

Land Acquisition in Singur for Industrialization: SEZ, Politics and Economic Intricacy

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Abstract

This paper discusses the issues of land acquisition in changing politico-economic scenario of West Bengal. Here, the land acquisition criteria chosen are due to the peculiar political set up and economic necessities. Also, the chosen criteria are the causes of political turbulence in the state and socio-economic instability in the affected societies. The discussion reveals that though land acquisition is a part and parcel of the industrial and economic development of a region; non-judicious selection of site, method of acquisition etc. may create socio-economic imbalance and hit the aspirations of a section of the population, which ultimately creates conflict and the end result is socio-political disorder.

Key Words

Industrialization, Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Land Acquisition, Socio-Economic Relation with SEZ, Political Conflict

Introduction

Industrialization, especially large scale manufacturing has now been conceived to be indispensable for speedy development of any region. The realization came out of limited agricultural progress in India during the last few decades and rising contribution of tertiary sector to GDP that cannot sustain the progress of an economy without industrial production activities. However, the establishment of large-scale industrial projects is contingent upon the availability of large contiguous land in suitable locations. Now, Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has become a

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buzzword, the principle of which is to develop a cluster of industries or industrial hub with some incentives and provisions from the government in terms of relaxation of tax, ceiling of land, facilitating land acquisition, subsidy, quick processing, communication etc. to encourage such process with an end result of increasing employment and opportunities and overall development.

Given the constitution of India, individuals have the right to possess and operate lands for the purpose of cultivation, housing, business etc. and now it has become almost impossible to acquire vast stretches of land for setting up large industries in West Bengal. It has become more difficult due to the continued fragmentation of land holdings for the division of families.

The prevalence of a large number of small and marginal farmers in a cluster forces the industrialists to negotiate with all those farmers and the problem is compounded by the existence of registered or unrecorded share tenants. In case of negotiation and compensation, the tenants in most cases are not consulted or not benefited as they are not the actual owners of the land. It thus necessitates the intervention of the State Government in the negotiation process and look after the welfare aspects of the poor farmers by accommodating them within the process of industrialization.

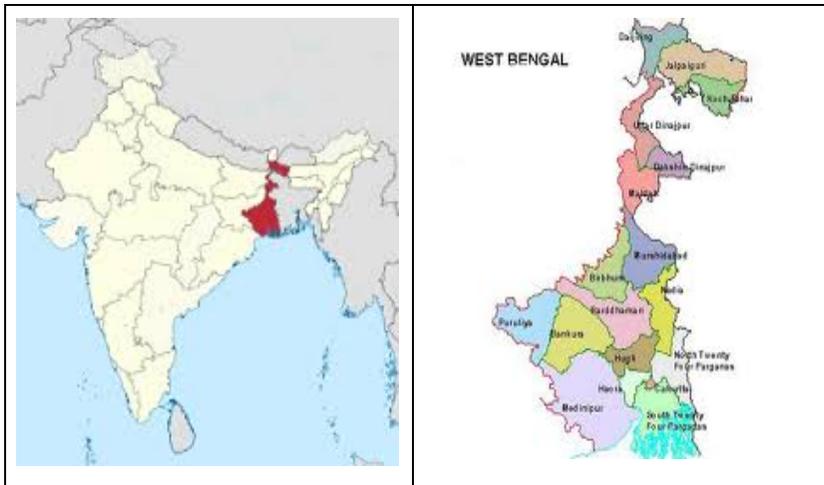
Land is the most important natural resource for human survival and development. Naturally, acquisition of land by the State or Central Government should be dealt with utmost caution, because it not only displaces authorized persons from their lands but also has other traumatic psychological and socio-cultural consequences. The efforts of the previous Government of West Bengal, ruled by the Left Front, towards helping large industrialists by acquiring lands from the peasants has resulted in bitter consequences and raised a number of questions. A live example is Singur.

This paper provides an elaborate review of the events in Singur, West Bengal and discusses the process of land acquisition as well as its socio-economic and political implications. It examined the politics of land acquisition and argues that the overconfidence of the government in the hegemonic control of the then ruling political party (CPI-M), emboldened them to pressurize its own support base to follow the party dictate and agree to the compensation package, even at the cost of livelihood opportunity of many marginal peasant families. The then main opposition party, Trinamool Congress (TMC) took up the cause of the dissatisfied small peasants and was able to transform that into a mass movement that left the then government paralyzed.

Location

Singur, located in Hooghly district of West Bengal, is a rural area with most of its inhabitants engaged in farming for livelihood and is in the headlines of newspapers and under watch of the general public, political personalities, bureaucrats, policy makers, news reporters and scientific analysts for the last couple of years. It is located at 22.810 N latitudes 88.230E longitudes and about 45 Km away from Kolkata Metro and 45 minutes drive from the NSC Bose International Airport. From Howrah railway station, it is about 34 Km and located at the crossing point of Howrah-Bardhaman Chord and Howrah- Tarakeswar railway route and lies within 1-2 Km of Madhusudanpur and Kamarkundu railway stations. Singur can also be reached through Durgapur Express (High) Way, which has been constructed as part of the infrastructure development projects of the country for the betterment of connectivity especially to boost industrial progress. Thus, it is well-connected by rail and roadways. The area had become well-known due to the initiative of Tata Motors, which had almost set up an automobile factory here. The location is however 5-6 hours journey from TISCO and other industrial units in the Jharkhand belt. Logistically, the place was very well-placed and fit for marketing automobiles like the then proposed Nano small car. However, from the point of view of the source of raw materials, the project site is far-away and could be better located somewhere in Purulia, Midnapore (East and West) and even Bankura adjacent to other Tata projects in Jharkhand and with good connectivity.

Figure1: Map of India, West Bengal where Singur lies



The then dream car model Tata Nano was about to come out in October, 2008 from the then would be factory at this site. But prolonged protest movement of

the local farmers especially those who had lost their fortune land against their unwillingness to do so for the compensation and organised support by the then opposition parties including TMC did not allow the fulfilment of the dream of a section of middle and lower middle class people who were enthusiastic over the arrival of the cheapest car in the world of that time. The protest also got impetus due to the organised support of the then main opposition party TMC and thus some arguments were also put forward by the analysts in favour of politically motivated intention of some farmers being unwilling to take the compensation and part with their land (Ghosh, 2012).

The institutional support received by Tata Motors, for the proposed factory under Special Economic Zone category for the industrial development, from the then Government of West Bengal in the form of acquisition of land measuring 997.11 acres and handing them through a lease agreement in order to materialise the small car project. A section of the farmers who had lost their land were not happy because of the abrupt and unfair way in which land was acquired. For many small and marginal peasants, their petty landholdings were the only means of livelihood. This was being sacrificed for the private industrial project of Tata Motors and its ancillary factories.

Table 1: Total Land and Land Acquired in Six Villages in Singur Block

Gopalnagar	Land acquired (acres)*	Total land (acres)**	Percentage
Gopalnagar	399.00	600.00	66.5
Beraberi	327.21	400.00	81.80
Bajemelia	047.77	350.00	13.65
Khaserberi	180.00	200.00	90.00
Singherberi	041.47	500.00	8.29
Joymollarberi	012.36	300	4.12
Total	997.11	2350	42.43

**Based on Status Report circulated by CPM Delhi State Secretary P.S. Grewal (Credit Watch) and reported by the villagers of Singur Block.*

***Provided by a group of project affected peasants.*

The futile exercise of land acquisition has not helped the then Left Front Government at all. The government had acquired the land using the age-old land acquisition Act of British India, 1894 that empowers the government to acquire land from the individual owners for any project of national interest like the construction of roads and highways, government hospitals and educational institutions, defence establishments etc. but with appropriate compensation. The then Left Front government of West Bengal went ahead with its project and acquired 997.11 acres of land in six villages of Singur block, namely, Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Bajemelia, Khaserberi, Singherberi and Joymollarberi that are spread

over three Gram Panchayats. The distribution of land acquired in different Mouzas of Singur Block by the previous government of West Bengal is shown in Table-1.

Characteristics of the Land Acquired and Changing Land Rights:

The land area that has been acquired for the project was well known to be under multiple cropping systems of 300-400 cropping intensity and very highly fertile i.e., cropping intensity was the highest not only in the state but also in the country. Varieties of crops including that of vegetables, fruits were grown in that area over the years and there were full irrigation facilities. Because of its strategic location (nearer to Kolkata with good communication), farmers received good price for their crops in the market of nearby city where the products could easily be transported. Thus, loss in agricultural output or benefits drawn from that land was much higher as compared to that of equivalent land in other places with comparatively low agricultural productivity and agro-infrastructure. In this age of continuously shrinking per capita land area and rising requirement of food and other agricultural products; land acquisition for other purposes like township, real estate, industry etc. has become increasingly difficult. If rising agricultural productivity (which has also reached its maximum limit and diversification of agriculture (De, 2003) can over-compensate the effect of declining per-capita land, then acquisition of some land for those other purposes would not create much problem. Rather, rising industrial activities and growth of urban areas could be in tune with the development aspirations across the economies. Usually, the low productive lands were chosen for setting up of the industries with developing other infrastructure like connectivity, power, marketing facilities and making provision for raw materials. However, the area chosen in this case was very fertile where the major crops grown were autumn paddy (Bhadoi), winter paddy (Amon), potato, mustard in rabi season, summer paddy (Boro) and jute as obtained from the personal observations of the authors. A number of vegetables were also grown in good quantity all round the year.

The acquired lands here were mostly fragmented and large numbers of families (over 23000) were involved in farming on almost thousand hectares there. In other words, most of the farmers were marginal farmers as the average farm size was below 0.5 hectares. Yet, the multiple cropping used to give some respectable earning to those peasants. The farmers were partly owner-cultivators and many of them were share tenants; some of whom were registered bargadars and some were unregistered but were cultivating on leased in land for several years with

their due share in output as per the law. After the left front came into power in 1977 it started implementing the land and tenancy reforms rigorously and sometime excessive muscle power had been used by the local leaders who started thinking to be all-powerful, as if next to god. Even in many cases without waiting for the court's verdict (wherever the conflict arose), they distributed the self-declared surplus land or registered some people as recorded bargadars even if the land was in the name of some god (Debottar (religious) trustee). Even if there were good harvests, the share paid to the owner by the tenants had been very less as compared to their due share and the actual owners started feeling helpless. The situation was worse in case of absentee landowners and thus those who had alternative opportunities were eagerly looking for some agreeable opportunity to get rid of such menace.

Whatever be the way and reason, a large number of marginal share croppers got the benefits of such formal land rights and informal rights through political patronage and appropriated a large portion of actual owner's share. There are still several cases pending of inaction on the part of the local ruling leaders against the complaint of landowners. The judiciary was also under political compulsion and failed to provide justice on several occasions. As a result, occasional conflicts or fights occurred across the state between the landowners especially those who were sympathisers of the opposition political party and a newly emerged tenant class (who owned vested land or cultivation rights) with the ruling party support. Afterwards the situation became such that most of land owners concerned whether big or small accepted the situation. Some of them later opted to join the ruling group in order to save their interests, while the other class (sharecroppers/ bargadars etc) found the saturation of their scopes and benefits extended from the ruling side and thus gradually they became dissatisfied with the political system. Thus, the land rights and relations were fragile, especially between the parties of sharecropping that needed a small spark to blow up, and that was facilitated by the initiative of special economic zone, process of land acquisition and received momentum with the support of the opposition political parties. Also, a section of the ruling coalition partner supported the movement for their apprehension of losing their rural vote bank.

Land Acquisition and Arising Issues

Land acquisition process was not as smooth as it was thought initially. More than three decades of rule/misrule and decimated presence of erstwhile main opposition congress had generated a sense of high confidence among the then ruling members in the state and even the local leaders considered their words to be final.

However, it was because of Trinamool Congress (TMC) support (that took birth in 1998 from the womb of Indian National Congress), several issues related to the way of acquiring huge land beyond the actual requirement of Tata Motors (as per the debatable estimate), negotiation with only a handful number of influential people in the area and use of local leaders to influence the potential farmers by persuasion or threat tactics, compensation paid, rehabilitation and safeguard for livelihood of the land-losers etc. have been raised. Many land losers got the opportunity and courage to refuse to accept the proposal of sacrificing their land in exchange for the compensation offered in this regard.

The ruling party had gone all out for the acquisition of 997 acres of multi-cropping land for the development of car and its ancillary factories under the status of special economic zone. However, we would like to share our experience that a significant number of industries (jute, sugar, iron and steel, paper mills and other government factories) have been closed and washed away during the previous three decades, which according to many analysts have been due to political hegemony, adamant and hostile labour unionism (trade unions) leading to continuous productivity loss and finally led them to be sick. There was hardly any attempt to safeguard the interests of those industrial owners. Apart from that, there had been administrative mismanagement (red-tapism). The hostile atmosphere created during the left-front regime led to the flight of capital from the state relegating it very far behind in the industrial scenario in the country. Only a few, countable number of industries came up like Haldia petrochemicals, Bakreshwar thermal power unit etc. under the government initiatives, and declaration of sick units had become a pathway of getting relaxation, compensation and moving away with some benefits. So, the question was always there about the government's real intention and motive on actual industrial development. A number of questions were raised by the people about the justification of forcible acquisition of land (by using the age old colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894) amidst three decades of de-industrialization move on the part of the government. Instead, those industries could be revived wherever possible. No attempt was even made to acquire the abandoned lands and sheds of erstwhile big industries that over time had become either jungles and hiding places of anti-social elements or being converted only for housing business (a share of which also goes to the powerful facilitators). So, the apprehension was also there whether it was a half-hearted effort for industrialisation or the acquired land would be used for profitable housing colonies.

Even the provisions of the Act have not been met, where it is clearly stated that if the owners of more than 80 per cent of the land agree to surrender their land and

accept the compensation then the government could interfere and take steps to forcefully acquire the required remaining portion. Of course, the acquisition must be for the national interest and there lies the question as to what extent the action was for the broad national interest or in the interest of private gain. In the present case of Singur, the calculation of area under non-takers of compensation or unwilling farmers was about 40 per cent (400 acres) though the ruling side was trying to justify that a part of those unwilling farmers were actually willing. Those willing farmers were not reflected in the list of those willingly giving up their lands because of various conflicts and litigations among the partners that arose due to separation of families (whether the owners or tenants), unregistered tenants who would not legally claim the compensation but were the actual owners. Also, some of the owners, especially on the boundary wanted to save their land from acquisition and take advantage of the future increase in land prices once the project materialised. They received the inspiration from the curved outline of the whole area acquired in order to save some plots of the then ruling party leaders or powerful people. The main opposition's point was that the government's acquisition of land was in the interest of the private industry. Notwithstanding that, some people always got jobs in any industrial establishment, the doubt always remained in this case as to whether it was in the national interest or private interest. There would not have been much talk had there been acquisition for government enterprises.

Reasons for Not Surrendering Land and the Socio-Economic Relations

After the process of the acquisition of land, some farmers (who did not receive compensation and were not willing to do so) made repeated petitions to the land registration office in Sreerampur informing that they were not willing to hand-over their land. The compensation offered had raised some dissatisfaction among the then land-givers. The fact was that the land was extremely fertile. However, the pro-acquisition parties made it a debatable issue whether the farmers in Singur had experienced high cropping intensity like that of Punjab. In fact, the Tata Motor site was very fertile part of the Singur Block. The entire local population was largely dependent on agriculture and estimated 150,000 people were directly dependent on it for their livelihood.

The suspicion was that the proposed 1000 jobs to be created would have gone to the outsiders (persons from outside of West Bengal). This is because the available local human resource does not match with the type of manpower required for the purpose of the motor car industry. The farmers understandably felt that they

would lose their livelihood. Environmental degradation of the surroundings would also be the result.

However, the Tata Company had made big promises. As per their claims, there would be 70 vendors along the factory. The total investment was about Rs. 1000 crores. Thus, the project raised controversy right from the beginning.

In the law there is a provision for the state to take over land held by private individuals for the public interest but not for development of private business. The Kolkata High Court has admitted the illegal nature of the acquisition (Indian Express News Service, February 22, 2012, Kolkata).

Any SEZ in India or elsewhere is supposed to have both positive and negative impacts on the population living around the project site. The economic and social impact on the directly affected people whose land is acquired depend on the contract and type as well as quantum of compensation paid to those who sacrifice their agricultural land on which their economy was primarily dependent. The compensation is paid sometimes in terms of money or job in accordance with their academic qualification as well as training and their fitness for the job required by the multinational.

However, people in the surrounding areas who do not sacrifice any land are also benefited in terms of job opportunities created in the newly industrial set up though they also have to bear a little burden if any kind of displacement takes place and for the relocation of the people for living in their areas. It may also happen that many of the newly landless people have no other source of income except the monetary compensation provided. As they do not have any technical skill and also not of the age for which they can be engaged in the newly established industry, they are bound to look for unskilled agricultural work in the surrounding areas leading to the fall in the wage rate. But, in the case of Singur, this has not happened in the surrounding areas due to the multiple cropping and adequate opportunities created due to the 100 days MGNREGA and continuous switch over of the people from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations especially various business activities due to its good connectivity with Kolkata city.

Therefore, it is likely that the surrounding villagers would be positively benefited in various ways:

- The technical manpower can get jobs in the new industry.
 - Demand for their products may increase with the influx of people from outside and hence the price.
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- Engagement in hospitality, transport etc. and thus the scope of earning may be enhanced.

Effect on the Election Results in Singur of Panchayatai Raj Institution (PRI)

Let us examine the impact of land acquisition in Singur and the fear factor on the part of the farmers and laborers on the results of Panchayat election. If we look at the successive Panchayat election results, we shall be able to understand the significance of the latest election. A comparative picture of the previous and later elections clearly reflects the impact of Singur SEZ issue. One might argue that it was because of the general rise of principal opponent Trinamool Congress across the state of West Bengal. But a point to be noted is that the motivation would not come automatically when there was powerful cadre-based Left Front government and the experience reveals that the general people were almost silent on every other occasion. Towards the middle of the Left Front rule in 1990s or early 2000s there was comparatively less bloodbath. It was due to the fact that the opposition-minded people were frightened due to politicization of all bureaucratic machinery and they did not virtually receive any justice regarding their complaints. Thus, they did not dare to go for confrontation for the fear of losing survival opportunities. However, the situation gradually transformed after the opposition gained control over the area and the situation reversed, which has continued even now, after the change of guard of the state.

Table 2: Results of Gram Panchayat Elections during 1978 – 2013

Year	Seats	CPI(M)	CPI	FB	RSP	Congress	TMC	BJP	Ind. & Others
1978	46401	28105 (60.57)	825 (1.78)	1539 (3.31)	1674 (3.61)	5116 (11.02)	-	-	9142 (19.70)
1983	45675	24410 (53.44)	716 (1.57)	1084 (2.37)	1241 (2.72)	14733 (32.26)	-	34 (0.07)	3457 (7.57)
1988	52473	33834 (64.48)	907 (1.73)	1398 (2.66)	1581 (3.01)	12239 (23.33)	-	32 (0.06)	2482 (4.73)
1993	60965	35342 (57.97)	799 (1.31)	1238 (2.03)	1526 (2.5)	16292 (26.73)	-	2367 (3.88)	3401 (5.58)
2003	49140	28641 (58.30)	836 (1.7)	1252 (2.55)	1263 (2.57)	6715 (13.67)	6462 (13.16)	1580 (3.22)	2372 (4.83)
2008	41313	19035 (46.08)	515 (1.25)	1090 (2.64)	1051 (2.54)	6837 (16.55)	9375 (22.69)	1169 (2.82)	2241 (5.40)
2013	41400	11796 (28.49)	377 (0.91)	685 (1.65)	604 (1.46)	4814 (11.63)	20963 (50.64)	511 (1.23)	1487 (3.59)

Source: State Institute of Panchayat, Govt. of West Bengal.

The ordinary people, especially in rural areas during the earlier regime, had taken the situation for granted even if their crops were looted from their fields. But, in their mind there was extreme anger waiting for the opportunity for an outburst. On the economic front, the apprehension of survival put them in the corner of the wall and the situation helped TMC to regroup them under a political banner that was spread out across the regions. It then brought many of those mute spectators into the electoral process and on the first opportunity they came forward to cast their votes that more than counterbalanced the voting management of the then ruling political coalition. Thus, the changing election results of at least at the local level (panchayat) from the pre-land acquisition to post-land acquisition period no doubt reflected the impact of acquisition policy to a great extent.

Table 3: Results of Panchayat Samiti Election during 1978 – 2013

Year	Seats	CPI(M)	CPI	FB	RSP	Congress	TMC	BJP	Ind. & Others
1978	8483	5596 (65.96)	132 (1.55)	320 (3.77)	393 (4.63)	728 (8.57)	-	-	1314 (15.48)
1983	8591	5050 (58.78)	97 (1.13)	194 (2.26)	248 (2.89)	2543 (29.60)	-	2 (0.02)	457 (5.33)
1988	9116	6550 (71.85)	117 (1.28)	227 (2.49)	276 (3.03)	1687 (18.51)	-	3 (0.03)	256 (2.81)
1993	9446	6333 (67.04)	90 (0.95)	169 (1.79)	241 (2.55)	2158 (22.84)	-	125 (1.32)	330 (3.49)
2003	8500	5717 (67.28)	131 (1.54)	186 (2.19)	224 (2.36)	1053 (12.4)	813 (9.57)	160 (1.89)	213 (2.50)
2008	8753	4339 (49.57)	104 (1.19)	205 (2.34)	234 (2.67)	1446 (16.52)	2018 (23.05)	170 (1.94)	237 (2.71)
2013	8425	2360 (28.01)	53 (0.63)	123 (1.46)	110 (1.31)	878 (10.42)	4729 (56.13)	32 (0.38)	139 (1.65)

Source: State Institute of Panchayat, Govt. of West Bengal

NB: 8425 seats has been declared by WBSE commission's website out of 9124 of 2013.

Election results from 1978 to 2003 show that Left Front bagged over 65 per cent of the seats of the Gram Panchayat elections, and CPIM alone used to claim about 60 per cent of the seats except in 1983 when it was marginally lower and Congress barely managed 30 per cent of the seats. In 2008, the figures for Left Front eroded and came down to about 52 per cent, of which 46 per cent went in favour of CPIM (Table 2). The share of the opposition in the Gram Panchayat gradually increased to 48 per cent and TMC emerged as the second largest party with about 23 per cent of the seats in 2008 Gram Panchayat election and the Congress was relegated to the third position with only 16.55 per cent figure. The

hegemony of the Left Front was broken and their absolute control has also been shaken. In 2013, the picture changed and TMC owned about 51 per cent of the Gram Panchayat seats, while CPIM got only about 28 per cent of the seats. Congress could manage about 12 per cent of the seats.

Up to the elections of 2003, the Left front had won about 73 to 78 per cent of the Panchayat Samiti seats, except in 1983 when it was marginally lower (Table 3). The share of the CPIM had always been in the range of 66 to 72 per cent. In 2008, the figures of the same were reduced to 69 per cent and 61 per cent respectively, which were not drastically low like that of Gram Panchayat. Thus, though the Left-front had been able to retain their seats in 2008, their absolute authority over Panchayati Raj Institution had been shaken and the hegemony of the Left has been seriously challenged. So far as Panchayat Samitis are concerned, at least 40 per cent of them had gone in favour of the then opposition parties. In fact, the erosion of the Left's support base has been quite strong in 2008 and after that year's Panchayat election, the opposition started to gain significant control over the political scenario of West Bengal. In 2013, TMC emerged as the single largest party with 56 per cent seats of the Panchayat Samiti, while CPM could manage only 28 per cent of the Panchayat Samiti seats. The share of Congress in this respect was about 10 per cent. In 2013, the power house shifted from Left Front to TMC.

Table 4: Results of Zilla Parishad Election during 1978 – 2013

Year	Seats	CPI(M)	CPI	FB	RSP	Congress	TMC	BJP	Ind. & Others
1978	645	488 (75.66)	5 (0.77)	44 (6.82)	30 (4.65)	27 (4.05)	-	-	51 (7.90)
1983	637	429 (67.35)	-	25 (3.92)	14 (2.20)	149 (23.39)	-	-	20 (3.14)
1988	657	531 (80.82)	7 (1.06)	22 (3.35)	25 (3.80)	62 (9.43)	-	-	10 (1.52)
1993	528	528 (80.61)	6 (0.92)	17 (2.60)	14 (2.14)	73 (11.14)	-	-	17 (2.59)
2003	712	548 (76.97)	18 (2.53)	24 (3.37)	22 (3.08)	68 (9.55)	16 (2.25)	2 (0.28)	14 (1.97)
2008	735	458 (61.23)	13 (1.77)	18 (2.45)	25 (3.40)	99 (13.46)	120 (16.32)	2 (0.27)	12 (1.63)
2013	806	145 (17.99)	6 (0.74)	13 (1.61)	9 (1.12)	91 (11.29)	459 (56.95)	0 (0.00)	3 (0.37)

Source: State Institute of Panchayat, Govt. of West Bengal

In 2008, for the first time, the then opposition was able to carve out a space in the Zilla Parishad. They gained control over 4 Zilla Parishads out of 17 in 2008 (Ta-

ble 4). Moreover, in one of the district level bodies, the opposition lost by the margin of only one seat. The process continued with the changes of power in the State Assembly in 2011 and in the Panchayat election of 2013. The Left Front was shifted to the position of the opposition for the first time since 1978. Trinamool Congress (TMC) took the position of erstwhile ruling party by winning 13 out of 17 Zilla Parishads and the majority of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis, as revealed in Tables 2 and 3.

Changes in Power and Land Acquisition Scenario in West Bengal:

The wave of anti-land acquisition movement started with Singur and continued to remain so even after the change of power in 2011 because of the continued apprehension of losing economic opportunities. Some clever people also tried to evade land acquisition and waited for the others to surrender their land for such development project, so that he or she could enjoy the benefits after the completion of the project and the rise in price of his/her own land. The land or anti-acquisition movement became so intense that even for the project of genuine public welfare or national interest like National Security Observer, the land acquisition became almost impossible. The opposition that was started with a genuine reason of interest or on the ground of the method of acquisition now became an instrument to block every development activity by some opponent groups, whether it was highway construction, power plant or even academic and health institution or airport with more national or public interest and less of private interest.

Trinamool Congress government, which had voiced its opposition to land acquisition at Singur, Nandigram by the then state government, was attempting for a big land acquisition drive after coming to power. A decision of the earlier Left Front government in December 2010, to acquire 3,600 acres of land at Gourandi and Banjemari mouzas of Burdwan district to build a housing project for the people evicted by Eastern Coal-fields Limited (ECL) for its mining projects had been re-approved by the Commerce and Industries Department, and the proposal would be placed before the state cabinet for its re-validation.

"Minister of Commerce and Industries Partha Chatterjee had given his seal of approval, and it is to be placed before the cabinet shortly," an official of Land and Land Reforms Department told (Durgapur Adda, January 27, 2013). The project would be executed by Asansol Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA) at a

cost of Rs 2,650 crores. While the state government through ADDA would acquire the land, the money would be provided by the ECL for the project.

The then Left Front government could not go ahead with the project because of opposition by some of the land owners. As the 2011 Assembly Election was approaching, the then Left Front government stuck with the land problems, decided to shelve the proposal. Afterwards, the Trinamool government decided to revive the project after conducting a survey. "We have arrived at a tentative figure of providing rehabilitation to 40,000 families," said Antara Acharya, CEO of ADDA (Durgapur Adda, January 27, 2013). The families were displaced by ECL's mining activities in Burdwan district.

The government officials opined that the land was being taken to fulfil a "public purpose" and the policies of the present government of not taking any land forcefully without any consultation and consent of the owners has not yet been compromised. "It is not being taken for setting up any private industry. The project is for the benefit of poor people," an official of the department told Indian Express (Indian Express News Service, February 2012, Kolkata, Bandopadhyay, 2013).

As far as SEZs were concerned, the CPI-M and the Left Front government of West Bengal wanted major changes in the scope and character of the SEZs. In February, 2010 itself, the Left Front government opined that new SEZs would not be set up in West Bengal till the changes in the all-India SEZ Act and Rules were made. West Bengal would not adopt the type of SEZs being set up in Maharashtra, Haryana and other states where huge tracts of land were being given to big business houses with ample scope for real estate speculation.

The Left parties had already spelt out the required changes they wanted. As for those who wanted the Left Front government to give up its industrialization policy, they would be disappointed. West Bengal should protect and further develop agriculture; the gains of land reforms would not be undermined but the emphasis on industrialization would not be given up. The continued de-industrialization in the state was to be reversed with a serious thought. Thus, a balanced economic development urged industrialization within the capitalist framework too. Small and medium industries could not be sufficient, and large-scale units, particularly manufacturing was necessary.

Concluding Remarks

Any SEZ in India or elsewhere is supposed to have both positive and negative impacts on the population living around the project site. The economic and social

impact on the directly affected people whose land is acquired depend upon the contract and type as well as quantum of compensation paid to those who sacrifice their agricultural land on which their economy was primarily dependent. The compensation is paid sometimes in terms of money or job in accordance with their academic qualification as well as training and their fitness for the job required by the multinational.

However, people in the surrounding areas who do not sacrifice any land are also benefited in terms of job opportunities created in the newly industrial setup though they also have to bear a little burden if any kind of displacement takes place and for the relocation of the people for living in their areas. It may also happen that many of the newly landless people have no other source of income except the monetary compensation provided. As they do not have any technical skill and are also not of the age at which they can be engaged in the newly established industry, they are bound to look for unskilled agricultural work in the surrounding areas leading to the fall in wage rate. But in case of Singur, it has not happened in the surrounding areas due to the multiple cropping and enough opportunities created due to the 100 days MGNREGA and continuous switch over of the people from agriculture to non-agricultural occupation especially various business activities due to its good connectivity with Kolkata city.

Therefore, it is likely that the surrounding villagers would be positively benefited in various ways:

- The technical manpower can get jobs in the new industry.
- Demand for their products may increase with the influx of people from outside and hence the price.

Engagement in hospitality, transport etc. and thus scope for earning

So, a survey was conducted in the surrounding villages who did not in any way sacrifice any land, at the time when the TATA work was in full swing and already crossed three years (though it has been withdrawn at present). Data were collected from 12 villages in Chandanpur area which is adjacent to the Singur TATA motor site on their social and economic status in order to examine the pattern and quantum of impact on their economy.

Out of 453 families surveyed, it has been observed that the income of 61 families has increased while that of 63 families decreased during the three year span. However, 329 families reported about no change in their family income. The

families all belong to the SC, ST and general categories and across all the income groups from below Rs. 1500/- per capita monthly income to over Rs. 30000/- per capita income depending upon their education qualifications and employment status. Many of the families are found to be reluctant to disclose their income as well as the changes in income after the project started. A few families also reported to have training in TATA motor areas under its initiative. Out of the total of 61 positively benefited families, rise in income is noted to be Rs 329200/- i.e., an average of Rs 5397/- per family, while the total decline in monthly family income of the 63 losing families were Rs 239500/- i.e., an average of Rs 3802/- per family per month. Overall, there is an improvement in the income to the tune of Rs 89700/- i.e., an average of Rs 198/- per family per month.

Among the benefited people it has been observed that the people having good technical background like engineers, motor mechanics, leather workers, hawkers, salesmen etc. are mostly benefited while most of the losers are farmers, agricultural laborers, old people who have no connection with the TATA motors in the form of land loss or getting or not getting jobs. many of the benefited people even had their income increased due to their engagement elsewhere with better opportunities and also due to general rise in their agricultural income. Moreover, very negligible respondents replied about any improvement in their technical skill after the training arranged by the TATA as most of them did not either receive any scope of training or whatever happened, it is due to their own efforts.

So, it is very difficult to ascertain the actual impact on the social and economic status of the neighboring villagers from the survey report unless the specific answers are reported by the villagers about their nature of engagements and changes in activity pattern after the initiation of TATA motors and it would be very difficult to know the future consequences it would have as the project has already been closed. Only, whatever, we can say is that any SEZ project of this type has serious social and economic consequences as observed due to the fear of losing opportunities of survival by the potential land losers especially those who are neither the actual owners and hence did not receive any compensation or very little and those who have no other technical skills to enable them to switch over to other occupations.

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