

‘Land Grab’ by the Government: From Local to Global and Back

ABHIJIT GUHA^{†‡}

*Flat No. 3, 4th Floor, Sagarika Apartment,
R/20, Dak Bungalow Road, Saratpally,
Midnapore 721101, West Bengal
Email: abhijitguhavanthro@rediffmail.com*

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ABSTRACT: In the current social science literature ‘land grab’ is used as a catch-all phrase to refer to large scale commercial land transactions between countries involving transnational corporations for the production of food, biofuels and timber. Under this broader context, I use the term land grab in this paper to refer to expropriation of land by a domestic government with the help of the eminent domain of state for profit making private companies towards non-agricultural uses in the West Bengal state of India. An attempt is made to construct the ethnography of land grab in West Bengal. In this description, field data are juxtaposed with archival sources and author’s personal experiences on the issue of reforming a colonial law, which was in vogue in India till early 2013. The findings of the ethnography revealed wide differences between the policymakers and the people towards development through land expropriation.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists, owing to their disciplinary tradition have studied the endangerment of tribal populations, particularly hunter-gatherers and pastoralists in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Gradually, anthropologists have paid attention to the study of peasantry in the local and the global contexts (Roseberry, 1988:161-85). In most of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America barring some exceptions (like Japan, China and Brazil) globalization is also a mocking combination of technological advancement and archaic laws (Cernea and Mathur, 2008). In India, the colonial *Land Acquisition Act* (1894) provided for the acquisition of private land for the installation of various development projects for monetary compensation only (Guha, 2004:4620-4623). In West Bengal, where a pro-peasant

Left Front Government (hereafter LFG) began its career through distribution of land to the landless by post Independence land reform laws, gradually became more interested in acquiring land (including agricultural land) for big industrial projects pursuant to the *Land Acquisition Act* (1894), particularly after the liberalization policy adopted by the Central government. The LFG did not show much interest to protect small peasants affected by acquisition by adopting a pro-peasant rehabilitation policy (Guha, 2004; 2007a & b). The Leninist slogan ‘Land to the tillers’ was transformed by the Bengal communists into ‘Agriculture is our foundation, industry our future’, and it was advanced by the Left Front before the Assembly elections of 2006. (<http://cpim.org/content/thirty-years-west-bengal-left-front-govt> accessed on 14.02.2015 by the author from the Google).

Background

During the mid-1990s three students of the Department of Anthropology at Vidyasagar

[†] Formerly Professor of Anthropology
at Vidyasagar University, Midnapore 721102
[‡] Former Senior Fellow, ICSSR, at Institute of
Development Studies, Kolkata 700064

University¹ went on fieldwork for their Masters' dissertations in a village named Paschim Amba, only eight kilometers from the Midnapore railway station. They selected a hamlet inhabited by the Koras² and started measuring human bodies and collected data on family, marriage and kinship following the standard anthropological methodology. In one usual afternoon in the Department, whilst discussing the colourful Kora marriage ceremony, a student remarked, *'The colour and pomp of Kora marriage will soon go away since their lands are being taken over for a big pig iron industry of the Tatas.'* (Italics mine).

The remark of the student was significant for me. So, on one Sunday morning in 1995, I landed in Paschim Amba village where I first met a peasant leader named Trilochan Rana who was then leading a militant movement against the acquisition of agricultural land for private industries by the state government. In Trilochan Rana's house, I met a good number of peasants hailing from Amba, Mahespur, Kantapal, Gokulpur, Baharapat, Shyamraipur and other villages of the area. These peasants narrated, the gloomy story of how their lands have been taken away for the industries and also depicted how they were trying to protest against this kind of anti-peasant policy suddenly adopted by the Left Government in the wake of liberalization in India. Their leader, Mr. Rana, admitted that he was a former Naxalite³, and took refuge under the Congress party⁴ to organize this peasant movement. This incident had aroused my interest in the study of land acquisition.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The methodology of this research involved both anthropological fieldwork in the villages and collection of archival materials from the land acquisition office of the district and West Bengal State Assembly records. My personal encounters as an invited expert with the members of the Indian Parliament were also used to understand the views of the policy makers in this paper. Under these facts and circumstances, the methodology adopted in this study maybe regarded as a kind of multi-sited ethnographic research (Gellner, 2012; Marcus, 1995). This study was not confined to some specific villages as it was being routinely carried out in traditional anthropological village studies in India. The holistic perspective taken

up in this research did not end in the villages but moved beyond them into the files, notes, and gazette notifications at the Land Acquisition Department of the District Administration and also to the West Bengal Assembly Proceedings (Guha, 2007:58-72). At the initial stage, household surveys of the families were done who lost their agricultural land by the governmental acquisition through which I have collected quantitative data on the amount of land lost and compensation money received as well as on the manner of the utilization of the compensation money by the land losers. The field research was conducted in a participatory manner, in which I became an intellectual resource person of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) helping them in drafting memoranda, publishing news articles in the local dailies, organizing a seminar and a deputation to the District Magistrate by a human rights organization on the adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts of land acquisition in the locality. My active participation for the cause of the displaced persons helped me to earn the trust and confidence of the affected persons. The IDPs from the very beginning gave me unanimous consent to write on the acquisition and the movements they were carrying out against the land grab. My postgraduate students who were already trained in anthropological fieldwork helped me to collect data for the field survey with whom I have later published articles on our findings in the journals and they worked for their own academic improvement without any monetary payment. The households were selected in a non-random manner sometime by using the snowball sampling technique.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Facing Policymakers

I was sitting in front of about 20 Members of Parliament (MP) from different parts of the country at the Parliament Library building, New Delhi, India on 17 June 2008; a nervous feeling was felt by me having been invited as an expert to give suggestions on upcoming reforms for the century old Land Acquisition Act of India

The Deputy Chairman began the discussion by asking me to highlight the major points which I recommended to insert in the proposed bill. I then

talked at length trying to convince the MPs about the aspects which were neglected in the bill. I emphasized on the recognition of local self governments while getting consent of the affected people for land acquisition, protection of food security at the household level and avoidance of agricultural land from the scope of land acquisition for private profit making industries. The Deputy Chairman with a smiling face reacted by saying that I have raised certain 'basic issues and philosophy' behind the Act and there was no dispute on the idea, which I mentioned but the question was, one could not avoid land expropriation since private companies were already purchasing huge chunks of land in the rural areas of the country. It was clear to me that the standing committee may not be interested in increasing the role of local governments, household level food security and all other local issues which I had been observing as a field anthropologist in cases of acquisition of huge chunks of fertile farmland in Medinipur villages where the farmers did not agree to sell their land to the big industrialists. In the rest of my discussion with the members of the Standing Committee, I kept on emphasizing putting the people first through local governments, and it appeared that the point was not viewed seriously by the elected members of the Parliament, although they advised me quite politely to send the suggestions in writing. There ended my encounter with the policymakers. I will now go back to the story of my engagement with the actual scenario of land grab by the government which I observed and also described ethnographically with active participation in my research and popular articles since 1995.

PEASANT MOVEMENT AGAINST LAND GRAB

Journeying through the Archives

The protests launched by the landowning peasants of the Kharagpur region against land acquisition took many forms, even though these did not last long maintaining the same intensity. The movement reached its peak from the later part of 1995 up to April 1996 during which the farmers even went to the extent of adopting violent means. The fieldwork for this study also began during the period. My entry in the field during this time of turmoil was quite

significant in terms of the type of data collected as well as the nature of my participation with the peasant movement. The active participants of the movement provided me with the list of affected peasant households in different villages and discussed about the rationale behind their demand and I could also observe their protest in the field. All these gave me ample opportunity to collect data on the i) chronology of the movement; ii) peasant perception towards the administration, iii) government's land acquisition policy, and iv) the political dynamics of the movement. Action oriented and participatory type of field research helped me to build up a new kind of relationship with the leaders of the movement wherein the peasants were also looking into the research outputs as they were being published in the local and national level newspapers in the form of news items, popular articles and letters. I will now summarize some of my findings along with the data sources which led me to construct the ethnography of land grab in West Bengal.

The household surveys and case studies of the families who have lost all or most of their agricultural land owing to the establishment of industries revealed the disempowerment of the peasantry under the rule of the democratically elected communist led left front government in West Bengal. Interestingly, this government championed the cause of the poorest section of the peasantry through a pro-people land reform policy (Guha, 2013). Both land reforms, which involve giving land to the landless and land acquisition, which dispossesses the peasants have to be executed by the district level Land and Land Reforms Department. This Department and its Land Acquisition section have to keep records of all documents related to land acquisition. The typical anthropological definition of 'field' did not include this kind of arena within it. The village studies in India rarely taken into account the Land and Land Records Department of the District Administration in order to understand the relationship between the state and the people at the grassroots. When I had taken up the study of the displacement of the peasants in Kharagpur villages, I realised that the phenomena of displacement could not be viewed in isolation from land acquisition. The displacement of peasants (not from their homes but from their agricultural land) took

place through the acquisition of land which happened to be a legal and administrative process that mediated between the people and the government. The documents of the Land Acquisition Department and the officers who executed the acquisition provided a rich source of data on the government-people interface.

HOW THE POLICY MAKERS MAKE POLICIES

Narratives from the State Legislative Assembly

From the District Land Acquisition Department, I moved up and unlike a typical ethnographer, towards the nerve centre of policymaking in West Bengal which is the State Legislative Assembly. Published records of Assembly proceedings were consulted on the specific subject of land acquisition since Independence in West Bengal. The Assembly Proceedings contained rich data in the form of debates and questions on land acquisition, displacement and rehabilitation among the Ministers and elected members belonging to various political parties. These narratives also contained qualitative and quantitative information on displacement in various districts of West Bengal since Independence up to mid-1990s.

The Assembly Proceedings also gave me an idea about the common themes that dominated the attitudes and actions of the policymakers towards land acquisition by the government for development projects. The radical and class oriented approach of the elected members belonging to the left parties towards land acquisition whenever they were in the opposition was one of the main themes that was revealed from this narrative. The questions and replies on various aspects of land acquisition in West Bengal Assembly followed a pattern that did not change much over the years. The questions revolved around compensation and rehabilitation. The elected members seemed to be more concerned with the deprivation of the land losers owing to the non-payment of compensation. With only one notable exception, there was no occasion when the policymakers raised questions on the justification of acquiring agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. There was also a virtual absence of discussion in the Assembly on the adverse effects of land acquisition on land reforms (West Bengal Assembly Proceedings, 1956-1994). In

a state, which claimed to have made remarkable progress in the distribution of land to the landless, it was really surprising not to find any member of a political party saying something on this vital problem relating to social and economic justice (Guha, 2007a).

BACK TO FIELD

Area and the People

The villages of my study area come under the administrative jurisdiction of Kharagpur-I block (it is the lowest administrative unit) of present Paschim Medinipur district. The Kharagpur-I block is situated in the western part of the district and is bounded in the north by the *Kasai* river. On the west and the south of the block lies the Jhargram sub-division while the Kharagpur township is located in the east. Although the two major townships of the district are situated almost in the vicinity of this block, it is chiefly an agricultural area with few patches of *Sal* (*shorea robusta*) forest. The area is characterized by vast open cultivable lands interspersed with village settlements connected by unmetalled roads.

According to a survey conducted by Block Development Office in 1997-98 the block has an area of 201 sq km or 27,979.21 hectares within which 18,500 hectares are under cultivation (66.12 percent). The same survey also found that out of the total cultivated area at about 6,905 hectares are under more than one crop which turns out to be 37.32 percent of the cultivated land of the block. The total population of the block is 1, 21,685 of which the males outnumber the females (male 62,314 and female 59,364), and there are 22,666 scheduled castes (18.62 percent) and 29,974 (24.63 percent) belong to the scheduled tribes. Among the scheduled castes, the females (11,683) outnumber the males (10,983) while within the scheduled tribe population the sex-ratio is in favour of the males (15,528 males and 14,448 females). The population density of the block turns out to be a little more than 605 persons per sq km while the average household size is slightly above 5 persons. The district statistical handbook, which is based on 1991 Census data, however differs from the survey conducted by the Kharagpur-I Block Development Office. According to 1991 Census figures the total population of the block had been recorded as 1, 21,659 while the area of the block was 281.94 sq

km and this gave a population density of 432 persons per sq km with 268 mouzas of which 225 were inhabited (District Statistical Handbook, Medinipur 1998).

Dependence of the Villagers on Agriculture

The name of the village which has been studied specifically is Gokulpur (J.L. No.120)⁵ and it is a multiethnic farming village. The village is situated at about 7 km from the Medinipur town which was the District Headquarters of erstwhile Medinipur under the Kalaikunda Gram Panchayat (the lowest tier of the elected local self government). This village is located very near to the river Kasai on the east and in the west lie the south-eastern railway track which runs between Medinipur and Kharagpur railway stations.

On the east of Gokulpur, lies the village Borkola. At the south side of this village, there are Chunpara and Nimpura. In the west and north lie the villages Amba and Ajobpur respectively. Except Chunpara all the other villages that surround Gokulpur are agricultural villages in which most of the inhabitants depend on agriculture and agriculture related economic pursuits. In Gokulpur too, the majority of the villagers are depended on the cultivation of paddy and various kinds of vegetables.

There are mainly two types of land in Gokulpur. They are termed as '*Jal Jami*' and '*Kala Jami*' in local parlance. The villagers call those lands as '*Jal Jami*' which are low lying and hold water during the rainy season while the '*kala Jami*' is located near the house sites and at higher elevations than the '*Jal Jami*'. In the rainy season, people cultivate mainly paddy in the '*Jal Jami*'. On the other hand, '*Kala Jami*' is used for vegetable cultivation, in the winter season. In Gokulpur, 48.26 percent land belongs to the category '*jal*' out of the total amount of land under cultivation. This has been calculated from the data collected by our household census survey (Majumder & Guha, 2008:121-133).

LAND ACQUISITION FOR TATA METALIKS

Tata Metaliks is a heavy industry, which was established within the jurisdiction of the Kalaikunda Gram panchayat (under which our village Gokulpur belonged) during 1992. This is a pig-iron manufacturing plant which was found to produce about 290 tonnes of pig-iron per day in 1995- 96. After

the establishment of Tata Metaliks, the Kalaikunda gram panchayat built up a metal road on the western side connecting the plant with the national high way 6 in a place named Sahachawk. The south-eastern railway station line runs on the eastern side of the industry. The Kharagpur railway station is only about 5 kilometres and the Medinipur district headquarters is 7 kilometres from this place. In this connection we can recall that in his answer to a question on 1.6.1992 on the West Bengal Legislative Assembly the land and Land Reforms Minister mentioned that 217.23 acres land was acquired for the Tata Metaliks (Guha, 2007: 85).

The land acquired for the pig-iron industry belonged to "*jal soem*" class according to the system of classification made by the Land and Land Reforms Department. The possessions on these lands were given to the company on different dates in the month of August 1991 and declaration notifications were published from November 1991 to January 1992. The Land Acquisition Department approved a rate of ¹ 20,686 per acre. The cases of Land acquisition for Tata Metaliks have shown that the Government of West Bengal desired a quick acquisition of land for the company and that is why Act-II (West Bengal Land Requisition and Acquisition Act, 1948) was employed for the said purpose (*Ibid* p. 87).

The area lies on the bank of the river *Kasai* which is the largest river of the erstwhile Medinipur district. Cultivation of paddy (staple food of the district) in the villages under study depends primary upon rainfall and no systematic irrigation facilities have yet been developed by the government. The villagers residing on the south-eastern bank of the river cultivate a variety of vegetables on the land adjoining their homesteads ('*Kala Jami*') owing to a good supply of groundwater tapped through traditional dug wells. But just west of the south eastern Railway track the groundwater level is not very congenial for cultivation of vegetables. The main agricultural activity on this side of the railway track is rain fed paddy cultivation for about four to six months of the year. Land for the two big private industries had been acquired by the government on this side during 1991-96.

How a Peasant Lives after the Acquisition

Phanibhusan Patra is a middle aged man who inherited

7.20 acres fertile land from his father, of which 3.80 acres was paddy land and 3.40 acres of land was used for vegetable cultivation. Out of his 7.20 acres' 2.80 acres of his paddy fields had been acquired for Tata Metaliks. He belongs to Sadgop caste and was an active participant in the movement against land acquisition. He saved the compensation money in the bank. He thinks that his one acre of paddy land and 3.40 acres of vegetable land are blessing for him, because these land has not yet been acquired. He cultivates paddy, potato, onion, tomato, cauliflower etc. and sells them in the market. His son reads in class V and the daughter reads in class VIII (Majumder, 2007).

TABLE 1

Pre-acquisition and post-acquisition agricultural landholding of the land loser Families in the village

Size category of landholdings in acres	Before acquisition	Meanhouse hold size	After acquisition	Meanhouse hold size
Landless	“	“	5 (5.05)	3.60
d" 0.5	10 (10.10)	1.90	28 (28.28)	4.21
0.5 – 1.5	38 (38.38)	3.97	39 (39.39)	6.21
1.5 – 2.5	23 (23.23)	6.80	19 (19.19)	5.16
2.5 – 3.5	17 (17.17)	7.80	03 (03.03)	9.66
3.5 – 4.5	04 (4.04)	8.20	03 (03.03)	9.33
4.5 – 5.0	“	“	1 (01.01)	14.00
5.0 +	07 (7.07)	9.40	1 (01.01)	11.00
Total	99	5.63	99	5.63

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 1 shows pre-acquisition and post-acquisition agricultural land holding scenario of the land loser families in Gokulpur. After land acquisition, 5 families out of 99 became landless which constitutes 5.05 percent of the total land loser families. The families having less than 0.5 acres of land dramatically increased from 10 (10.10%) to 28 (28.28%) after land acquisition. It was noticed that even after land acquisition the number of families having 0.5-1.5 acres of land increased from 38 (38.38%) to 39 (39.39%). But the families having 1.5-2.5 acres of land decreased from 23 (23.23%) to 19 (19.19%). Similarly a considerable decline was noticed in the number of families having 2.5 acres to more than 5.0 acres of land; the number of families decreased from 28 (28.28%) to 8 (8.08%) after acquisition. On the other hand, the number of households within the size category 2.5-5.0+ acres declined from 6.53 to 4 only.

From the above analysis we can infer that there was a steep decline in the amount of paddy cultivation land which consequently brought a decrease in the

production of paddy too. On the other hand, the decrease in amount of paddy land and paddy production led to an increase in the non-agricultural activities and loss of household level food security.

Food Security of a Peasant Family after the Land Grab

Murali Santra is a land loser Sadgop farmer. He inherited 8.60 acre fertile land from his father. He used to till the land with his family members and got 20,000-25,000 kg paddy per year. He cultivated different traditional varieties of paddy, such as Rupsal, Patnai, Sitasal, Jota which were usually planted in the rainy season. During the other times of the year the land remained uncultivated owing to shortage of water. The paddy yielded in this land was used to feed his family and if there was any surplus then he sold it in the market. He came to know about acquisition of the land from a notice, which came from land acquisition office of Midnapore. After receiving the notice he attended meetings but never submitted any objection in writing. After a short period of time like other farmers of Gokulpur, he agreed to give away his land with the hope that a member of his family will get a permanent job in the industry. He got a compensation Rs. 22,000/- for his 1.00 acre land (located in the Amba mouza) which was acquired for the Tata metaliks company. He saved this compensation money in the bank. His family is now undergoing through an economic as well as psychological stress. The land, which he possesses, now cannot supply food for his family throughout the year. Now he has to purchase paddy from the market for two months of the year. After the acquisition of his land he bought two ploughs and a pair of bullocks and a shallow tube well. Since the acquisition he did not take any loan from the bank, but received some economic assistance from his relatives. He also sells vegetable grown in his homestead land. He emphatically stated that the most adverse and immediate effect of land acquisition in his family was the scarcity of food and fodder for the cattle (Majumder, 2007).

One of the most adverse and direct effect of land acquisition became clear to us when we collected data on the household food security of the land loser families of Gokulpur. We have made an attempt to demonstrate the household food insecurity caused by land acquisition in terms of the dependence of villagers on the purchase of the staple food crop from the market. From our field observations and interviews

we have learnt that almost all the farmers of Gokulpur used to consume the paddy they grow in their field. We have not come across any farmer who sold their paddy in the market. Purchasing rice for consumption is viewed by the peasant families of this region as derogatory and particularly among the Sodgops⁶ is regarded as a dishonorable act for a *chasi* (peasant). Owning cultivable land is seen to be quite prestigious for the peasant families of this area. A good farmer in this area is one who can feed his family with the paddy grown in his field throughout the year. A popular maxim in this area which we collected during fieldwork runs like the following: '*Arthe maan / Khote dhan*/. Freely translated it means: '*Money gives prestige/ Fertilisers yield paddy*.' In almost all our conversations the members of the land loser families always expressed their hopelessness whenever they had to talk about the number of months in which they purchased rice from the market for domestic consumption.

TABLE 2

Changing pattern of dependence on staple food (paddy) in the market among land loser families

Months	Number of the families	
	Pre-acquisition period	Post-acquisition period
0	28 (56)	45 (45.45)
1-4	22 (44)	11 (11.11)
5-8	"	31 (31.31)
9-12	"	12 (12.12)
Total	50 (100)	99 (100)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

Let us now look at the Table 2. But before we analyze the table, we have to mention an important point. The table shows a larger number of families in the post- acquisition period. This may be owing to the fact that quite a good number of families in the pre-acquisition period have broken into smaller families owing to the process of size diminution which happens over time among peasant families; land acquisition might have quickened the process of family breakdown but we have not enquired into this phenomena since that requires a larger sample size and control and treatment group comparison.

Returning to our original point, we find that in the pre- acquisition period 56 percent of the total number of the cultivator families was self-sufficient in terms of domestic paddy consumption while this percentage declined to 45.45 percent in post acquisition period. Furthermore, in the pre-acquisition

period there was no family who purchased rice for more than 5 months in a year. But in the post acquisition period we find 43.43 percent families who have to purchase rice for 5-12 months of the year. We can therefore, safely conclude that acquisition of rain fed, monocrop land has eroded the domestic food security of the majority of landloser families in Gokulpur 15 years after the land take over for the Tata Metaliks (Guha, 2013).

RESISTANCE AND BARGAINS MADE BY THE PEASANTS

The protests launched by the landowning farmers of the Gokulpur-Amba (two of our study villages) against land acquisition took many forms, even though these did not last for a long period as it happened recently in Singur in the Hooghly district of West Bengal (Guha, 2007). Several peasants took up their objections against land acquisition under Section 5A of the Land Acquisition Act during December 1995. A Government report dated 21.06.96 vividly recorded the objections and described in detail how the latter were overruled by the District Collector.

The objections submitted by 342 land losers contained the following points: i) The acquisition of agricultural land would affect the farmers seriously by throwing them out of employment, ii) the land losers will not get compensation at the rate they expect, and iii) the proposed acquisition is against public interest and is beyond the purview of the Act. It is interesting to observe how the concerned officials of the Land Acquisition Department overruled all the objections raised by the farmers. Before rejecting the objections, the officials, however, recognized the severity and magnitude of the acquisition. To quote from the report: "It is a fact that since large quantum of land is being acquired and the people chiefly subsist on agriculture many people will be seriously affected in earning their livelihood and avocation" (Departmental Report, 1996).

But this was the only sentence in the whole report which upheld the interests of the peasants. The rest of the 3-page report was devoted to justify the acquisition through the elaboration of some arguments. The arguments of the officials centered around the low agricultural yield of the lands which

are monocrop in nature. Moreover the report also mentioned about the merits of the location of the land, which provided important infrastructure facilities for the industry like nearby railway line and the national highway. It is learnt from the report that during the hearing of the objections the petitioners could not “specify their individual difficulty in parting with the land” although the same report said that “most of the objectors submitted that they have no objection if employment is assured to them, in the company in favour of whom acquisition is being done.” It is not clear from the report why the authors of the same could not understand the nature of “individual difficulty” in parting with the land which is their main source of livelihood. Three points raised in the report are quite significant and shows the insensitive way of dealing with such an action on the part of the Government which was going to have a severe impact on the subsistence pattern of a group of rural cultivators in a monocrop region. Firstly, at one place the report mentioned: “It is worthwhile to point out that objections have been received only from 342 landowners for the acquisition of 526.71 acre which will affect at least 3000 landowners, if not more.” It seems the official position rested on the logic that as the overwhelming majority of farmers would not face any difficulty (*at least there was no record of objection under the Land Acquisition Act*) so there was no need to record any objection against this acquisition. Secondly, after citing the locational advantages of the land, the officials overruled objections regarding the question of earning a livelihood by saying that the proposal had been approved both by the screening committee and by the state after considering all aspects. Incidentally, the screening committee for the approval of any project comprises the *Sabhadhipati* of the panchayat samity (the second tier of the statutory local self-government) and the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the locality. It was obvious at that time that these people’s representatives who were members of political parties of the LFG would not object a proposal which had *already been approved* by the cabinet and the concerned ministries of their own Government. The temporal order of consultation and approvals appear important. Thirdly, the report dealt with the point ‘job for land’ simply by saying that the Land Acquisition Act does not provide any

relief except compensation. But the Government may take up the matter with the company particularly for those farmers who would become landless and would be devoid of any source of earning a livelihood. After having overruled all the objections, the procedure for land acquisition made headway.

Beside recording objections within the legal framework of the Land Acquisition Act, the farmers of this area also took recourse to extra-legal means to fight against the acquisition of their agricultural land.

Two interesting incidents may be mentioned in this regard which would throw some light on the reasons behind the popularity of this movement among the farmers. The first incident took place in the month of May 1995 when Trilochan Rana organised a good number of peasants to put a deputation to the Tata Metaliks Company authorities demanding some compensation for the damage caused by movement of trucks carrying goods for the company over unacquired agricultural fields (there was no crop in the fields at that time) of those farmers. The trucks damaged the dykes of the fields (*ails*) and the soil. Under the pressure of the peasants the company had to pay compensation in kind to 75 peasant families in presence of the *pradhan* (elected head of the lowest tier, i.e. gram panchayat of the statutory local self-government) of Kalaikunda GP. Some amount of fertiliser was given to those peasants whose lands were damaged.

In the second incident Trilochan Rana put a deputation to the district administration about the damage caused to the unacquired agricultural fields of some peasants for putting pillars to demarcate acquired lands for Century Textiles Company in Kantapal, Mollachak and other adjoining villages. Those cement pillars were fixed by digging at about 4 sq ft of land to a depth of 3-4 ft and became permanent structures right on the agricultural fields of the peasants whose lands were not acquired. These pillars served as the boundary of the acquired land for CTIL. About 24-25 such pillars were constructed in early 1996. The peasants argued that cultivation of fields over a much wider area around those pillars was not possible owing to physical obstruction (Guha, 2007a).

The district administration had to agree with this demand of the peasants and arranged for payment of ¹ 420/- as monetary compensation to those families

affected by the construction of those pillars. This compensation payment continued for 2 years but with the decline of the movement the administration discontinued this compensation.

Both these incidents reveal that under the pressure of an intelligent and organized peasant movement the company authority as well as the Land Acquisition Department had arranged compensation for peasant families having no provision under the existing legal and administrative framework.

Without getting support from any opposition party and facing stiff resistance from the ruling left parties and lacking a coherent organization, this localized peasant movement against land acquisition gradually lost its intensity. The land losers also made an attempt to organize themselves by refusing to accept compensation money for a very brief period under the leadership of a few local leaders but this effort too did not last long and the movement finally lost steam in the Kalaikunda region.

CONCLUSION

This article began with a description of how the members of Parliament in India looked at the problem of land expropriation and found how in the opinion of policy makers land grab was viewed as inevitable under the market forces. Rest of the description narrated how the author as an anthropologist became involved in the ethnography of land grab and movements against it at Medinipur through the fieldwork in the village and also by going into the archives of the government. It was revealed that unlike the members of the Parliament, the peasants did not give away their lands under the market forces. They put up viable resistances, made bargains with the state and finally surrendered to the state power.

I will end my ethnography with an anecdote from the field, which made a nice contrast with what the MPs at New Delhi implicitly communicated to me.

The event occurred near Kantapal village from where the huge chunk of land acquired for Century Textiles could be seen. The author with his students was engaged in a discussion with the locals about the condition of the small dykes ('*ail*' in the local parlance) raised by the farmers to demarcate the plots of land possessed by different owners within the

acquired area. Since no cultivation could be taken up for three successive seasons in the whole area it had turned into a grazing field and the dykes had started to break down. Two consequences of this situation followed. Firstly, farmers who still had unacquired land in the vicinity of the acquired area were facing difficulties in protecting their agricultural plots from the grazing cattle. Earlier there were other farmers who also shared the responsibility of driving out the cattle from the fields during agricultural season. Driving out the intruding cattle in paddy fields is always a collective affair in rural areas. After acquisition, the numbers of farmers have decreased in this area. Moreover, cows and buffaloes of the milkmen of the urban areas of Kharagpur town have also ventured to exploit this huge chunk of land.

Secondly, after the breakdown of dykes the poorer people of the area who used to collect a good quantity of small fishes of various types from those agricultural plots as a common property resource, are not getting any fish in those plots. In the discussion three to four persons including one middle-aged woman and old man were present. All of them were denouncing the Government for the takeover of the fertile agricultural land for Century Company which had not yet been established. When the question arose that if people of this area had started to dislike the ruling party and the Government, then why did the majority of the people in the area vote for the ruling parties at the panchayat and assembly elections every year? The reply which came from the old man which is reproduced here verbatim: '*Look babu, (in Bengali language 'babu' means middle class gentlemen) we poor people always have to ride on some animal almost blindfolded. After the ride for sometime we start to realize whether it is a tiger or a bullock. But very often we have to twist its tail in order to keep it in proper direction.*' (translated from Bengali by the author). The joke of the old man symbolized the gap between aspiration of the helpless local peasants in West Bengal and the distant policymakers at New Delhi.

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NOTES

1. Vidyasagar University is one of the small rural universities of West Bengal state of India which was established in the early eighties with the mission of conducting interdisciplinary research which would cater to the needs of the underprivileged people of the rural areas, particularly of the district of erstwhile Midnapore where it was located.
2. Kora is small tribal community in West Bengal who are found to be engaged in agricultural occupations in the rural areas of the state. (Mitra, 1951).
3. Naxalite movement was a peasant uprising against the oppression of big landlords which arose in West Bengal in the late sixties. The Naxalites believed in the ideology of Mao-tse-Tung and the Chinese Communist Party.
4. The largest anti-communist and centrist political party of India which has been defeated in the 2014 Parliamentary election in India by the rightist Bharatiya Janata Party coalition known as National Democratic Alliance (NDA).
5. In India every village as an administrative and revenue collection unit is given a jurisdiction list number or J.L. No. Note shift.
6. *Sadgops* are one of the clean castes of the Hindu order who have taken to agriculture and claim themselves to be superior to milkmen or Goala caste (Mitra 1951). In Paschim Medinipur district, the *Sadgops* earn their livelihood as enterprising agriculturists who are most often found to occupy the fertile riverine plains of the district. They are also found in urban areas in the service sector.

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