic Conditions of the Respondents

Social structure and demography of the respondents in the five *mouzas* of this study area may be presented in the following manner.:

Table 6.8. Social Structure of Respondent

Sl. No.	Respondent	Cast analysis								Total
		GEN		SC		ST		OBC		
		Res	%	Res	%	Res	%	Res	%	
Moujas	Gopalnagar	10	15.38	10	15.38	0	0	45	69.23	65
	Beraberi	2	4.17	14	29.17	0	0	32	66.67	48
	Khaserbheri	6	19.35	2	6.45	0	0	23	74.19	31
	Bajemelia	2	7.41	9	33.33	2	7.41	14	51.85	27
	Singherbheri	1	5.56	1	5.56	3	16.67	13	72.22	18
Total		21	11.11	36	19.05	5	2.65	127	67.20	189

(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

Table No. 6.9 shows a disappointing figure which shows the majority 133 (70.37 per cent) of the respondents belong to low economic strata only which 13 (6.88 per cent) respondents are found to be in the high economic status leaving the remaining 43 (22.75 per cent) belong to the middle-status group. Thus the field survey reveals the lower socio-economic status of the respondents in the study area.

The people of three relatively more rural and three semi-urban villages belonged predominantly to the *Mahishya* caste, Endogamous *Tentulia Bagdi*, the *Duley Bagdi*, the *Rarhi Brahman*, and the *Kayastha* populations occur in gradually lesser numbers in the area. 244 The study is primarily focussed on the most numerous *Mahishya* population of Singur comparing data from other local populations to generalise and specify the findings where possible.

A scrutiny of the data from Economic Status of the respondent in the five *mouzas* of the area of study is mentioned below:

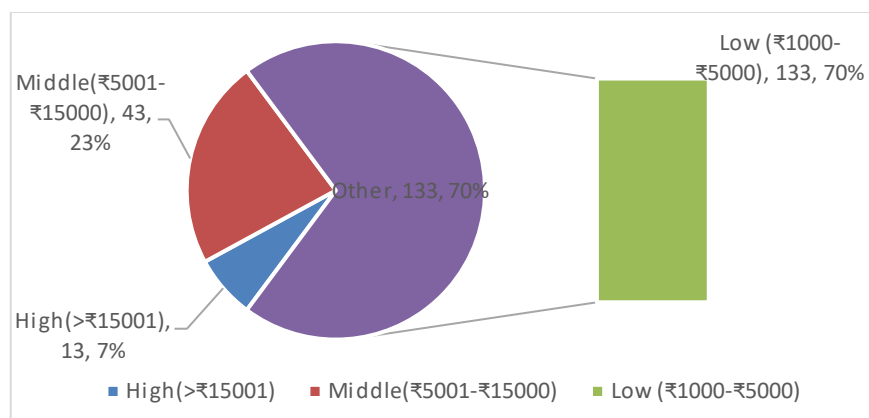
Table 6.9 The Economic Conditions of Respondents

Sl. No	Economic status	Frequency	Percentage
1	High(>₹15001)	13	6.88
2	Middle(₹5001-₹15000)	43	22.75
3	Low (₹1000-₹5000)	133	70.37
	Total	189	100

(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

The above findings may be summarised with the help of the followings Figure.

Figure 6.1. The Economic Status of Respondents



■ Employment Status and Main Sources of Income

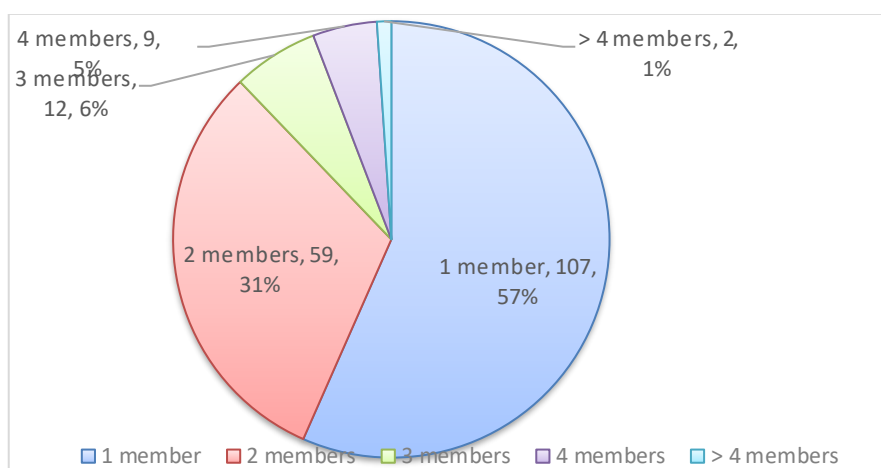
Employment always engages people in productive activities which in turn provide monetary benefits to reach the highest strata of the society. The employment status of the people of the locality provides :

Table 6.10. Employment Status of Respondents

Sl no	No of family member employed	Frequency	Percentage
1	1 member	107	56.61
2	2 members	59	31.22
3	3 members	12	6.35
4	4 members	9	4.76
5	> 4 members	2	1.06
	Total	189	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

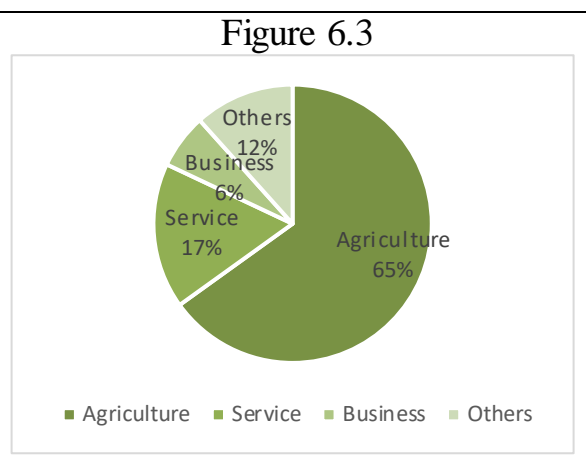
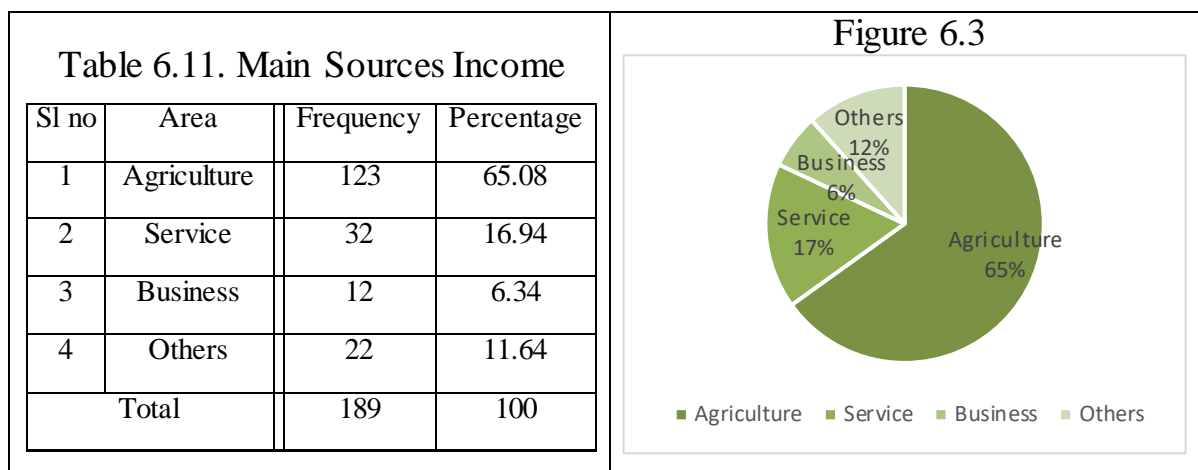
The Followings Figure 6.2. Depicts the above Findings



(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

Table No. 6.10 and Figure 6.2 shows the number of family members of the respondents employed. We can see 107 (almost 57 per cent) respondents have expressed about ‘one member’ employment, 71(nearly 38 per cent) respondents expressed ‘two-three members’ in their family are employed followed by 11 (just about 6 per cent) confirmed about ‘four and more than four members’ employability. It shows that respondents belong to the low and medium-income group in the study area.

It is found from the field survey (Table No 6.11) and Figure 6.3 that majority of the respondents i.e. 123 (almost 65 per cent) are engaged in agriculture and related activities and it is the main source of income of those families. On the other hand, in the case of 32 (just about 17 per cent) respondents, the main source of income is service-related occupation. 12 (6.35 per cent) respondents informed that they rely on business and related occupations for their main earnings. Nearly 12 per cent (22 respondents) earned around ₹ 3000-4000 monthly through live stocks and other sources.



(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

The livelihood of a large number of respondents is supported with their engagements in seasonal works under MGNREG programme, where they earn (₹120-₹150) per day. In the expenditure side, we find an expenditure on an average ₹ 3000 for food with other important expenses including medicines, electricity, fuel, education, entertainment and ceremonies around ₹ 4000, which shows that they have hardly savings for their future securities especially for old age savings, marriage for a girl child, health care etc. it remains as an important element in maintaining a stable livelihood.

It also noted that Ms Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal Government started offering a monthly allowance to unwilling farmers and landless labourers of Singur. The scheme promises to cover close to 3,700 farmers and landless labourers in Khaserberi, Beraberi, Gopalnagar, Singerberi and Bajemilia villages adjacent to the Tata Nano factory site at Singur. Whole heartedly believe that the present State Government would return the land by making it suitable for cultivation or agricultural production. It is to be mentioned that these families got financial assistance from the State Government along with 16 KG rice per week at the rate of ₹2 per KG till date.

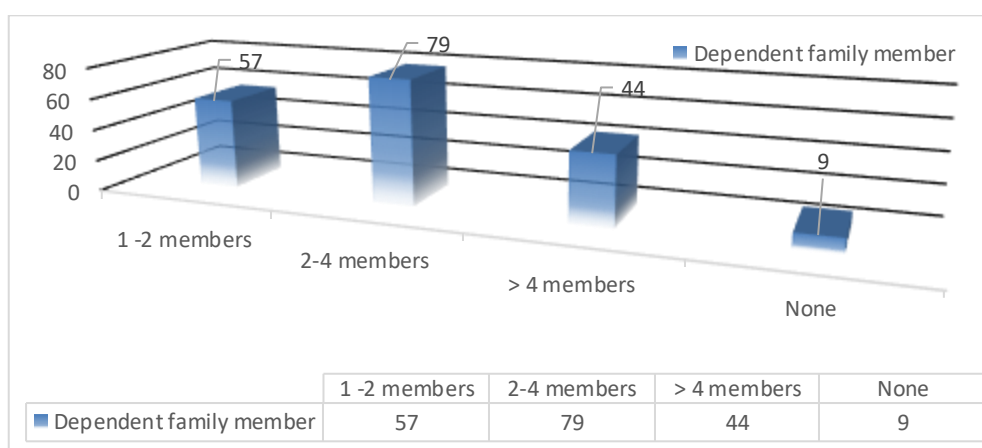
Cows, buffalos, goats, sheep, ducks, pigs- all are general nature of livestock can be found in villages. Keeping these stocks glorify the status of villager's one hand and maintain rural eco-systems and biodiversity on the other. Here it is seen that the majority around 70 per cent of

the respondents have their cows and goat. Cows are used for milk. Being the majority of respondents belong to Hindu community, they prefer to keep cows not only as a source of milk production and income but also use cows for worshipping and goat is used for flesh trading. A few respondents are also found in possession of bullocks which they use for agricultural works. Poultry etc. are also found to be used as an instant source of income through selling mutton, eggs etc. But maintaining of all these domestic animals depend largely upon agricultural surplus, which is used for feeding the livestock.

▪ **Dependency Pattern among Family Members**

The pattern of dependency varies from one family to another. It's an economic indicator which shows the affluence of the family in terms of income and expenditure. Earners in the families depend on the situation of the family as their earnings are not sufficient for their independence as individuals, therefore, they remain dependent on other's who has better income in the family, at the same time Non-earning dependents since they do not have any earning; therefore they remain as liabilities in the family.

**Figure 6.4. Dependency Pattern of respondents**



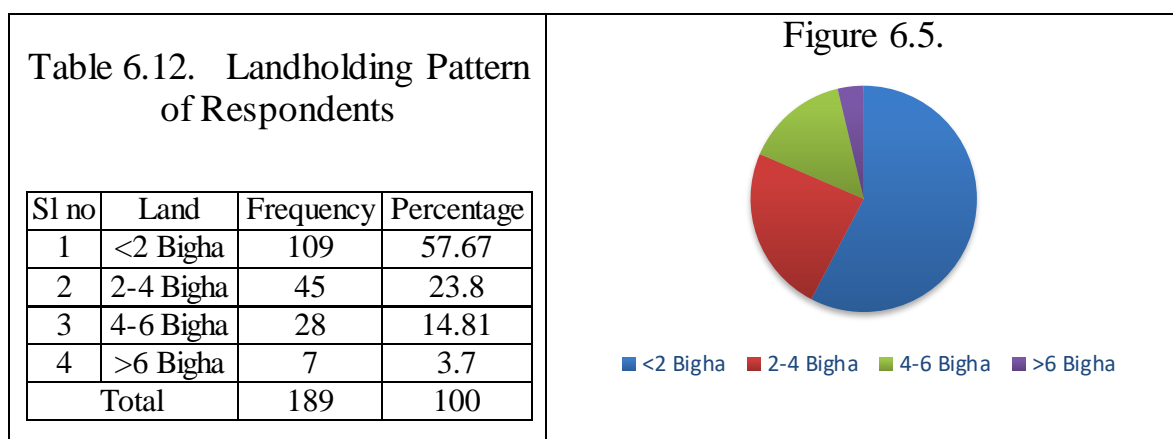
(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

This Figure shows that calculates 23 per cent of respondents have more than 4 members as dependent in the family and around 70 per cent of the families 1-4 member depend on the single

earning person. Only around 5 per cent families the members are self-sufficient to support themselves.

▪ **Landholding: Pattern, Use and Transmissions**

The landholding is a major socio-economic indicator. Landholding capacity of the families only distinguishes and identifies rich and poor in society. In the feudal culture, landlords are the owners of a large amount of land which are cultivated by poor people called peasants in the village. These landlords are identified as *Zamindars* who had a good link with Colonial rulers for Tax and other beneficial purposes. After abolishing Zamindari systems in post-independent India, it is presumed that the majority of cultivators have some amount of land as an owner for better productivity.



(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

This Figure shows that landholdings of the respondents, which comprises majority 109 (57.67 per cent) respondents are holding less than 2 *bighas* of land followed by 45 (23.80 per cent) are holding 2-4 *bighas* of land, while 28 (14.81 per cent) holds 4-6 *bighas* of land remaining and only 7 (3.70 per cent) of 189 respondents were holding land more than 6 *bigha* which shows the majority respondents belong to the small and marginal peasantry in the study area.

Land use pattern determines the intensity of production, which peasant gets from that land. Fertile land is used more intensively for crop production. Nowadays peasants use the high breed variety of seeds for cultivation in shorter periods and for better products so that the land could

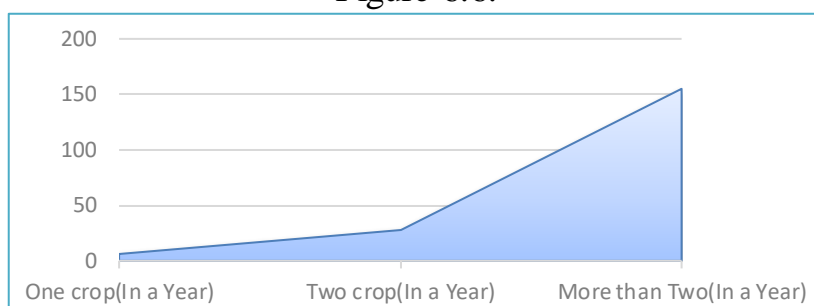


be used double or triple production. During the course of the survey, the respondents were asked how many times they produce their crops in a single piece of land and their responses are recorded accordingly:

**Table 6.13. Yearly Crop-Frequency in a Particular Piece of Land**

Sl. No	Yearly Crop-Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
1	One crop(In a Year)	6	3.17
2	Two crops (In a Year)	28	14.81
3	More than Two(In a Year)	155	82.02
	Total	189	100 Per cent

**Figure 6.6.**

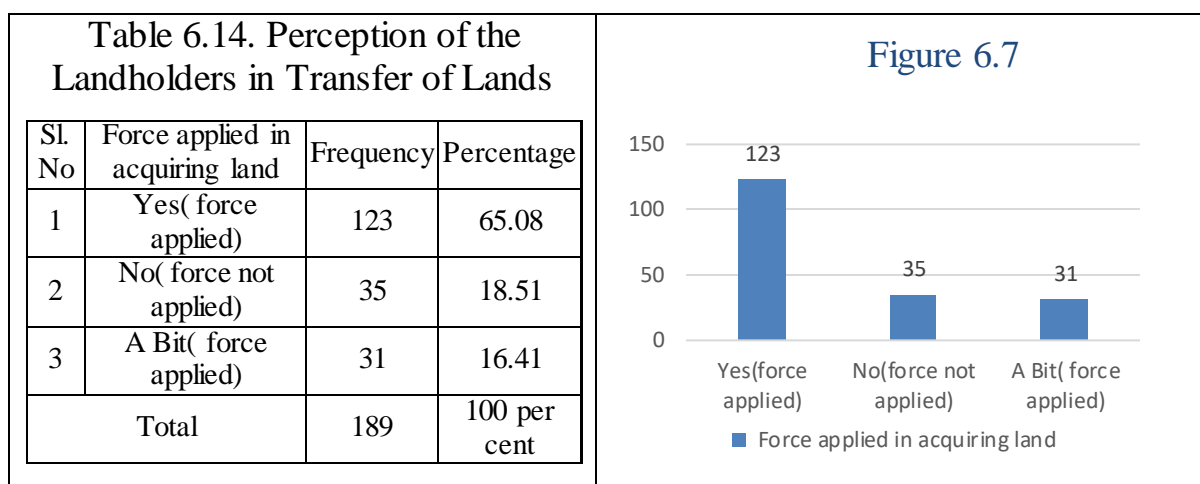


(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

Above table and Figure shows that 155 ( 82.02 per cent) respondents use their land for cultivation in a plot more than twice a year while 28 ( 14.81 per cent) respondents cultivate in a particular plot two times in a year, leaving only 6 ( 3.17 per cent) cultivators to produce once in a year. This shows that crop is being produced for more than twice in a year by the majority of respondents which is an indicator of the fertility of lands and availability of requisite facilities in the area of study.

Transfer or transmission of land ownership has always been considered as an issue of gain or loss on the part of the owner. Nobody will hand over his livelihood resources happily unless he is paid adequate benefits in the form of compensation or exchange unless compelled by forces like political pressures, administrative instructions and the like. In the area of study, it is found that all peasants were not happy to hand over their lands to the government for the

establishment of industries. The upheavals situation was aroused in their life on the transmission of their last resources (agricultural land ) for their livelihood. Hence, most of them were not prepared to handover their agricultural land which was a major concern to the policy-makers and administration. This could be ascertained from the respondents.



(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

This table 6.14 and Figure 6.7 show that force was exerted to make an agreement of land acquisition process as confirmed by 123 (65.08 per cent) respondents; remaining 35 (18.51 per cent) did not feel they were forced to hand over their land for this project and 31(16.41 per cent) say that a bit of force was applied for land acquisition of the Singur Tata Nano project. This indicates that political parties were very much active to encroach the land for the said factory and a great thrust on peasants as the land was used for factory without their willingness.

## 6.9. Category wise response of various stakeholders

**Table 6.15. The Response of Resident Landowner(Living at Singur)**

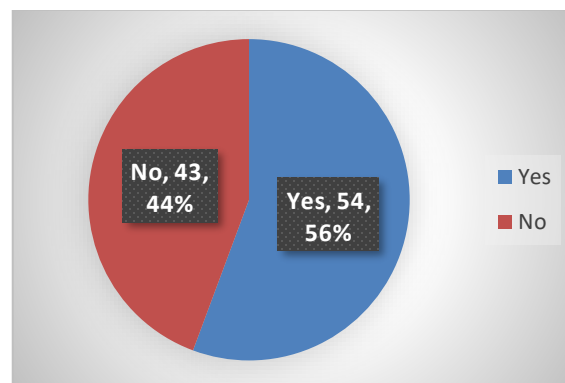
Sl	Respondents	Mouzas					Total
		Gopalnagar	Beraberi	Khaserbheri	Bajemelia	Singherbheri	
1	Resident Land owner(Living at Singur)	35	31	16	9	6	97

(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

In our survey, we could trace 97 resident landowners(living at Singur) in the mouzas of Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Khaserbheri, Bajemelia and Singherbheri. The finding of the survey conducted with this category of respondents are presented:

The land acquired for Tata Nano Project is highly fertile, fit for multi-crop (at least three crops in a year) and well-irrigated but all landowners do not cultivate land personally. They depend on the hiring of labourers for agricultural and farming activities. The requirement of daily agricultural labour(*Khetmajur*) are not met by the labourers available locally. A large number of daily labourers (*Khetmajur*) belong to the Adivasi(Tribal) community who come from Gurap, Belmuri, Dhaniakhali by using the railway communication, i.e. Howrah-Bardhaman Chord line.

Figure 6.8 Hiring of Labourers from Other Places Outside the Village

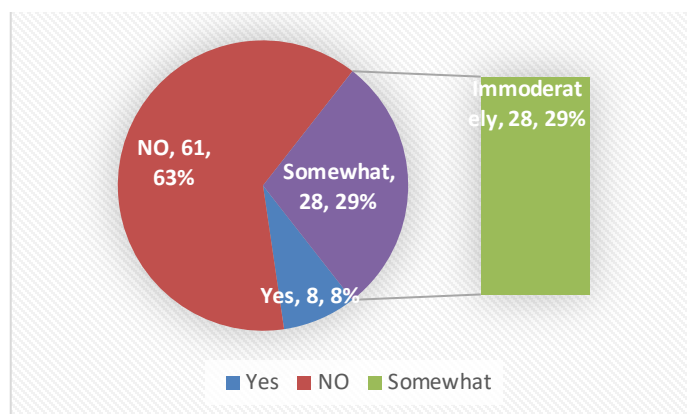


It is found that 56 per cent(54 respondents) of the resident landowners depend entirely on engaging labourers for the cultivation of their land while 44 per cent (43 respondents) work physically at their land mostly. Naturally, this category of the landholders (depending on the hiring of labourers) would have an inclination to hand over their land to the government in lieu of compensation.

A large number of family members belonging to the landowners of the said area were involved in government and non-government services, business other than agriculture. This section of the respondents were ready to hand over their land to the government for the said project. Since

they were engaged in a different profession other than agriculture, it was an opportunity for them to give their land for compensation.

Figure 6.9. Prior Discussions at the *Gram Sansad* or Panchayats



The majority of respondents of this category in the filed survey are of the view that the government had not taken consent and also did not hold discussions made any discussion with the local rural community or Gram Sabha through the Panchayat authority.

Table 6.16. Response of Land Owners (Living outside)

Sl	Respondents	Mouzas					Total
		Gopalnagar	Beraberi	Khaserbheri	Bajemelia	Singherbheri	
1	Land owner (living outside)	3	4	0	2	0	9

(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

In the course of the field visit, it is found that nine landowners were living outside their villages. The findings of our survey in this respect are important in tracing their attitude towards acquisition of their land. Out of the nine landowners, originally three belonged to Gopalnagar, four to Beraberi and two others migrated from Bajemelia. It was found that the share-croppers or *bargadars* were engaged through verbal understanding and that they did not use to share the produce with the owners after harvesting the same in violation of their previously settled ratio.

Naturally, this category of landowners were totally in favour of the establishment of the Tata car project. This section of the respondents also believed that there would be massive economic development and abundance in prosperity in Singur and its adjoining areas if the project was implemented. It is found in the course of the survey that eight respondents strongly supported the government's view while one of them was somewhat positive towards the setting up of the project at Singur.

Table 6.17. Response of Registered Sharecropper (Related to small Owner)

Sl	Respondents	<i>Mouzas</i>					Total
		Gopalnagar	Beraberi	Khaserbheri	Bajemelia	Singherbheri	
1	Registered Sharecropper (Related to Small Owner)	11	5	4	2	3	35

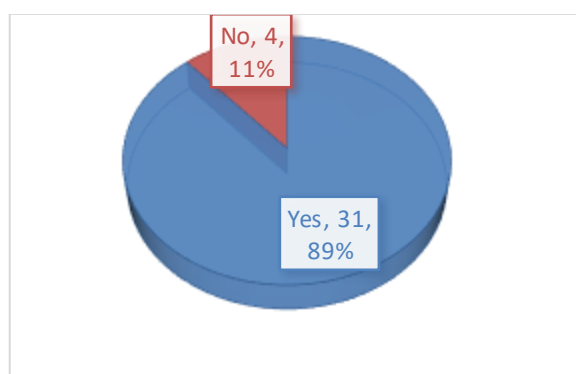
(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

We made a field survey of 35 registered share-cropper (related to small owner) in the five *mouzas* mentioned in the chart above. The findings of the survey in relation to the above-mentioned category reveal that the *bargadars* (share-croppers) cultivate the land of the owners as well as they work in their own plot of land.

The families of these share-croppers came under both BPL and APL category. In addition to cultivating in land, the family members are also involved in various types of vegetable cultivation which help them to live a steady and stable livelihood.

The majority of share-croppers and also owners of small plots of land belonging to the Mahishya community in the above-mentioned villages. Among all the *mouzas*, the vast majority of the *Mahishya* community is found in Gopalnagar *mouza*. Since these cultivable lands are situated close to their residential houses the female members of the families use to help their male counterparts almost vegetable farming. These families have a deep-rooted bonding with the land they cultivated.

Figure 6.10. Government Initiative to Re-Cultivate of Acquired Land



Since concrete structures were not constructed mostly in the outskirts of the villages such as Gopalnagar and Beraberi, the character of land did not change substantially or remained almost the same as before.

Table 6.18. A Un-registered Share-cropper (Related to Agricultural Labourer)

Sl	Respondents	Mouzas					Total
		Gopalnagar	Beraberi	Khaserbheri	Bajemelia	Singherbheri	
1	Unregistered Sharecropper (Related to Agricultural Labourer)	16	8	11	14	9	58

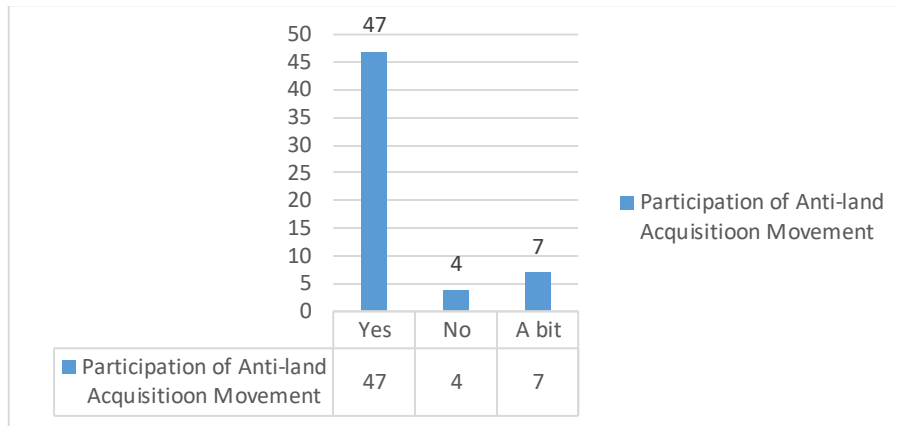
(Source: Field Survey, 2017-2019)

The respondents comprised 58 unregistered *bargadars* (share-croppers) related to an agricultural labourer who works in the lands owned by owners on certain conditions sharing the produce of the land. They belong to all the five *mouzas* in the following order. 16,8,11,14 and 9 in Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Khaserbheri, Bajemelia, and Singherbheri respectively.

The findings of the survey of the above noted unregistered *bargadars* related to agricultural labourers indicated a sense of insecurity of their right in cultivating the land they work. Since they basically work under the landowners on a verbal or oral contract. Most of the families of the unregistered sharecropper and agricultural labourer come under the BPL and *Antyodaya* category. The income of these families mostly come from agriculture and works related to

allied sectors. They maintain their livelihood from the daily income they receive as agricultural labourers.

Figure 6.11. Participation of Anti-land Acquisition Movements



Naturally, they were not eager to part with the so-called right to share-cropping and hence played a major role in Singur land acquisition movement. Out of my 58 respondents, of this Section 47 respondents participated very actively in the movement.

### 6.10. Impact Upon Livelihood of People

Now we may turn to the critical issue of dislocation of livelihood of the affected people in the aftermath of acquisition of agricultural lands in Singur and the extent of their sufferings because of acquisition, as claimed by the anti-acquisition leaders. This aspect is examined in the light of the data available in schedules of the Singur Act. It is not claimed that these data would alone reveal the truth, but, at the same time, analysis of the information reveals at least a part of the reality and more importantly raises some questions for further investigation. The analysis shows that most of the unwilling farmers had lost a very small quantity of land, due to acquisition.

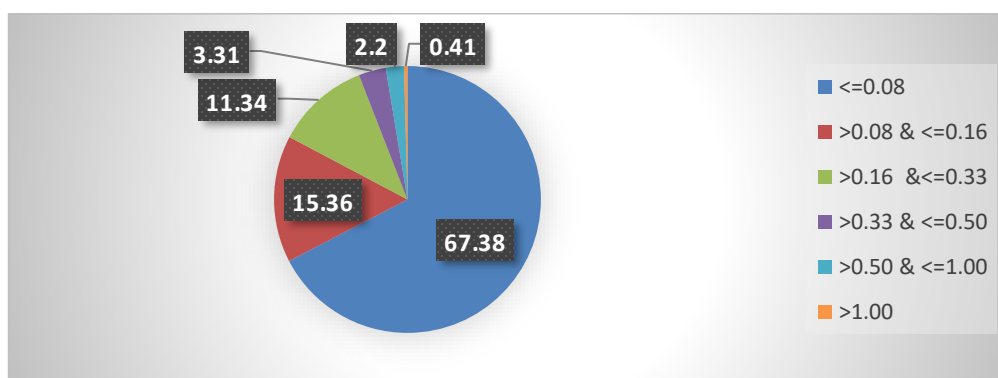
Table 6.19. Portion of Land Acquired from the Unwilling Owners

Portion of Land Acquired (in Acres)	Number of Owners	Per cent	Land Acquired(In Acres)	Per cent	Average Holding Per Owner (In Acres)
<=0.08	1,182	67.38	47.04	18.27	0.026
>0.08 & <=0.16	413	15.36	47.42	18.41	0.115
>0.16 & <=0.33	305	11.34	69.89	27.12	0.228
>0.33 & <=0.50	89	3.31	35.71	13.87	0.401
>0.50 & <=1.00	59	2.2	39.73	15.43	0.673
>1.00	11	0.41	17.76	6.9	1.614
Total	2,689	100	257.49	100	0.095

Source: Computed from the data provided in Part II of the schedule of the Singur Act

The average holding size of the agricultural land of all the 2,689 unwilling owners covered by acquisition was only 0.096 acre or less than one-tenth of an acre. This figure is not alone sufficient to testify the truth. A look into the distribution of the unwilling owners among different size-classes of their acquired holdings (Table 6.19 and Figure 6.12) presents a more actual picture.

Figure 6.12. Classification of Size of Land Belonging to the Unwilling Farmers



It is evident from Table 6.19 and Figure 6.12 that nearly 70 per cent of unwilling owners lost an insignificant quantity of land due to acquisition. As the table shows, 67 per cent of the unwilling owners had less than 0.08 acre (less than one-fourth of a *bigha* or less than one-twelfth of an acre) of land, the average holding per owner in this group being only 0.03 acre. Another 15 per cent of the unwilling owners held land between 0.08 acre and 0.16 acre, the average holding per owner being only 0.11 acre, which is much less than half a *bigha* or a little



over one-tenth of an acre. Thus at least more than 82 per cent of the unwilling owners cannot claim that they had suffered much economic hardship or that their agricultural activities had received a great setback because of acquisition of their tiny holdings. Those belonging to the last group of the table owned more than one acre of land. Given the landownership pattern of Singur, the preponderance of small and marginal farm owners can be said to have suffered considerably due to acquisition. But they constitute less than 0.5 per cent of the total number of unwilling farmers. Others who claim to have suffered are those who had more than one bigha to one acre of land. They constitute only 5.5 per cent of the group of unwilling farmers. It is significant to note that only 160 owners constituting 6 per cent of the total unwilling farmers owned as much as 36 per cent of the total land of the unwilling farmers. The owners belonging to this group had lost land ranging between more than one *bigha* to more than an acre. For others constituting around 94 per cent of the unwilling farmers, the economic function of the land is highly unlikely to be a basis for resistance to land acquisition. For overwhelming numbers of unwilling owners, land lost due to acquisition was insignificant. It is quite obvious that loss of such tiny holdings could not destroy the livelihood of the peasants or stand in the way of their intention to 'stick to agriculture' for their livelihood. It can be argued that there may be more than one titleholder (belonging to the same household) of the same plot or plots of land making the real holding of a household bigger than what appears in the list of awardees from which the above observations are made. Even granting that this is a reality in many cases, the main thrust of the above observations – that land lost by most of the unwilling farmers because of the acquisition was not significant – remains valid. Now the question arises why did this group of owners join the protest movement. It may raise the issue of involvement of political factors. It is a well-known fact that the Singur agitation provided the rallying point for diverse anti-Left Front forces. Hence the possibility of exerting political pressure in mobilising

a disparate group of landowners to join the movement against land acquisition cannot be altogether ruled out.

It is argued, that their resistance to acquisition of land was propelled by their own-interests only and not influenced by political or any kind of community feeling or social activism. There may be a possibility, as claimed sometimes, that the factors like 'insurance function' of land or 'emotional bonding' with land could have been the motivating factors to take part in the struggle. But for those who own less than even half a *bigha* (or one-sixth of an acre), it is not easy to accept the logic of possession of land to function only as a safety net for the landowners. Since more than 82 per cent of unwilling farmers belong to this category, the 'insurance function' of land cannot be a motivating factor for the overwhelming majority of the unwilling farmers. All these raise doubts about the character of the Singur movement. Which lead us to accept the thesis that the movement was launched only in the interest of the peasants of Singur. The question looms large that weather the farmers who organised or joined the movement because their livelihood was threatened or it was purely a political agitation of the anti-Left Front forces.

There are other questions: How were the landless agricultural labourers drawn into the movement, despite the fact that the demands of the protest movement centred on the return of land to the owners who were unwilling to part with their lands? What was the attitude of the local community towards the Tata project, given the fact that most of the working population of the affected villages (65 per cent) were engaged in non-agricultural occupations as of 2001? Were they happy when Tata Motors abandoned their project in Singur? Till now, there is no empirical study addressing these and many other unsettled questions.

A section of Singur farmers has raised a demand to reclaim their barren agricultural land and develop as cultivable land as promised by the state government. A group of Singur farmers a memorandum to the Governor demanding that the state government should keep its promise to

reclaim the uncultivable land area as cultivable land amounting to 997 acres of land within the aborted Tata project area covering the five *mouzas* of Singur, Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Khaserbheri, Bajemelia, and Singherbheri.

However, the Gopalnagar *mouza* was unaffected by the construction and modification work done by Tata group and the fertility of farmland in Gopalnagar *mouza* remained unhampered. Therefore, soon after regaining physical possession of the land in the Gopalnagar *mouza*, agriculture was promptly initiated. As a symbolic start of farming by the Singur farmers, the Chief Minister first scattered mustard seeds in Gopalnagar *mouza* and Mahestala areas. The farmers raised potato, paddy, mustard and pulses. However, some areas under Khaserbheri, Bajemelia, and Singherbheri remained uncultivated. The government has been continuing the work to extract out the iron rods and concrete slabs deeply embedded and rooted in more than 300 acres of land area, but it has been going quite slowly. The Tata Group, to suit their purpose had spread layers of inferior quality of soil and sand and reclamation of the affected land area is going on at a very slow pace.

### 6.11. Journey Back to Agriculture from Industry in Singur

Singur seems to be a theme of industrial mobility in reverse. The site of the postponed Tata Nano factory a decade ago as the symbol of west Bengal's commercial revival is now being restored carefully to its original state- a sprawling, 997- acre green farm that would support hundreds of families. with tiny landholdings. As metal and concrete workshops of different shapes and sizes are torn downed to restore the estate's original character.



A farmer who fought for Ten years and got back his Land



Singur is coming back to its age-old agricultural roots

However, ten years later, Uttam Maji of Beraberi village in Singur is again a farmer and his 24-year-old son is a fish vendor. He has ten *cottahas* of land ( half a *bigha* ) and is sowing paddy. He is among the few farmers trying to farm their land on their own, with assistance from the state government.



Government worker's restoring agricultural land to its original state in Singur



The vast piles of scrap at the Tata Motors factory are shifted for restoring agricultural land to its original state

Beginning January 2017, Singur started its journey back in time from industry to Agriculture, And the estate resumed farming in more than 300 acres of land. Cash crops such as mustard, okra, lentils, and spinach were grown initially, and now green shoots of paddy are fast raising their heads in what was once a mass of twisted metal, iron, steel, and concrete. The remnants are even now visible in vertically spiralling junkyards as stretches of green keep spreading every day, signalling the historical transformation.



Drainage pipes of Tata project dumped in the area

A majority of the landowners in Singur were anxious about the fertility of their land. Many of them believed that the Tata factory infrastructure had destroyed the farmland. Though the verdict of the Supreme Court came in their favour, it was a near-impossible proposition to resume agricultural activity in Singur.

However, like the farm owners earlier, it is now the Government and its various wings that are toiling to ensure that Singur's transformation from industry to agriculture is smooth and successful. Now it stands as 'prestige issue' for the West Bengal Chief Minister, hence the agriculture department and its allied wings started farming the land on their own in absence of farmers (read the landowners), who are either apprehensive about fertility or have migrated to other vocations. "It was a Herculean task. After getting the land back, some people held that agriculture is not possible. With this propaganda, the farmers became apprehensive and stayed away from their land. As a result, the government took the step to put the agriculture infrastructure in place and started farming the land on its own. It is a confidence-building measure. With the coming of crops and grey fields turning green, the farmers are slowly coming

back to their land and resting their trade,”<sup>8</sup> said Pradip Kumar Mazumder, adviser, agriculture and allied sector in the Chief Minister's office.

A fully dedicated team of officers from several departments- agriculture, irrigation, horticulture, Agri-irrigation, PWD and power in close - are working cooperatively on the Singur land to revive farming. The state government narrated that it had invested more than ₹100 core in setting up an integrated irrigation network, with as many as 56 mini deep tube wells and an extended network of irrigation canals that include two check-damns on a small river called Julkia. A new electric power network with 15 transformers is installed to run deep tube wells that would augment the supply of water in dry months, “Initially, we were a little hesitant about farming. We were not sure about the product and could not take risks since a huge amount of money is involved in cultivating the land. However, the agriculture department took the first step. They cultivated potato and had good production, and then they started sowing paddy. ‘Now we are a little more confident,’ said Gobinda das, an ‘unwilling’ farmer, who refused to accept the compensation and hand over his land to the Tatas, Das has 4 *bighas* of land in Gopalnagar *mouza*. There was a black-topped road passed on some part of his land. The road has been uprooted, and the state government is trying to make his entire land holding cultivable.

## 6.12. Conclusion

Thus we find that the transition in the relationship between environment and society due to the acquisition of land at Singur for Tata Nano factory affected the agricultural economy. From the fear of losing occupation, the local farmers which include registered and unregistered sharecroppers organised the agitation. The local people of Singur used to utilize the then fertile

---

<sup>8</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/singur-site-of-the-mothballed-tata-nano-factory-is-now-returning-back-to-its-agricultural-roots/articleshow/57583783.cms>



land of this area to sustain their life and earn a livelihood. The unanticipated decision from the government to set up a large scale industry in this region upset the flow of local economy all of a sudden. Without a proper understanding of the local agro-ecosystem, the Left-front government tried to acquire land utilizing a colonial law through political aggression. The agrarian history of Singur shows the agricultural affluence of this region (Shaw, 2019). The total agricultural land of Singur is estimated as 10526 Ha. Out of this 83 per cent i.e. 8830 Ha is directly irrigated. The cropping intensity of this region is 220 per cent which is 5 per cent higher than the total Hooghly district. There were 27 shallow tube well and three deep tube well in this region, most of which was set up by local farmers. Apart from this, the region was irrigated by water from Kunti, Julikia and DVC canals. As this region is placed between two rivers, the Ganges and Damodar, the sediment of the flood plane makes the land extremely fertile. Potato being the major crop of this region and other factors like communication through road and railways and nearby large markets of Tarkeswar, Seoraphuli and Shibaichandi drives the commercialization of agricultural product of this area. The farmers of this region utilized the fertility of this land innovatively and efficiently.

As the jute industry has closed down along the coast of Ganges the jute plantation has shifted



Ratanpur 'Alur' More : One of the largest wholesale potato market in West Bengal

to other vegetables which were in high demand and were supplied to Shibaichandi and Seorafuli Market. On the other side potato export from Ratanpur market leads to the wide-spread potato plantation of this

region. The affluence resulting from agriculture played a major role in shaping the social structure and development of this region.

In the acquired land of Singur, the majority of the farmers was Share-croppers (*bhag-chasi*) and *khet-majurs* (agricultural labourers) who were not associated with any other profession other than agriculture. There were families where all members were associated with direct farming and they themselves cultivate their land without appointing labourer. The land was of prime importance for them. The main opposition of land acquisition came from this class of farmers.

On the other hand, there was a class of villagers who were associated with other profession and only marked as farmers in government documents without any real attachment to cultivation. They were very much enthusiastic in handing over their land for setting up heavy industry at Singur. They did not get a proper return from their land and as there was an irregularity in sharing his produce from the *bargadars*(share-croppers). So they found a better chance of utilizing their land in giving land for the project.

So the dependence on and attachment to the land play a major role in forming the dynamics of Singur Land movement. There was a general perception that the value of the land can be compensated by providing money that was being earned from the land. It is true that Singur Project may have provided livelihood to all the local people who lost their agricultural profession through various jobs in the main factories, associated industry and also provide an opportunity in other unconventional work mechanics, drivers etc. But most of the farmers were of the view that transition in the job from crop-producer to factory-labourer as derogatory and dishonouring to their status. The uncertainty of getting a respectful profession from a known and apparently secured position of traditional farmer played a crucial role in their disagreement with the Government. As a result of this agony of losing profession, land and status the general



farmers, *bargadars* and *khet-majurs* chose the path of movement against the acquisition (Shaw, 2017).

The matter highlighted in the context of Singur land movement is development also leads to eviction. Setting up large Industry in different parts of India always leads to loss of profession, land and livelihood of local people that caused enormous misery for them. From 1947 to 2000 it is estimated that approx. 5 crore people have been affected due to land acquisition in the name of development. 91 per cent of these people did not get rehabilitated. In West Bengal, the scenario is almost the same where 75 lakh people were evicted and 66 per cent did find not rehabilitation. So the policy of onetime compensation in case of land acquisition seems not viable from the point of view of the victims of this acquisition. In Singur also the total Agro-economic-social and environmental equilibrium were disrupted by the Nano Project that led to resentment and land movement and ultimately total failure of the project. So in a country like ours, the industrialisation policy should be in accordance with sustainable development. Labour-intensive industry based on agriculture that incorporates local people without harming their social status.

Based on the above premise, farmer's agitation was started in Singur mainly by the aggrieved farmers who were evicted by the project. As a result, the movement got additional fuels from the political parties and civil society groups which intensified the gravity of the movement and the situation. It is established from the study of the developments in Singur that were guided more by factors and issues other than only the grievances of the farmers. No doubt, the movement has originally reflected the reluctance and anguish of the farmers at the unilateral attempt of the Government to set up industries on fertile land at Singur. There was virtually no genuine gesture on the part of the administration to clean the doubts and misunderstanding of the local farmers. It is ascertained that this lack of effective interactions between the administration and the affected people led to a crisis in their relationship. The ruling party did

not try to eradicate the gap. The initial opposition of the local people was exploited politically to dethrone the party in power by the opposition parties and groups.

Thus we also find that compensation to the losers is not adequate to match the loss of their land and livelihood. Money earned by selling land also serves as dowry for the daughter. Land acts as security to the landowners in the rural areas. Land gives the ability to employ or supervise the landless labourer. However, industries, development and urbanization also require land. This is the fundamental contradiction that gives rise to protests and counter-protests, which could be well utilised by forces opposed to the government and its agencies. This is the lesson that we learn from the Singur episode.