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Narratives of Development
Projects, Politics and Land
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TATA MOTORS SINGUR: NARRATIVES OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, POLITICS AND LAND ACQUISITION IN WEST BENGAL

Pallav Karmakar¹ and V Anil Kumar²

Abstract

The Singur peasants' movement is considered to be one of the greatest mass movements of its time against the state government of West Bengal. The paper intends to highlight one of the significant peasant-led protests in the country, which challenged the state government in the process of land acquisition for setting up a small car factory in Singur, West Bengal. The paper underpins the narratives of the movement and focuses on bringing forth the public discourse centering on the movement. It was found through the analysis of both the primary and secondary data that people's participation in the decision-making is one of the most important aspects of development projects, and the use of force and undemocratic means to meet the goal by the state government can have a long-term negative impact on the electoral base of the government. The protest movement to get back the land has reached its objective, but it is fraught with the uncertainty of being fit for agricultural activities, and the farmers are now looking for alternatives to sell it for a better price.

Keywords: Development Projects, Panchayati Raj, Land Reforms, Tata Motors`

Background

With liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy, industrialization through development projects has become a tool to foster economic growth in the country. Speedy industrialization would yield high growth rate, fostering the gross domestic product which, in turn, would help the government to redistribute it among the poor. The neo-liberal economy has created an arena of competition among the respective state governments of the nation in attracting private capital for development.

The electoral promises made with regard to development had to be met, and industrialization seems to be the only feasible way. However, the main concern of industrialization and development is land, besides capital. Land has to be provided by the state in order to setup industries.

Hence, post independence there has been a steady increase in forceful land acquisition in order to meet the developmental aspirations of the state which, in turn, has deprived a major section of the society of their basic right to life and livelihood (Amirthalingam & Lakshman, 2009; Cernea, 1996) and had exposed them to vulnerable states (De Wet, 2001; CSD, 2008).

An attempt to understand the changing class character of the Left Front government has been made, which happened to be a pro-poor and agricultural/public sector facilitator but then, over time, became provider of private industrialization through forceful acquisition of agricultural land (Mukharji, 2009; Bandopadhyay, 2006), focusing on the development model debate on whether the state should act as a facilitator for private projects. Data for the study has been taken from secondary as well as primary sources in order to arrive at a conclusion as to why the project failed and what were the factors that led to the failure?

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Review of Literature

The entire motive of the former dispensation of West Bengal in allowing Tata Motors to set up the small car factory in Singur was one of using market principles of growth to transform a predominantly agrarian society. The idea failed because it did not take into account the value and dignity of land for a peasant. Basically, the present condition of the project where both the landowner and the lessee failing to make anything substantial in a way might echo the opposition forces, who in a way did not have any alternative ready and did not understand the necessity for peasants to also benefit from individual progress, a process of development that is only possible through industrialization (Sau, 2008)

The 'model' of industrialization, the abandoned Tata Motors project in Singur, reflects a number of regressive flaws. In competition with the other states for the location of the project, the Left Front government in West Bengal fell overboard in offering subsidies to the company. The government did not further scrutinize the land demanded and ended up offering highly fertile land in Singur. To make matters worse, they invoked the Land Acquisition Act, which compelled the landowner to surrender their land at a low price. The compensation formula was biased and favored the rich non-cultivating absentee landowners, and was highly unfair to the actual cultivators, *bargadars* and agricultural laborers, which in a way gave rise to strong opposition from peasants and their supporters (Chandra, 2008)

A household survey conducted in Singur, West Bengal, concerning compensation offered by the state government to owners of land, acquired for the purpose of setting up a car factory, reflected that under compensation relative to market price significantly raised the chances of the compensation offered to be rejected by the landowners. Agricultural workers were more adversely affected relative to non-agricultural workers (Ghatak, Mitra, Mookherjee, & Nath, 2012).

The controversy over the acquisition of land in Singur in West Bengal for Tata Motors car factory explains larger issues in an explicit manner. Overall acknowledgement of the plight of displaced and project-affected persons throughout the country implies that the development pattern, nature of rehabilitation package and the 'public purpose' declared by the state while acquiring land has to be discussed and redefined (Fernandes, 2007).

The choice of project site always lies with the investors, since the investor always has the option of setting up the project elsewhere. Therefore, in order to acquire the investment, governments agree to almost everything the investors demand for, which happened in the case of Singur. Tata Motors chose Singur for the project, first, because it is right next to the only proper highway of the state by international standards; second, it is just 45 kms from the capital city Kolkata; third, the land had lots of underground water which is required for an automobile factory. So, in the process of satisfying the demands of Tata Motors, the government did not take into account the 400 acres of multi-cropped fertile agricultural land that was falling within the demanded premises of the factory site (Sarkar, 2007).

Theoretical Underpinning

On the context of industrialization and land acquisition, a model assumed that a higher economic growth would eventually produce a trickle-down effect, bringing economic benefit for the country's

entire population. This is the model of development adopted by the Indian state during the post-liberalization period, in which both the politically right and the parliamentary left have converged (Bhaduri, 2007). In this model, the private corporations were assigned with the leading role and it expected the state government to facilitate the corporation in acquiring land for the purpose, and to repress any resistance to the project using their machineries of control.

In economist Amit Bhaduri's interpretation, there were two possible political consequences that would arise from the adopted model of development. First, it could create a crisis of parliamentary legitimacy. It is evident that the electorate, either in the state or at the center, has never voted back any regime that propagated an urban-centric development in contemporary India. Hence, there is no reason in believing that the corporate-led growth ideology would not be rejected again by our democratic polity in the country (Bhaduri, 2007). Second, it could create possible crisis for parliamentary democracy itself, such as the Maoist uprising in the tribal belt of the country where the government had eventually dispossessed masses of their habitats and belonging, considered an inevitable act of country's progress.

Data Source

The data for the paper has been collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data has been collected through interviews conducted by the author with various stakeholders related to the issue. Secondary data is collected from various available literatures in the aforementioned field.

Tata Motors project Singur

The state government in its gazette notification (19-24 July 2006) declared that the land was to be acquired under section 4 (1) of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 by the government or its undertaking 'at public expense for a public purpose,' such as 'employment generation and socio-economic development the area by setting up a Tata Small Car Project' (Bhattacharyya, 2016).

The state government issued 13 notices under the Section 9 (1) of the Land acquisition Act 1894 to the affected farmers, which approved the acquisition of 997.11 acres of land for setting up Tata Motors small car project in Singur, which is located around 40kms from the state capital Kolkata. The land to be acquired covered five *mouzas*,ⁱ namely, Beraberi, Gopalnagar, Singbheri, Bajemelia and Khaserbheri.

As per the report of (WBIDC, 2006), 50% of the affected population were small and marginalized farmers and 25 to 30 % were *bagardars* (sharecroppers) and landless people. The compensation for acquisition was declared under the provisions of Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which considered the market price of the land depending on the type of the land. As per the response to RTIⁱⁱ the Government of West Bengal, Office of the Special Land Acquisition Officer had stated the following rates of compensation.

Table 1: Market Value of Land Based on Types of Land for Compensation

Type of Land	Rate of Compensation / acre
'Sali,' 'Bandh,' 'Samsan,' 'Debasthan,' 'Doba', 'Pukur,' 'Mandir'	Rs. 6,01,718
'Suna,' 'Danga'	Rs. 8,80,029
'Bastu,' 'Viti'	Rs. 18,04,431
'Khamar,' 'Garhlayekpatit'	Rs. 5,28,017
'Bansbagan'	Rs. 7,04,023
'Bagan,' 'Shop,' 'Dokan,' 'Cold Storage'	Rs. 14,43,545
'Bhagar'	Rs. 3,61,030
'Path,' 'Khal,' 'Nala,' 'Nayanjuli'	Rs. 3,00,859

Source: RTI response

As per table number 1, the registered sharecroppers were to receive only 25% of the above value as compensation. The livelihood of a large number of poor cultivators and agricultural workers were endangered by the land acquisition. The government did not pay adequate compensation and its adverse economic impact led the project-affected people to protest against the government's order of land acquisition. Again, a different opinion emerged in relation to refusal of some landowners and non-acceptance of compensation, and the uprising within the community was on account of political motivation by the opposition political parties rather than the adverse economic impact or under compensation (Ghosh, 2012).

A study done Maitreesh Ghatak, Sandip Mitra, Dilip Mookherjee, Anusha Nathⁱⁱⁱ states the following:

"After averaging across all types of plots, compensations offered by the government for agricultural plots were close to their market values; however, there was a systematic under-compensation for *suna* plots and overcompensation for *sal* plots. *Suna* plots that were undercompensated accounted for about one-third of the land acquired and of owners affected. The most likely explanation for this is the failure of the official land records to incorporate accurate information concerning plot characteristics: specifically, failing to identify their irrigation and multi-cropping status correctly."

With the refusal of few landowners to part away with their land for development, the movement got its momentum through support from various political and non-political fronts who came forward to stand beside the demand of the protesting masses.

The Protest against Forceful Land Acquisition in Singur

The state government's statistical handbook before the acquisition indicated that Singur was a block with a thriving agri-business, where 83 percent of the land was irrigated, and a crop density of 220 percent. A survey conducted in November 2006 by civil society group, 'Sanhati Udyog,' showed that of the 997 acres of land allotted for the factory contained more than 11,000 landholdings of around 2 *bighas* (0.66acres) or less per holding on average, feeding around 6,000 families, of which 3,500 were

subsistence farmers and 1,200 unrecorded *bargadars*. This might be sufficient reason to rationalize a protest or resistance by these groups of people against forceful eviction from their land and livelihood.

People's protests and demonstrations against the forceful land acquisition were peaceful, and officials from the government were barred from entering the project site. All of it turned into a bitter nightmare and triggered the movement to its worse phase on September 25, 2006, when more than 400 people including several women and children were brutally assaulted and about 78 activists were arrested which included 27 women, MP Mamata Banerjee and MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharya. At around 1:40 am that night, the RAF and the police attacked a few thousand men, women and children who were protesting peacefully all day. The people assembled at the BDO Singur were upset about the fact that their voices had not been given a platform, and the government was unilaterally working in the favor of Tata Motors to acquire their land at any cost.

The struggle of the people continued in peaceful and democratic manner for the next few months. Marches, rallies, and public hearings got organized in Singur and in the state capital Kolkata. They were joined by several organizations and eminent people such as professors from Jadavpur University, human rights activists, other social action groups, trade unions, and all political parties other than those of the Left front. Ms. Mamata Banerjee announced a 24-hour general strike on October 9, 2006, as a protest against the land acquisition at Singur. Joining the same as a sign of civil disobedience, other political parties like Socialist Unity Centre of India called for a 12 hours' *bandh* in Singur on September 27, 2006. With series of protests and agitations for month, finally on October 3, 2006, Tata declared their decision to move the Nano project out of West Bengal.

The Left – Narrative

The bitter and violent conflict at Singur was unique in a different context, as it took place in West Bengal, a state governed by a communist government – The Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI (M) – led Left Front coalition – from 1977 to 2011. The coalition was considered to be one of the remarkable examples of political stability, taking into consideration the wider context of caste-, religion- and ethnicity-based politics, compared to frequent changes in political regimes elsewhere in India (Banerjee M, 2010). The Left Front government was applauded for bringing in land reform and was a pioneer in initiating democratic decentralization via *panchayati raj*, earning popularity as the government of the poor (Das, 2016).

The former Left Front chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya declared that 'agriculture is our base, industry our future,' demanding a need to move 'towards rapid industrialization based on the success in agriculture,' which would generate necessary non-agricultural employment.

Mr Ashok Bhattacharya^{iv} in an interview^v addressed the various reasons on how and why the project failed. He pointed out different aspects of the 34 years of the Left Front government regime, during which the policies and initiatives of the government had enabled the poor and marginalized section. Through the land reform policies, *bargadars* were given legitimate rights over the production and registered. During the regime, there was steady increase in educational facilities, with a better mode of connectivity between the urban and rural areas. The *panchayati raj* institution has enabled the rural population in decision-making. Literacy rate increased from 45% to 77%, as utmost importance

was given to education. With better agricultural facilities and right over the production from sharecropping, there was a steady increase in the purchasing parity.

But post-liberalization (i.e., 1991), there were a steep decline in agricultural activities. With the foreign products entering the market, there was fall in price of agricultural commodities. The 'neo rich' class that was created, as a result of the pro-poor policies of the government, was now not ready to go back to agricultural activities. The educated youth wanted to move to urban areas, as there were no employment opportunities; hence, the nascent stage of the 'neo rich' demanded the creation of an alternative to agricultural activities where they could be absorbed.

Industrialization was the only way out of this trap which would save the electoral power in the state. Though opposing the central government's moves on economic reforms in 1991, the CPI (M) in West Bengal finally adopted a new industrial policy in 1994.

With the adaptation of the industrialization policy, the main concern of the government at that hour was capital, since ours is a federal structure and there was a different political party ruling the center, the only way out was to approach private capital. In order to attract investments, the government was compelled to abide by the demands of the investors.

According to him, the government was blinded in its pursuit of achieving economic growth, completely ignoring the social and political implications. The biggest blunder made was not consulting the third tier of the government in the state in the process of land acquisition. It was a top-to-bottom approach of decision-making which was exactly the opposite way in which the Left government in West Bengal had functioned over the period. Using of force and state machineries to control the protest was a murder of democracy, of which the Left government had been a supporter throughout.

Ranjit Guha^{vi} in an interview with the author dated March 22, 2016, expressed the same views as Ashok Bhattacharya. Not involving the people in the decision-making and use of force to control the protest, curbing the democratic rights of the masses, resulted in loss of electoral base of the Left Front government in the state.

If the masses are not brought into confidence and there is no consultation, if they are forced into something they do not believe in, then it does not matter how good the policy is, it tends to fail. The economic development that was envisioned by the Left Front government would have been possible if the masses were consulted and involved in the decision-making process.

The initiative behind the project was right but its implementation process was not right. In the case of Haldiaport, there were no turmoil, as the rehabilitation and resettlement process was just and good. Jobs were given to the project-affected people and above all the process was executed by involving the masses.

With regard to the case of Tata Motors, more options should had been explored. Since Singur is an agricultural area, industries should be set up in rural areas, so there can be overall development through economic activities. Overall, the Tata Motors Singur project was disastrous, and the Left Front government acknowledged this regretfully. The election ballot in a democratic state speaks a lot about what people have been through and what their opinions are.

Subhanil Chowdhury^{vii} had the same opinion as the above. He strongly condemned the politburo of the CPI (M) who happened to ignore the whole notion of participatory democracy.

Industries are not built in thin air, and for that land is required, and agricultural land can also be given away for the purposes of industrialization. The idea behind the project was appealing and promising, if only the implementation was executed in a more democratic way. By involving the, the project would have benefitted the entire state.

Narratives of the Civil Society Organizations

In a day long international people's tribunal organized by various national and international human rights organizations, presided by dignified judges and social activist on January 31,2007 in Kolkata in light of Supreme Court's Judgement^{viii} regarding the ninth schedule^{ix}, the judges' delivered the following judgment:.

- Depriving anyone from the land is similar to deprivation from right to life and livelihood and in that perspective unanimously agreed that fundamental rights, as detailed in the Indian constitution and all types of national and international human rights, had been violated in Singur.
- The villagers of Singur had been subject to brutal police repression.
- Land acquisition process in Singur bypassed the *panchayati raj* institution.
- The perpetrators of human rights to be treated as per law.
- The state government must adequately compensate the victims of human rights violation in Singur for loss of life and damage of property.

Biplam Halim^x in an interview with the author strongly condemned the idea of forcefully evicting peasants from their land in order to set up industries. The exclusion of *panchayati raj* institution in the decision-making had definitely resulted in a blunder for the Left Front government in West Bengal with regard to electoral support. The Singur incident one the hand proved to be disastrous for the Left Front government but on the other hand came as a blessing for the opposition party TMC. Mamata Banerjee did not let go of a single opportunity to blame the Left and revoke their electoral support. She happened to be the sole winner in the total chaos of the Tata Motors Singur project.

Nirmalaya Mukherjee^{xi} shared the same views on the project, strongly condemning the Opposition and the Left Front government for using Singur for their respective benefits. Projects without the approval and consent of the people, who would be affected in the process, is not acceptable. Development projects should be for the benefit of all and decisions in relation to its implementation should be wisely made.

Narratives of the Project-Affected People (PAPs)

From 2016 to 2021, the researchers conducted multiple field visits to understand the mass movement objectives and implications. During the course of the interaction, several shifts in the outlooks of the PAPs were observed. At the project's inception, there were farmers who were aligned with the project and had accepted the compensation; however, there were also unwilling landowners who spearheaded the movement and expressed their discontent in view of the project installation.

A 5-year long legal battle with the Tata Motors and the TMC government ended with a legal notice to return the land back to the 14,000 farmers in 2016. During the period, the researcher

interacted with the landowners and categorically stratified them into the following three sections: a. willing landowners, b. unwilling landowners, and c. agricultural workers.

Willing landowners

Naren Das, a 70-year-old farmer, had handed over more than 10 *bighas* of land for a compensation amount of 30 lakhs. He expressed that he believed in the policies of the Left Front government and was aligned with their objective of industries being the future. He has 4 sons and not all are interested in agricultural work, as they have received education and want to move out and have a designated job. The car factory would create employment opportunities and result in economic development. He mentioned of his struggle to find the desired match for his sons' marriage, as at present, no one wants to be married to a farmer, "*sobaichakriwalababukhoje*" (everyone is in search of job holders with steady income).

In 2011, the Indian census recorded 780 towns in West Bengal, of which 580 were added in the period between 2001 and 2011. Trends of 'subaltern urbanization' are results of spatial developments in the peripheries of global cities. The trend of moving into non-farm employment opportunities has fostered many landowners to surrender land for development projects and has alienated the dependency on land (Majumder, 2018)

Sonathan, a small land owner, had come to the block office to collect the cheque allotted to him by the ruling government as compensation. On asking what he feels about the protests and whether he participated in the movement, he said that his father was the one who had dealt with the transaction of the land. On his demise, he, being the successor, received the amount of compensation. He said people wanted to increase the price of land but protested against building of the factory. Who does not want development, the objective of the factory was to foster economic activities in the area. He mentioned a few friends and relatives who had started working as security guards at the project site and were earning a steady income. Now, they are jobless and have migrated to the city for livelihood. The construction for the factory had provided economic opportunities for the youth and had also provided skill development training in order to absorb the available manpower. With the removal of the project and land being returned to the farmers, the scope of employment remains uncertain as before.

Soumen Das was pursuing his master's degree when the project was announced. He aspired to land a proper job as an engineer at the Tata factory and had appeared for the entrance examination conducted by Tata. On clearing the entrance examination, he was all prepared to start working at the factory. With the outbreak of the conflict and removal of the project, his dream was shattered, and he now runs a small coaching center as a private tutor to make ends meet.

Rakesh Manna is son of one of the farmers who had sold their land for the Tata Motors small car factory. He was among the 700 youth who were trained as technicians by the Tata group. He had received an official letter of appointment from the Tata group and was a designated member of the Tata Motors group in 2008, but on withdrawal of the project, his offer letter was cancelled in 2009. He works as a security guard in nearby districts and keeps changing job locations to find a better and stable one that would suit his skills.

Unwilling Landowners

Tarapada Manna, 58 years, was one of the many farmers who decided not to part with the land. He has 6 family members and had 2 *bighas* of cultivatable land. He used to grow potato, paddy, jute, and seasonal vegetables before the acquisition of land. On being asked why he was against the project, he firmly replied, " *Matiamader Ma* (land is our mother) how can we part from it." The land has provided for us from generations. He mentioned how he hosted Mamata Banerjee at his house and very excitedly showed around the places where she sat and spoke to them. He believes she has saved them from a great disaster and has provided them with the means to sustain in the form of stipend and rations.

Haradhan Das, 74 years, living with a eight-member family, had 5 *bighas* of land and was offered 18 lakhs as compensation, but he denied the offer and decided not to part with the land. He is looking forward to cultivate the land once he gets the possession of the land back. He has been surviving on the stipend and ration support provided by the TMC government.

The protest movement lies with them as a strong memory of bravery, which they collectively won against the state. Land to him represents his cultural and social roots, which has been handed over to him from his ancestors, and they feel this win of getting their land back would not have been possible without the leadership of Mamata Banerjee.

Likewise, there were few more landowners who spoke about their affiliation with the land as sacred, and how detachment from it would affect their ancestral roots. The representation of land to them is more aligned toward land being a provider and protector rather than a commodity of exchange to make money.

Agricultural workers:

Dependency on land for livelihood and sustenance has directly been of the agricultural laborers/workers. As per the provisions of the acquisition, 25 percent of the allotted compensation was for the *bargadars* who were registered. However, there were very few registered *bargadars*; hence, the unregistered did ones did not find a place in the compensation books.

Haripada Das is an agricultural worker on a land of 2 *bighas*, with five individuals as dependents. He cultivated paddy, jute, and potato. The share from the produce would be 50 percent if he invested money during the sowing period and 25 percent of no investments were done from his end. He received no compensation for the acquisition of the land, as he was not a registered *bargadar*. He had no alternative source of income, since the agricultural activities had drastically gone down in the area post-acquisition. He and two others of his family received a stipend of rupees 2000 and 16 kilograms of rice each on a monthly basis.

Adjoining the project site lies Dobadi, a village of the *khetmajurs* (agricultural workers). There are approximately 90 families residing in the villages, all dependent on agricultural work directly or indirectly to earn livelihoods. Except one or two, none of these 90 families has ever owned a land in their lifetime. Except one family, there were not a single registered *bargadar* in the village. All the adults of the families in the village are agricultural field workers.

The tradition of cultivation would be through leasing of land by these agricultural laborers who would cultivate on their own. The allotment of land for cultivation by the landowners would be on

rotational basis to avoid any claims of dependency on the land by the cultivators. The residents of Dobadi village would be engaged in agricultural activities for 8 to 10 months in a year. The nearby canals and lakes provided them with fishing opportunities; some of the families would rear livestock and poultry.

Post the acquisition of the land to set up the car factory, fences were raised to mark the territory for the project. Accessibility to the agricultural work remained no more an option. It was easier for the landowner to accept the compensation and give away the land for the project, as they were not directly dependent on the land for their income, said Bijoy Patra one of the residents of the village and an agricultural worker.

With no legal entitlement over the land, the agricultural workers were the ones left in a state of pauperization. Death through starvation of one of the agricultural workers, Shankar Das, raised a serious question on the future of these agricultural workers. The protest movement was the only means through which their hope of having a livelihood could be restored; therefore, on grounds of sympathy, they actively sided with the unwilling farmers in the protest. The people of Dobadi joined the farmers for whom they would cultivate. They said, "we fought their battles and now when the land is returned to them, we see no scope of agriculture."

Present-day scenario

Fifteen years since the acquisition of land for the Tata Motors small car factory in Singur, drastic conflicts of interest between the state and landowners have compelled the Tata group to move the project to Gujarat and the acquired land has been returned to the respective landowners. The movement has resulted in emergence of an alternative political representation in the state, providing fodder for the present ruling government.

Have things returned to normalcy and has the objective of the protest movement achieved its desired outcome? Since the return of land to the farmers in 2016, through the Supreme Court verdict, the TMC government has invested capital to develop the land and restore it for agricultural usage. With the construction being almost complete for the factory, deconstruction has been initiated using explosives to remove concretes slabs, pipes, plates and boulders from the land. However, despite all efforts, the farmers find the lands' quality not suitable for cultivation anymore and now want to sell off the land for industrial purpose.

The land war in Singur has been the center of political manifestos since the start of the project and has favored the TMC government in 2011, 2016 and 2021 state assembly elections. But in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, there was a shift in voters' preference toward BJP, who campaigned on bringing back the industry and providing economic growth in the area.

During the 2021 state assembly elections campaign, West Bengal IT Minister Partha Chatterjee stated that they are open to talks with the Tata group and harbor no enmity toward them. It was the forcible ways of land acquisition executed by the Left Front government for the project that their party was against.

The 1000 acres land remains in a state of limbo after 15 years. The farmers now find the land not suitable for cultivation and are looking for deals to sell off the land at a better price. One of the

farmers, Arun Das, said that there are real estate dealers who are willing to pay 10 times more the price the Left Front government had offered in compensation 13 years ago.

Conclusion

In the light of the above discussions, the Tata Motors small car project turned out to be failure which, in turn, had an adverse effect on the electoral support of the Left Front government in West Bengal. It can be said that the failure of the project was because of the unsatisfactory compensation offered, but at the same time, it cannot be ignored that the Left Front government used unfair means to acquire the land which triggered and provoked the masses to resist and protest against the move. Using force to acquire land and ignoring the *panchayati raj* in the decision-making process had turned people against the government and the political motivation of the opposition acted as a trigger to the whole movement.

The development model adopted by the Left Front government in West Bengal, which was justified to be the need of the hour in order to reach higher economic growth, happened to backfire, as rightly pointed out by economist Amit Bhaduri. The shift in policies from being pro-poor government, which was evident from the party's participation in advocating against the exploitation of the poor and marginalized, to being the government for a corporate-led development changed the electoral equation for the Left Front government.

After a decade since the Singur incident, the Left in West Bengal has lost its faith which it had earned among people. This is very evident in the party's performance in the recent state assembly election. The people have accepted the fact that the Left Front government is too regressive in nature after the policy blunders in Singur. At the same time, the TMC is doing well and has replaced the Left Front government in West Bengal. The outstanding performance of TMC in the state assembly elections in 2016 goes on to prove that people have accepted it as a replacement of Left Front government.

Mamata Banerjee, leading the TMC, has proved through her policies that the needs of the people have to be addressed in order to enjoy electoral support. The reason why TMC is doing well can be understood from its initiatives in the last 5 years of its rule. The TMC government in the state has taken initiatives like building rural toilets, spreading rural connectivity, and introducing schemes like *SabujSath*^{xii} and *Kanyashree*^{xiii} which have gained immense rural popularity.

In the 2011 elections, the communist party was defeated but the ideology of the Left has survived. Mamata Banerjee, over the period of 5 years, has nurtured an image of being pro-poor, the core part of which is her land policy. The party came to power at the backdrop of rural discontent with the Left Front government's initiative of acquisition of farmland for industry, a fact that it has not forgotten in 5 years, because of which Mamata Banerjee scrapped the state's Special Economic Zone policy and resisted pressure to repeal the Land Ceiling Act. In fact, the first thing the party did after coming to power in 2011 was to return the land acquired for Tata Motors project back to the farmers.

In both the cases of gaining electoral support, it can be outlined that both parties enjoyed supremacy, with the political inclination to be a pro-poor party, and tried to win over the masses through their respective initiatives. The Left Front government took a step toward industrialization for which it was appreciated in the past, riding high on its electoral victory following its new policy of

economic growth, but let go of its base which was the people itself. The top-to-bottom approach failed, as the people were accustomed to a bottom-up approach, which was indeed the strongest ideologies the Left Front government followed. Latching onto their mistake, the TMC proved the Left to be anti-poor and managed to take its place with the same Leftist ideology the communist party had used in the past to gain its electoral base.

Notes

- ⁱ A *mouza* is a specific land area in which there can be one or more settlements, and is used for land revenue administration.
- ⁱⁱ Filed by Mr Atmaram Saraogi of International Centre Calcutta. In an interview with the author gave a copy of the response to the author.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Published in Economic and Political Weekly on May 25, 2013.
- ^{iv} A veteran Marxist-leader and currently has been elected as the Mayor of Siliguri Municipal Corporation. He was elected to the west Bengal state assembly as CPI(M) candidate in 1991, 1996 and 2006. He was defeated in the 2011 assembly election by TMC candidate after the Singur Incidence.
- ^v With the author dated: March 17, 2016.
- ^{vi} West Bengal State General Secretary of AITUC
- ^{vii} Assistant Professor, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata and a former CPI (M) Party member.
- ^{viii} Laid that the laws placed under Ninth Schedule after April 24, 1973, shall be open to challenge in court if they violated fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 14, 19, 20 and 21 of the Constitution.
- ^{ix} The first amendment to the Indian Constitution added the Ninth Schedule, to address judicial decisions and pronouncements especially about the chapter on fundamental rights.
- ^x Associated with IMSE, a social activist and organizing committee member of the International Peoples Tribunal on Eviction of peasants and violation of human rights in Singur and other areas in West Bengal.
- ^{xi} Director of MANT, a grass root organization working with rural population to sensitize and generate awareness regarding various social issues.
- ^{xii} A scheme to distribute cycles to girl students from classes 9 to 12.
- ^{xiii} Scholarship scheme for economically disadvantaged girls. The scholarship consists of an annual stipend of Rs 750 and a one-time payment of Rs 25,000 if the students continues their studies up the age of 18 – a measure aimed at preventing girls from dropping out and lowering the rates of child marriage.

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