Gujarat's Gain and Bengal's Loss? "Development," Land Acquisition in India and the Tata Nano Project: A Comparison of Singur with Sanand

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Paper presented at the
International Conference on
Global Land Grabbing
6-8 April 2011

Organised by the **Land Deals Politics Initiative** (LDPI) in collaboration with the **Journal of Peasant Studies** and hosted by the **Future Agricultures Consortium** at the **Institute of Development Studies**, University of Sussex

GUJARAT'S GAIN AND BENGAL'S LOSS?
"DEVELOPMENT," LAND ACQUISITION IN INDIA AND THE TATA NANO PROJECT:
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(Draft of paper prepared for the international conference on land-grabbing issues, organized by the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK, from 6 to 8 April, 2011)

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Abstract

It is necessary to understand the political economy and recent political history of West Bengal to understand the "success" of the unwilling farmers in Singur who were protesting against the Tata Nano project. It is necessary to do the same for Gujarat in order to understand why there has been no similar resistance in Sanand. Accordingly, this paper has three main objectives. The first objective is to present a nuanced comparative analysis of two subnational political regimes and associated civil societies: that of Gujarat and of West Bengal. The argument is that though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Gujarat and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front government in West Bengal are ideologically located at the opposite ends of the political spectrum in India, there are certain similarities in the political regimes, specifically in their definition of the model of "development" to be pursued and the means to strive for this kind of "development", and in their means of achieving hegemony (however fragile it may be) in their respective regional civil societies. The second objective of this paper is to provide a portrait of the unwilling peasants of Singur, who were against the Tata Nano factory in West Bengal. I will also discuss why there is no such resistance (as yet!) in Sanand (Gujarat) where the factory has relocated. Singur's unwilling peasants were able to craft an alliance with urban middle-class intellectuals, regional and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and opposition political parties (the most important of which was the Trinamool Congress or TMC). This alliance was successful in forcing Tata Motors out of Singur. In Sanand, the situation is different. The third objective of the paper is to analyze and critique the role of an important national non-governmental organization, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), which has played a significant role in opposing so-called development projects in rural areas of Gujarat and West Bengal over the few decades. In Gujarat, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (or NBA), led by Medha Patkar, the Gandhian social activist, opposed the dam on river Narmada. NBA is one of the founding members of the NAPM. In West Bengal, NAPM and

Patkar have opposed the Tata Nano project. By returning to the basic political economic questions of land acquisition and land rights and by supporting the TMC, NBA/NAPM has contributed to the success of the Singur resistance (which was not the case with the Narmada struggle, due to a host of reasons). However, whether the Singur resistance is able to bring to power a political party which can address alternative models of development, i.e. alternatives to corporate-led industrialization, remains to be seen.

Introduction

The mainstream economist's argument is to view industrialization and the related process of urbanization as synonymous with development, a view that is shared by many non-expert citizens of developing countries such as India. In this context, car-ownership[1] is seen by many Indian policymaker and members of the elite classes as a necessity in the twenty-first century, not as a luxury. The latest major news from Indian automobile engineering is that the Tata Motors Limited has begun manufacturing and selling the world's least-expensive production car, the Nano, which is supposed to be an emblem of Gandhian engineering or frugal engineering.

The merits and demerits of the Tata Nano as a car for Indian conditions are not the subject of this paper, however. What is of interest to the development sociologist is that land acquisition for one of the Tata Nano factories was not a smooth political process. Initially, in 2006, the Tata Motors Company had decided to set up a Nano car-manufacturing factory in Singur (West Bengal). But the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front government of West Bengal (WB) was unable to acquire land for that project, because land was to be acquired from farmers, and several unwilling Singur peasants (in alliance with opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations, and middle-class urban intellectuals) opposed this "farmland grab." As a result of strong opposition from Singur peasants, Tata Motors Company relocated its project to Sanand (Gujarat) in 2008. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of Gujarat was able to acquire land for the Nano project without generating much opposition from the people. The first Nano car rolled out of the Sanand factory in June 2010.

With few exceptions, the Indian media as well as members of the elite class and middle class, have viewed this entire episode as "Gujarat's gain" and "Bengal's loss." The relocation of the Tata Nano factory is seen as a major problem for the image of the Left Front government of WB, and Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Conversely, the alacrity with which Tata Motors Company shifted to Gujarat is seen as a feather in the cap of the BJP and Chief Minister Narendra Modi. West Bengal, ruled continuously by a coalition of leftist parties since 1977, has been commonly viewed as hostile to capitalist industrialization and the Singur episode has

[1] There is considerable debate about what kind of cars Indians should manufacture and drive, even among those convinced about the necessity for India's industrialization and the need to extend car-ownership to many families. During the pre-liberalization days (1947-circa 1990), there were few automobile models available in India: Hindustan Motor's Ambassador and another model, Premier Padmini, come to mind. In the 1980s, the Maruti Company achieved great success with the launch of its more compact Maruti Suzuki brand. As a consequence of economic liberalization since 1991, Indians now own and drive a variety of car models, including imported ones.

cemented that view. Gujarat, ruled almost continuously by the right-wing BJP since 1995, is commonly seen as friendly to capitalist industrialization, and the Tata Nano plant relocation to Sanand has led to Gujarat emerging as an auto hub as several other car manufacturers are rushing to set up factories in that state. To mend the situation and restore the Left Front's image, Bhattacharjee recently said that "Singur will not stop the industrialization of West Bengal."

In sharp contrast to the Indian media, elites and middle classes, the activist circles in India and elsewhere have hailed the Singur resistance as a "victory for peasants" and they rue the lack of similar level of resistance in Sanand. Prominent Indian activists, such as Praful Bidwai, have been quick to scold the Tatas for shifting the factory to Modi's Gujarat, which is perceived by many as a "laboratory" for "Hindutva-style development." Let me note here that as a long-standing industrial house, the Tatas generally enjoy a good reputation in India for taking care of their employees as well as the natural environment. However, Bidwai accused the Tatas of endorsing Modi's style of political functioning and BJP's divisive politics by shifting the factory to Gujarat.

This episode of two sites sheds some light on several issues related to development and democracy in India—a country with the most heterogeneous social fabric in the world. Through an iterative process of literature search and fieldwork (mostly formal audio-recorded and informal interviews conducted in both states), I have been able to reach some understanding of the phenomenon under study, which I will share with you. Please treat this paper as a work in progress, as I am going to do further fieldwork in summer 2011.

The resistance in Singur was closely connected with the resistance in Nandigram (another site in West Bengal) against a chemical Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Resistance in both sites was coeval. Let me note that for reasons of space, I have not covered the Nandigram resistance in this paper. Another caveat is that while the acquisition and transfer of farmland by the Gujarat government for the Nano factory did not create much controversy, there is an ongoing resistance to the Gujarat government's plans to acquire farmland (adjacent to the Nano factory) for an industrial estate. As of this writing, the resistance in Sanand has picked up steam but I am not going to explore that resistance in this paper. Time will tell us what level of success the unwilling Sanand peasants will achieve in their opposition to the state's plans.

A third caveat is that I have dealt with the roles of only four of the major categories of actors in the controversy over the process of land acquisition: the unwilling landowners, the state, the Tata Motors Company, and one major non-governmental organization (NGO). For reasons of space, I have left out the roles of the willing landowners, other NGOs, middle-class intellectuals, and opposition political parties. I have also chosen not to focus on sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers.

After this introduction, I will briefly note the political economy of Indian development since 1991. This will be followed by a discussion of the political economy of development in Gujarat versus that in Bengal. I will delineate the rise of a new model of development--corporate-led industrialization—in these two states. Next, I will discuss the rise of new leaders with charismatic elements in both states: "Vikas Purush Modi" and "Brand Buddha," their

success in selling their vision of corporate-led industrialization as the only model of development, and the accompanying depoliticization of development in these states. I will focus on the lack of effective democracy in the rural areas of both states. This will help to set the stage for a discussion of why Singur resistance was successful and why there was no such resistance in Sanand in case of the Tata Nano project. Next, I will analyze and critique the role of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)/ National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). I will compare its role during the Narmada struggle in Gujarat with that in the Singur resistance in West Bengal, paying attention to the question of representation. I will conclude the paper with a brief discussion of what Singur presages for the future of Indian democracy and development.

Political Economy of India: "Keep Development Above Politics"

The Indian government faced a balance of payments crisis in July 1991, and the World Bank and IMF began to apply neoliberal economic prescriptions to the Indian economic policy. These policies were welcomed by an important section of Indian industrialists and they involved subtle shifts in the developmentalist rhetoric of the state. As Whitehead (2007) notes, the Indian state adopted the neoliberal development paradigm which relied on the market to create growth, exalted individual autonomy and private property. The neoliberal paradigm is also basically anti-statist, seeing the state as creating imperfections in factor markets. Hence, welfarist rhetoric was given up and those state policies that "ameliorated the rigors of accumulation" were largely cast overboard. The state was reformed into an organization that aimed to attract capital investment, both domestic and foreign. Additionally, neoliberal policymakers promoted NGOs and civil-society organizations (CSOs) in the place of the state to create a "social cushion" for those who were hit hardest by the shock therapies of neoliberalism.

A point that should be made about the nature of the development model adopted in the post-1991 era was that the state did not encourage debate and discussion about the development since road to development was assumed to have become apolitical. Development was equated with industrialization and with economic growth, and the road to these two goals was clear to those who had proper vision. Those who lacked such vision and created roadblocks on the path to progress (by raising uncomfortable questions in scholarly or policy circles or through social movements or activism) were marginalized. What does "development" mean? Development for whom? At what cost? Attempts were made by the state to shunt such questions to the side as it reiterated the message that "development was to be above politics."

Another change that accompanied the onset of economic reforms was the sharp decentralization of economic decision-making, from the central government to the subnational or state government. The central government in India had enjoyed dominant control of economic policymaking prior to 1991, but that changed 1991 onwards. Apart from economic reforms, several independent transformations have occurred in India's democracy over the years that have reinforced the growing subnational economic authority (Murali 2010). These developments (such as the start of coalition governments at the center, the marked regionalization of Indian politics, and the noticeable rise in the political participation of lower castes in the populous

northern states) all led to a very different environment where the subnational states began to flex their political muscles.

Inter-state growth disparities did exist during the first three decades after independence in 1947, but they became more pronounced in the post-1991 phase. Many scholars have suggested that the proximate cause of regional growth differentials after 1991 is diverging private investment levels across states (e.g. Ahluwalia 2000; Besley et al. 2007; Kohli, 2006; Murali 2010; Subramanian 2008). For example, Gujarat has emerged as the star player and the most attractive destination for private industrial investment for the period 1991 to 2007 (Sinha 2004; Murali 2010). West Bengal, which was a dominant industrial state in the 1950s and 1960s, has attracted far less investment than Gujarat during that same period. Consequently, Gujarat is perceived as a high-growth, more industrialized state, while West Bengal (WB) is seen as a medium-growth state in industrial decline. Many view Gujarat as the most developed state in India (ruled by the politically conservative BJP continuously since 1998) while WB is viewed as a less developed state (ruled by the Left Front continuously since 1977).

As Murali (2010) comments, the competition for private capital may require some state governments to privilege business groups over other sections of the electorate (e.g. peasants) at least in the short run. Few issues demonstrate such competing pressures in India better than land acquisition by the government for private industrial use. Now, land is a state subject according to the Constitution of India, so acquiring or not acquiring land is the prerogative of the state government. With scant regard for political labels, land is being acquired by the different subnational state governments in a competitive race to the bottom to win the favor of various corporations (Bhaduri 2007). The central government fully supports the state governments in this endeavor, both morally and legally. State governments are acquiring land for mining, for location of industries, for information technology parks, for large estates, and for SEZs, under the "eminent domain" clause which allows the state to override private property right in land in "public interest." Bhaduri (2007) rightly states that land, being the largest primary source of livelihood in the agrarian economy, becomes the most obvious case of forcible transfer of resources from common people to the private corporations. Landowners are displaced, and livelihoods are destroyed, all in the name of industrialization and the "common good."

Modi's Gujarat: Reincarnation of the Right-- "Hindutva" Plus "Corporate-led Industrial Development"

Gujarat, as a state, was created on May 1, 1960 out of the erstwhile Bombay State. For a long time, the Indian National Congress (Congress, in short) was in power in Gujarat, thanks to its strategy of creating a KHAM alliance. Apart from that comment for reasons of space, I will not discuss the political economy of development in Gujarat during the "Congress" phase 1960 to 1991. I will focus on the last twenty years, the phase during which the BJP has emerged as a major political player in the state. In fact, Gujarat is the only state in India where the BJP has continuously secured over 50 percent of the total seats in the last six Parliamentary elections, that is since 1991 (Shah, 2011).

The BJP in Gujarat is currently supported by a troika of powerful upper castes (who also constitute the upper classes): the Patidars, the Baniyas and the Brahmins. The major opposition party, which is the Congress, is supported by members of the poor classes and lower castes. However, the Congress is unable to translate that social base into electoral victory due to a number of reasons. The BJP has been in power as the ruling party since 1995 almost continuously, beating the anti-incumbency drive noted in other parts of India. How did the BJP manage to achieve this feat? At first, Hindutva (i.e. Hindu-chauvinist) rhetoric proved useful in garnering the support of the people, but as Shah (2011) notes, Hindutva rhetoric of the 1990s had diminishing return in the twenty-first century. By 2004, as a shrewd politician committed to Hindutva politics, Narendra Modi (chief minister of Gujarat continuously since 2001) might have realized the constraints of the chief minister's office to translate Hindutva ideology into the democratic system. Groups such as the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal could be effective in raising an emotional pitch but were less useful in sustaining people's support during election time. As Shah (2011) concludes, to nurture Hindutva, "development" had to be embraced.

The question was: what kind of "development" was to be pursued? There was only one game in town circa 2004: neoliberal corporate-led development. Of course, the BJP had talked about development prior to 2004. It should be noted that the BJP had won power in Gujarat Assembly Elections in 1995 not only with the plank of Hindutva but also with a vow to establish "bhaya, bhukh ane bhrashtachar mukta (free from fear, hunger, and corruption) Gujarat"." The ideologues of Hindutva—Golwalkar, Sudarshan, et al, have repeatedly asserted that the present era was the period of transformation based on Hindutva philosophy. Shah (2011) comments that Modi shares the ideologues' faith that Hindutva would lead the world in the twenty-first century. Though the concept of Hindutva remains ambiguous, except for the dominance of Hindus, economic policy of the BJP has changed over time to be in harmony with neoliberal capitalism.

"Vikas Purush Modi" and the Depoliticization of Development in Gujarat

The roots of Gujarati subnationalism go back at least two decades: to Chimanbhai Patel, Chief Minister in the late 1980s, who reinvented regional identity politics with a slogan "naya (new) Gujarat." The Gujarati middle class was skillfully mobilized by Chiman Patel on the Narmada dam issue. Patel and his supporters aggressively attacked all those who opposed the project as "enemy" of Gujarat and its "development."[2] Modi followed Patel's footsteps and to quote Shah (2011), "made a cocktail combining Hindutva and the dam as 'development.'"

[2] The Narmada dam issue polarized the state between those who were assumed to be rooting for Gujarat's development and those who were against it. Chiman Patel successfully constructed the "outsiders" ("binGujaratis") such as Medha Patkar and several other NAPM activists as being anti-Gujarat. Interestingly, though Patkar, and several other non-Bengali activists such as Anuradha Talwar, were active in the Singur resistance, there was no such construction by the Left Front of "anti-Bengal outsiders opposed to the state's development." This could be because the urban middle-class intelligentsia and the news media of Kolkata strongly supported TMC, Patkar and Talwar. Such support from urban middle-class and intellectuals and news media of Gujarat was missing during the Narmada struggle.

It was in the 1960s that the construction of the controversial Narmada Dam was conceived and planned. After much opposition and many delays, the first phase was completed in 2000. During the drought in 2001, Modi's predecessor government decided to pump water directly from the Narmada and distribute it through 2700 km long pipelines to needy villages and towns (Shah 2011). The target date for completion was 2006, but this target was not reached. Only 21.2 percent of the project was operative in 2008. Modi took credit for the Narmada Dam and projected himself as the upholder of "good governance." In Kutch, he told a large gathering, "For the last fifty years, people were being fooled with empty talk. Your dreams were realized only when we brought Narmada water to your doorstep" (quoted in Shah 2011).

Shah (2011) notes that Gujarat BJP is fast becoming a regional party under Modi's leadership. The regional identity and issues that Modi has articulated during the last five years had given the BJP an edge over the Congress in the last elections. Most of the voters who were satisfied with the performance of the UPA government at the center nevertheless voted for the BJP in the 2009 Parliamentary elections because of the perceived performance of the Modi government. Shah (2011) comments that the Gujarat Congress at present is not able to match Modi's electoral strategies and planning. Congress in Gujarat is faction ridden, lacks alternative vision, and commitment to deliver good governance in favor of the vast majority.

The 2009 Parliamentary elections in Gujarat were mainly Modi-centric, according to Shah (2011). Modi had mastery over publicity-propaganda idioms and techniques to project that he was the only savior of Gujarat. According to Modi, all that the state has achieved is because of his commitments and unique approach to good governance. In contrast, his predecessors including the earlier BJP governments, were responsible for all the shortfalls and problems. Shah (2011) writes about Modi, "His skill in selling dreams and slogans to mesmerize the people is unparalleled in contemporary Indian politics." During his rule in the last few years, he has very skillfully dominated his party and civil society. At present, Modi and the mainstream civil society are hand in glove. Congress also shares a corporate-led paradigm of development that according to them is apolitical in nature.

The 2009 election advertisement of the BJP was "No dicussion, vikas (development) is the mantra of BJP. Rastravad (nationalism) is BJP's mahamantra." The dominant segment of civil society in Gujarat had no dispute with an apolitical notion of development. They found that a "new Modi," the "vikas purush" (man for development) had emerged (Shah 2011). According to them, Modi was transformed from "saffron to software brand." His powerpoint presentations, video-conferences, e-governance, broadband telephony, "karmayoga" impressed them. According to Modi himself, "Hindutva and development are not contradictory. How can Ram Rajya be anti-development? Ram Rajya is all about providing opportunity for those who need help. What should be on the nation's top drawer is the resolve to redeem Gandhi's pledge to wipe out tear from every eye. And that is Ram Rajya. Only pseudo-secularists argue that Hindutva and development cannot coexist. It only exposes their perverted thinking" (quoted in Shah 2011).

Commenting on the hype of development in Gujarat, Shah (2011) writes that in 2005, while facing revolt within the party, Modi announced in a public meeting, "What has not been done in the last forty-five years, we will do in the next forty-five months. "Later, on the eve of the Assembly elections, he asserted, "It is our misfortune that…after Gujarat came into existence in 1960, no one thought about the basic infrastructure for development. Much of my effort has gone into filling up that gap…I have tried to bring in real democracy."

In 2004, the influential magazine *India Today* gave Modi the recognition of being the "No. 1 Chief Minister" and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation ranked Gujarat No. 1 in Economic Freedom Index. The government, business houses and pro-Modi NGOs placed hoardings with Modi's picture throughout the state, congratulating him for this achievement. Gujarat No. 1 was the central thrust of the Assembly as well as the Parliamentary elections. Shah (2011) notes that a tiny section of civil society actors questions the nature of "development' which favors the rich and urban middle classes. A few highlighted Gujarat's low rank in health and education. It was demonstrated that the investments in industries had not increased employment. The conditions of the workers in the unorganized sector had been worsening. But majority of the middle class intelligentsia were not interested in such dimensions of "development." Modi's charismatic personality, flamboyant style combined with rhetoric of Hindutva, led the middle classes to vote for the BJP. They did not grudge the performance of the UPA government at the center, but regional considerations led them to vote for the BJP.

"Samaras" Villages in Gujarat: Lack of Effective Democracy in Rural Areas

Effective democracy requires both a strong, competent government and a robust civil society. According to various accounts, the government in Gujarat is relatively strong and competent. What about civil society, especially rural areas? Shah (2011) notes that when Modi began his innings in 2001, Congress was regaining its ground in local governments with its social engineering formula—alliance of deprived castes and classes. To counter this, within fifteen days of assuming office, Modi introduced "samaras" i.e. social assimilation village scheme to discourage village panchayat elections. The Congress could not oppose the scheme as the party initially formed it when it was in office in 1991, though with different nomenclature. The "samaras" villages were assumed to have "no discussions, no disputes, but unanimous decisions taken harmoniously." The government used financial incentives and administrative machinery to build pressure on villages to become "samaras." Pro-BJP NGOs were also "roped in to spread the samaras message and to help achieve the targets." With all these efforts, 26 percent of the villages opted to be "samaras' in 2001. The number increased to 29 percent in 2006. Shah (2011) comments that though socioeconomic and political conflict continues to simmer not only in the non-"samaras" but also in the "samaras" villages, the message for apolitical development gets reiterated.

Gujarat and West Bengal Compared

Gujarat's political regime and West Bengal's political regime are similar in many ways.

First, both ruling parties (BJP in Gujarat and CPM in West Bengal) are cadre-based parties, which share a reputation for having more discplined "party machines" than other Indian political parties. Second, the incumbent regimes in both states have been in power for a relatively long time[3], given the history of anti-incumbency votes in India, and thus both governments have enjoyed the benefits of long-term political stability, given the Indian context. Third, in keeping with demands of realpolitik in the age of globalization, they have they reincarnated themselves by marrying their respective anti-capitalist[4] ideologies with "corporate-led industrialization" model of development. Fourth, according to this new-age model, "development" is assumed to be above politics in both states and the ruling party does not encourage dissent regarding the means of achieving "development" within its own camps or outside of it. Fifth, the rural areas of both states do not have many politically active village councils (panchayats) any more, which leads to lack of effective democracy. The ruling parties seek to establish cultural hegemony in the rural areas of their states, so that there is no real opposition or challenges to their visions of "development" and means of pursuing such "development." Sixth, both states are ruled by new, relatively young, charismatic leaders or chief ministers who have so far been successful in selling visions and images of "corporate-led industrial development" to their largely urban middle-class and elite followers. Fittingly, Narendra Modi has the moniker of "Vikas Purush" (man for development) and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has that of "Brand Buddha."[5] However, the hegemony established by both ruling parties in their respective civil societies (especially in rural areas) is fragile. This was exposed by the Singur and Nandigram resistances in West Bengal. There are also reports of mounting dissatisfaction among rural residents in Gujarat with the BJP, which is seen as catering to urban residents and business groups.

Bhattacharjee's West Bengal: Reincarnation of the Left --"Communism" plus "Corporate-Led Industrial Development"

In 1947, the state of Bengal was bifurcated into the erstwhile East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) and India's West Bengal. The Congress ruled West Bengal for several years in the post-1947 phase. For reasons for space, I won't discuss the 1947-1976 phase. In 1977, after a long period of tremendous political and social turmoil, the Left Front came to power in West

[3] The Left Front in West Bengal enjoys the distinction of being in power continuously since 1977, marking it as the longest –running democratically-elected communist regime in the world. During the period 1977-2011, West Bengal has seen only two chief ministers: Jyoti Basu (1977-2000) and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (2000 onwards). The BJP first came to power in Gujarat in 1995, and then has won every State Assembly election since 1998. Narenda Modi has been the Chief Minister of Gujarat continuously since 2001.

[4] The "communist" ideology of the CPM-led Left Front in anticapitalist is nature (though it may be argued by some that the Left Front has the "responsibility" of promoting industrial capitalism in a backward agrarian country such as India in order to usher in socialism in a later era). I would argue that the "Hindutva" ideology of the BJP and allied organizations was similarly anti-capitalist (or at least hostile to international capital and globalization) until recently. There is still a "swadeshi" (of one's own country) sentiment among many BJP members and supporters.

[5] The style of functioning of both Narendra Modi and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee bring to mind that of Chandrababu Naidu, who was chief minister of Andhra Pradesh from 1995 to 2004 (the longest serving chief minister of that state). Known for his e-governance, shopping malls, and IT sector development, Naidu was hailed as the most progressive politician of his times. However, he lost the 2004 elections because of his neglect of the rural sector.

Bengal. In the 1980s, the Left Front of West Bengal got its share of international recognition for its policies of land redistribution, sharecropper registration, and empowerment of the rural poor through panchayats (local councils). Such measures earned the Left Front a solid support based in the countryside during its first term in office, which was from 1977 to 1982. As Basu (2007) notes, land reform remained essential to progressive, leftist economic change in a developing country, and credit for bringing about the first (and perhaps only) effectual land reform program in India was justifiably claimed by the Left Front. These were measures which had the goal of bringing about a capitalist transformation of the agricultural sector, while, at the same time, curtailing its exploitative consequences. Basu (2007) comments that the Left Front also followed a policy of "class conciliation" by which it struck an alliance with the rich and middle peasants while declaring the "jotedars" (big landholders) to be "class enemies' in order to further broaden its rural support base.

The central government carried out neoliberal reforms in 1991, and the Left Front in West Bengal, then under Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, adopted a new industrial policy that markedly diverted from the stated official position of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The octogenarian chief minister Jyoti Basu also went on several trips abroad in search of foreign investment. Partly as a result of these efforts, West Bengal secured a higher share of aggregate foreign investment proposals than the economic powerhouse Gujarat state during the years 1991-1997, although it lagged substantially behind Gujarat when it came to actual investment (Sinha 2004).

"Brand Buddha" and Depoliticization of Development in West Bengal

In 2000, Jyoti Basu left office and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee took over as the new chief minister of West Bengal. Bhattacharjee continued the pro-industry policies of his predecessor. After taking charge of the state in 2000, "Brand Buddha" unveiled a fresh and dynamic vision of development with a distinct capitalistic tinge (Basu 2007). Private investment, including foreign capital, was aggressively courted with the goal of expanding employment opportunities, and investors were reassured with promises of infrastructural improvements, industrial peace, and administrative revamping. It should be noted that Jyoti Basu's new industrial policies had foundered in the 1990s because of resistance from within the Left Front as well as conflict between the party and its affiliated trade union. In contrast, Bhattacharjee was able to implement his economic reforms more successfully by managing the party and gaining the support of its members[6].

Basu (2007) notes that the most convincing evidence that "Brand Buddha" had broken fresh ground could be seen in the response of several captains of the Indian industry. Some of the

[6] Bhattacharjee has taken great pains to repeatedly underscore the differences between the Left Front's approach and the neoliberal model of development embraced by the central government in New Delhi (Basu 2007). For example, Bhattacharjee stressed that the Left Front sought foreign investment on its own terms as opposed to the investor's terms, and that it favored foreign direct investment only when it brought in advanced technology and boosted both production capacity and employment.

foremost industrialists of India, including Ratan Tata, Azim Premji, and Sanjiv Goenka, have showered compliments on the string of "confidence building measures" that Bhattacharjee has initiated over the past few years. The first congratulatory message Bhattacharjee reportedly received after the Left Front triumph in 2006 was from Ratan Tata. Bhattacharjee responded to these compliments by moving closer to Indian business interests that he felt could develop West Bengal's economy.

Lack of Effective Democracy in Rural West Bengal

If in Gujarat, the villages are fast becoming "samaras" villages where there is no debate over politics in the village councils (panchayats), many village councils in West Bengal are controlled by the ruling party. According to Chaudhuri (2011), the local council (panchayat) system as spearheaded by the Left Front to spread its tentacles to the remotest part of the rural areas became all "political panchayats" and totally centralized politically and administratively. What had helped the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) maintain its hegemonic dominance almost all over the state, was the policy of terrorization in most of the rural hinterland and distribution of largesse to the aspirant elite sections including government employees, trade unionists, rich peasants, and teachers of all categories. High-ranking government officials and police personnel were happy and tension free for the reason that the oppositions were to emasculated to challenge the CPM-led regime. Chaudhuri (2011) notes that "CPM controlled all aspects of life in the state." The Left Front had been enjoying the fruits of the social coalitions of the upper class, the middle class, the Scheduled Castes (SCs or Dalits), the Scheduled Tribes (STs or Adivasis), and above all, the Muslims, besides teachers, professionals, service holders, and business and small time industrial communities. The SCs, STs, and Muslim voters have been particularly important, they together constitute a majority in the state. Until the mid-1990s, the Left Front manipulated this social coalition in its favor. Though this social coalition began cracking in the mid-1990s, the major opposition parties for one reason or another, failed to exploit the situation. For example, the first United Progressive Alliance government at the center had to depend on the Left Front for Support[7].

However, during the Singur and Nandigram agitations, the Trinamool Congress was seeking to forge a broad-based alliance with the Singur Krishi Jami Raksha Committee (SKJRC), other smaller parties and a number of socio-political groups. This move was supported by an overwhelming number of Muslims and caste-based communities coalesced against the Left Front. It also sent a signal to the state Congress party about their future electoral survival in the state (Chaudhuri 2011). At last, the TMC and Congress coalition came into force. The 2009 Parliamentary election was really a watershed in the post-1977 electoral history of West Bengal, according to Chaudhuri (2011). The TMC and Congress coalition made electoral history for the

[7] The first United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government ruled at the Center from 2004 to 2009, and it was supported from the outside by the Left Front. The leader of the first UPA government was Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of the Indian National Congress (INC). Singh, then as the finance minister of the government of India, was the original architect of the neoliberal reforms that began in India in the early 1990s. The UPA won the elections again in 2009, and Singh continues to be the prime minister.

first time as the opposition won 27 seats including one for the BJP. The remarkable political stability of the Left Front coalition began crashing when "saving agricultural land and life movement" at Singur and Nandigram began gaining strength in the middle of 2006. Highlighting the importance of the Singur agitation to current politics in West Bengal, Chaudhuri (2011) notes, "Singur was the flash point of the ongoing politics of the opposition."

Singur: A Profile

Singur is in Hooghly district and is about 45 kilometers from Kolkata. The nearest railway stations are Singur, Kamarkundu and Madhusudanpur. The farmland earmarked for the Tata project stands alongside an arc of the Durgapur expressway near the Ratanpur crossing with National Highway 1. The six mouzas whose land falls under the Tata project site are Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Bajemelia, Khaser Bheri, Singher Bheri and Joymollar Bheri. They stand on the other side of the project site completing the expressway's arc into a circle (Sanhati Udyog 2006).

The area lies between the Damodar and Hooghly rivers, a tributary of the former (Kana nadi) and an irrigation canal constructed during the British period (Daibakh khal) flowing through it. About 80 percent of Singur's cultivable land falls under the notified DVC area. There are 5 deep tubewells and 27 minitibewells providing water for cultivation. About 50 households have power tillers.

The crops produced are mainly paddy (aman and boro varieties) and potato but jute and a variety of vegetables are also grown in the fields. There are five modern cold storage and a host of wholesalers' sheds (arat) in Ratanpur-Singur town. Landholdings in Singur are small with very few having more than 2 bighas. About 3500 farming households work their own fields and may be considered as poor or subsistence farmers. Among the sharecropping bargadars, 607 are registered and over 1200 are unregistered. There are also landless wage-earning laborers called "kishen" in local parlance.

Among the migrant workforce, about a thousand wage laborers called "garir kishen" arrive daily from Bardhaman, Bankura, and parts of Hooghly districts to earn their livelihoods from agricultural activities. About 800 laborers, mostly Adivasis from Jharkhand, are seasonal migrants who work the fields for six to eight months and earn just about enough to feed their families back home for the whole year. There are also several permanent migrant families who had come two or three decades ago and settled down in Singur.

A majority of non-farming households in Singur are employed in farming-related occupations. About 450-500 cycle-cart drivers transport crops and agricultural inputs to and from the fields, nearly 200 households are engaged in animal husbandry, and over 150 households are vegetable vendors in Howrah, Sealdah, Chuchura, and the two local markets. The cold storages in Ratanpur employ about 5000 laborers.

The acreage falling within the tract acquired by the WB government for the Tata project are: (all the figures are approximations and are based on calculations made by local people): Gopalnagar: 330 acres; Beraberi: 270 acres; Bajemelia: 110 acres; Khaser Bheri: 130 acres; Singher Bheri 37 acres; Joymollar Bheri 90 acres. In addition, about 65 acres, comprising two

bunds, land on which an ashram is located and land alongside Durgapur Expressway, had been vested (khas) from before. Two factories, a cold storage, and two petrol stations, constitute the rest of the 15 acres.

Competing Portraits of Singur's Unwilling Farmers

West Bengal has the highest population density of any state in the country. The Left Front's progressive policies of land reform and panchayati raj have had a positive impact on the lives of the villagers of this state since the late 1970s. But factors such as population increase, agricultural involution, and decreasing size of landholdings have created a situation where the farming households are no longer mainly dependent on cultivation as the main source of income.

997 acres were targeted for expropriation in Singur, and the owners of approximately 340 acres out of those 997 acres have refused to willingly hand over land, and they have not accepted the compensation offered by the state (Nielsen 2010). There exists no comprehensive sociological profile of these unwilling farmers, although one estimate (Bannerjee 2006) suggests that small and marginal farmers (owning no more than a few bighas[8]) constitute more than 50 percent of the local population. However, eighty percent of all landholding of West Bengal are of this size. The same source tells us that sharecroppers and landless laborers, who felt the impact of land acquisition indirectly, make up an additional 25 to 30 percent of the population (Bannerjee 2006).

There are two competing portraits of Singur's unwilling peasants: Mohanty (2007) views them as the "agrarian bourgeoisie" while others (e.g. Nielsen 2010) view them as small and marginal farmers, not as bourgeois. From my own conversations with peasants and others in West Bengal, I have reached the conclusion that the unwilling peasants of Singur are relatively prosperous compared to other peasants in surrounding areas, and they may be using modern varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides, as well as irrigation water, and they may have side-occupations, but that does not make them agrarian bourgeoisie. The Mahishya caste/community, which makes up the bulk of Singur's unwilling landowners, is certainly not comparable to the agrarian bourgeoisie Patidar[9] caste/community of Gujarat, as yet.

In the following sections, I will offer two partial surveys conducted by a team (Sanhati Udyog) and an individual researcher (Nielsen). The main points I wish to make by discussing these two surveys is that the unwilling[10] Singur farmers are (a) relatively affluent; (b) they do not wish to forgo the income they receive from agriculture; (c) they are not against industrialization

[8] In West Bengal, one bigha is equivalent to 0.33 acres.

[9] The Patidar caste/community of Gujarat is a land-owning caste, and they have turned to setting up industries in rural areas and urban areas as well. According to one estimate, the Patidars began the transformation to agrarian bourgeoisie about a hundred years ago. Many Patidars are also settled in distant countries, including the West, where they run different types of businesses (e.g. many Patidars or Patels run motels in the United States).

[10] It should be noted that there are several peasants in Singur willing to hand over their land to the government for the Tata Nano factory. I have not come across any complete sociological profile of these willing peasants, but the guess is that they came from landowning castes that use sharecroppers rather than cultivating the land themselves. The willing peasants have formed their own organization and have called for industrialization of Singur.

per se, but they did not wish to give up their farmland income; (d) they did not endorse Left Front's policy of converting farmland (multicrop land especially) to industrial use; (e) the question of whether they had any other interests in land (besides the income they received) or conceptions of land-use is not fully answered as yet. In my conversations with Singur's unwilling farmers, they referred to the land as "our mother who cannot be sold and bought"[11] but since I have not as yet undertaken a survey, I cannot tell whether these sentiments are widely shared.

Sanhati Udyog (2006) survey of Singur's Farmers

Sanhati Udyog interviewed 400 households in 2006, of which 335 were landholding households, and 65 were landless. They covered an acreage of 261.49 acres falling under the Tata project area. They report that the nature of land was multicropped (2-3 or 4-5 crops), only one respondent has given single-crop land. The land is irrigated, under notified DVC irrigation scheme, and all respondents use deep and mini-tubewells, except one.

The number of land holders willing to hand over or have already handed over land was 20; the acreage held by them in the notified area was 24.35 acres, and they were not willing to reveal the amount of compensation given by check. They gave the following reasons for giving up land: family pressure, other business, can't fight CPM and Tatas, single crop land.

The number of landholders unwilling to hand over land was 315 and the acreage they are not willing to he handed over was 237.19 acres. They cited the following reasons for not wanting to hand over land: what will we eat, forefathers' property, cash will not last, too many dependents, will wait till the last moment.

General observations by Sanhati Udyog (2006): Almost all of those interviewed, including those who have handed over their land, agreed that the land is fertile, well-irrigated and multi-crop producing. Despite rising input costs, Singur's farmers still want to stick to farming. Provision of seeds and fertilizers at subsidized rates have been withdrawn this season by the state government, and yet the Singur farmers are expecting to make a big profit from potato cultivation. Compensation is being offered to landholders, but not for even registered bargadars. In most cases where land has been handed over for the Tata project, the landowner has taken the checks sharing nothing with the sharecropper. The wage-earning farm-laborers living on the bund running through the land acquired for the Tatas will not only lose their livelihoods but also their homes. Every member of the household, including women and children, work in the fields. Singur farmers are relatively well-off. There is no case of malnutrition or starvation death. Every child goes to school. Every home has electricity and a majority have telephones and television. Singur is a peaceful area. There has been no case of theft or similar crime in the past decade. Singur villagers never shut their doors and any

[11] The Trinamool Congress came up with the very successful slogan of "Ma, Mati, Manush" (mother, soil/land, human being) during the 2009 Parliamentary elections in West Bengal. While it is clear that many of the urban intellectuals, NGO activists, and politicians focused on the non-economic aspects of farmland and farming, it is not clear that their sentiments were shared by the Singur farmers themselves.

communal tension is unknown. There are several clubs in each village indicating a well-knit community life.

Nielsen (2010)'s Survey of A Neighborhood

Nielsen (2010)'s own survey from a village para (neighborhood) in Singur, where opposition to the land acquisition was widespread and where more than 85 percent of the villagers had refused the compensation, confirmed the impression that most households did own only marginal or small lots. In the surveyed para, each land owning family had lost an average of 1.865 bigha because of the land acquisition. This had rendered 17.6 percent of the para's households completely landless, while the remaining households were left with an average of 0.593 bigha. Thus, even prior to the land acquisition, an average land owning family would have owned less than an acre of agricultural land. However, while some households depended almost exclusively on the cultivation of marginal plots for their livelihood, many did not as they had access to cash income from family members various employed. Thus, at the time Nielsen (2010) conducted his survey, only 28 percent of the para's male inhabitants reported being engaged in cultivation full-time, while as much as a third worked as either carpenters or jewellery workers. While some villagers had taken to these occupations as a consequence of land acquisition, it formed part of a deliberate income generating strategy for other families, whose agricultural plots were already, prior to the coming of the Tata factory, so small that one family member (with occasional assistance) could manage it alone. Clearly, agriculture would be incapable of providing a livelihood for future generations, and accordingly, many small and marginal farmers saw the emergence of more forms of non-agricultural employment opportunities in a positive light. This included not only unskilled, but also semi-skilled and skilled jobs; the para had a literacy rate of 88 percent (much above the state average), 25 per cent had passed class ten, and among, the younger generation, education was valued and eagerly pursued.

Unwilling Peasants and the Singur Resistance

Initially, news about the Tata factory coming to Singur was received with some enthusiasm. It was only when the details of the land acquisition became known that opposition really emerged (Nielsen 2010). Even then, in the early phases of the Singur movement, many peasants restricted themselves to demanding jobs for displaced farmers alongside cash compensation (Statesman, 2006).

When the details of the land acquisition became know, the SKJRC almost immediately went public and proved that upwards of 80 percent of the land targeted for expropriation—which the Left Front had claimed was overwhelmingly barren or monocrop land—was in fact multicrop (Nielsen 2010). In statements to the press, the SKJRC's president emphasized this fact and stressed that factories like the Tatas should not be allowed to come up on such fertile multicrop land. But he did not raise any opposition to the Tata factory as such, nor did he express any reservations about locating factories on less fertile monocrop land.

However, what landowners did not endorse was the policy of converting local agricultural land to industrial use. For landowners, non-agricultural jobs were a desired supplement to agriculture, not a substitute. For many, cultivation still constituted a safety net of subsistence production that they could fall back upon in times of distress, and as anthropologist Dayabati Roy (2007:3324) has observed, the people of Singur were quite aware of how industrial jobs are prone to downsizing. Accordingly, the best livelihood strategy from the farmers' point of view as to diversify income strategies, and not abandon cultivation for wage labor, which would merely replace one set of livelihood risks with another. The farmers' desire to have both agriculture and industry as available livelihood options was also reflected in the name they chose for their organization: the committee to 'save the farmland,' not the committee to oppose industry.

The farmers thus generally had no objection to the chief minister's vision of re-industrialization, nor did they protest strongly against allowing private capital and the market to play a significant role in this. They by and large welcomed the move towards industrialization, and many also endorsed the idea and merits of the Tata project per se. A number of farmers Nielsen (2010) interviewed in Singur also offered suggestions for alternative locations in the vicinity which they found more suitable for the factory. When Tata first threatened to abandon Singur altogether, some unwilling farmers protested that they wanted Tata to stay in Singur, provided they returned a portion of the land to its original owners. The farmers did not in principle endorse the idea of taking land from small and marginal farmers without their consent merely to gift it to multinational corporations; and they strongly believed that they should have been taken into confidence throughout the land acquisition process. But they tended to blame the Left Front for these malpractices, not the Tatas. From the unwilling farmers' point of view, the capitalist model of development was thus not an obvious target of criticism[12].

Even among those Singur farmers who refused to relinquish their land, the idea and merits of the Tata factory per se were not dismissed, and industrialization was seen in a positive light (Nielsen 2010: 165). Before the Tata factory project came Singur was not, in economic terms, a 'withering village,' but Nielsen (2010) believes it is nonetheless worthwhile recalling the argument Dipankar Gupta presented in an article with that title. Here Gupta argued that: "The family farm is no longer what it was earlier cut out to be. It cannot support the ambition to be where the bright lights are. Nor can family farms provide employment to landless youth in the villages. Therefore, no matter which way one looks at it, as owner cultivators or as landless laborers, the village is no longer a site where futures can be planned…rarely would a villager today want to be a farmer if given an opportunity elsewhere (Gupta 2005: 752).

[12] Nielsen (2010) notes that farmers even sometimes used the logic of the free market to critique the Left Front. In a genuinely free market, each farmer would have dealt directly with Tata Motors and would have been free to decide whether or not to sell and at what price. But as it were, the Left Front's intervention had distorted these mechanisms, and had deprived the peasants of their capacity to navigate as strategic market actors (Nielsen 2009: 458-459).

Whether out of ambition or necessity, many in Singur welcomed the idea of a factory. Their grudge was not primarily with the Left Front's policy of industrialization, but with the removal of agricultural land from the rural economic equation by way of expropriation (Nielsen 2010). This, they felt, did not offer the desired diversification of livelihood strategies, but merely replaced a set of familiar risks with a set of unfamiliar risks. Rather than being an outright protest against industrialization led by private capital, the farmers' protests stressed the importance of not undermining pre-existing livelihood strategies as part of the development process by completely replacing a regenerative resource (land) with a perishable one (money); they pointed out to the futility of providing non-agricultural employment opportunities without simultaneously enabling people to avail of these. The key issue at stake for most of Singur's unwilling farmers, as for many of the actors critical of the Left Front's policy on Singur, was not how to do away with the prevalent development model altogether, but how to be included in it so as to civilize it and make it more pro-people in nature (Nielsen 2010).

Left Front's and Tata Motors's Response to Singur Resistance

In his discussion of why the state targeted Singur (which is much less agrarian than the rest of West Bengal, with only 33 percent of its labor force employed in agriculture and a relatively better educated labor force) for land acquisition, Mohanty (2007) argues that there could be different reasons. First, it could be that Singur was the preferred choice of the Tata Group. Another reason as that there is very little fallow land available in West Bengal and any change in land use is going to necessitate acquisition of agricultural land. Mohanty (2007) gives a third reason: it may be that it was also politically expedient, given that Singur is an area dominated by the Trinamool Congress. Maybe the Left Front expected the rural people in Singur to resist land acquisition, and it is better that it be in Singur and the political battle be between the Trinamool combine and the Left Front, rather than elsewhere where the rural people might be part of a broad left coalition and then the political battle might have been fought within the Left Front. And if the Left Front wins the battle with the rural people in Singur and not too heavy a political price is paid, then the terms of future settlements and negotiations would have been set, and a signal sent to rural people elsewhere, irrespective of whether they are part of a broad left coalition of forces or not.

While the factory in Singur would create an estimated 10,000 jobs (2,000 in direct employment and 8,000 jobs indirectly) and would bring in investments worth INR 10 billion, it had great symbolic value in the view of Left Front as it was to be the first of a series of new industrial ventures which, in the words of the chief minister, would set in motion the other wheels of industrial progress in the state and would change the face of not only Singur but of the entire state (Nielsen 2010). In the wake of the announcement of the Singur project, criticism of and opposition to land acquisition soon surfaced. While the Left Front stuck to its argument that industrialization served a public purpose by generating employment, it also warned that no sensible government would sacrifice a project like the Tata Motors' one at this juncture, when it was trying so hard for industrialization. Without industrialization the entire economy of the state

would go to ruin, Nirupam Sen warned (Chattopadhyay, 2006). Both the Left Front and representatives of Tata Motors urged their opponents not to politicize the Singur issue. The Left Front declared its willingness to negotiate over practicalities and details—regarding compensation and rehabilitation—but refused to reconsider the basic tenets of its development model, namely rapid industrialization driven by private capital investments, which it felt was objectively correct (Nielsen 2010).

Mohanty (2007) argues that the Left Front government has been progressive in the design of the land acquisition program, it has been less than progressive, indeed verging on the undemocratic, in the implementation of this policy. He argues that this is no small matter, not only because of the Left Front's avowed espousal of democratic politics, but also because in a democratic polity, process is as important as the objective. Unfortunately by adopting a "my way or the highway" attitude, Mohanty (2007) notes that the government of West Bengal undermines an effort that perhaps only a progressive government can make.

If there were several unwilling farmers in Singur who were not opposed to industrialization in general and the Tata Nano project in particular, how can we explain the turn of events that took place by October 2008? The answer is that the political resistance took on a life of its own with the entry of prominent urban intellectuals such as Mahasweta Debi, activists such as Medha Patkar and Anuradha Talwar, and, most importantly, politicians such as Mamata Bannerjee of the Trinamool Congress. By October 2008, the political situation had evolved to the extent that the Tatas announced that they were going to leave Singur for another destination, citing concern for the safety of the factory personnel as the reason for their move.

Why No Peasant Resistance in Sanand?

On the surface, there are many similarities between Singur and Sanand. Like Singur, Sanand is close to a big city. Sanand is located about sixty kilometers from the financial and business capital and the largest city of Gujarat, Ahmedabad. Sanand is close to the railroad like Singur. Like Singur, Sanand is a relatively prosperous agricultural farmland area. It is a rural area where paddy, cotton, and other crops are cultivated. The natural scenery of Singur and Sanand are also not dissimilar, even though Gujarat is an arid state compared to verdant Bengal. When I visited Sanand in the monsoon season of July-August 2010, I found greenery everywhere. There were several low-lying areas covered with water, workers were working in wet paddy fields, cattle egrets and other kinds of birds were everywhere. Sanand town did appear to be more "developed" than Singur town, but the difference is not much. However, there was also a lot more construction work going on in Sanand, reflecting the rise in real estate prices in that region. The real estate boom has led to several housing developments in Sanand.

Around a century ago, the Anand Agriculture College (now University) acquired farmland in Chharodi village in Sanand taluka of Ahmedabad district. The Agriculture College set up a huge experimental farm there. In 2008, the Government of Gujarat acquired the land from the Anand Agriculture University and gave that land for the Tata Nano factory. Thus, the state government solved the problem by giving government-owned land to the Tata Nano

factory. The Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) has begun acquiring land to set up an industrial estate near the Nano plant for auxiliary units. Though there was initial opposition from farmers to the project, the GIDC reached out to them by offering compensation for their land that was much more than the market rate. For example, the state government is shelling out INR 9500 million as compensation to farmers from Bol village alone (Indian Express, 2010)[13]. In spite of such measures, there is some resistance by peasants to the GIDC's plans in Sanand.

Singur Resistance: the NAPM Response

In the course of the movement, the Singur farmers and peasants were brought into close contact with a number of urban civil society groups, NGOs and independent activists. While these had great sympathy for the farmers' struggle, many of them felt that the unwilling farmers' point of view rested on a logic that was short-sighted and lacked a larger frame of reference. Accordingly, the activists supporting the Singur movement saw it as their job to provide this larger frame. In doing so, they inscribed the movement into a much grander narrative that in more fundamental ways challenged core elements of the neoliberal model of development (Nielsen 2010).

As Nielsen (2010) notes, in case of the Singur controversy, the genuinely dissenting voices that questions core elements of the neoliberal model of development emanated largely from NGOs, activist groups and political organizations on the non-governmental left. There were many such groups acting in the Singur controversy: APDR, IMSE, PCFS, FIAN, and NAPM.

In this paper, I will establish three points about the NAPM[14]. First, unlike the Singur farmers, the NBA/NAPM has a radical critique of industrialization which illustrates both the continuity and the discontinuity in its ideology between the Narmada struggle years (1990s) and the Singur resistance (2006-2008). Second, the NAPM has made a "course correction" between 1990s and mid-2000s, returning to its original critique of capitalism and primitive accumulation of capital. Third, the NAPM has successfully aided the Singur resistance, and it has not had any problems with representation of Singur's unwilling farmers.

NBA/NAPM Critique of Neoliberal Development Model

I will now highlight the critique of industrialization and neoliberal development which has been advanced by social activist Medha Patkar and the group she is associated with—the

[13] The village has about 500 families, and a population of over 2,000, most of whom belong to Rajput, Bharwads (cattle breeder), Koli-Patel and Dalit communities. Almost 90 percent of the families in the village have benefitted from the project. The newspaper reporter noted that "the villagers are going easy and wise with their new-found wealth. Most of them are buying agricultural land in other villages and of course, spending some of it to buy new cars and houses."

[14] The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) was established in 1985 as an organization which represented the people who were to be displaced by the building of several dams on the Narmada river in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. It was the only major social/environmental movement in Gujarat during the 1990s. In 1992, the NBA and other NGOs formed the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM), a country-wide umbrella group of non-governmental organizations. Patkar is a founder of both the NBA and the NAPM>

National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM), because Patkar has been long active in Gujarat as well (as part of the NBA). The NAPM also targeted both the human and civil rights violations perpetrated in Singur, as well as the model of development that the Tata factory embodied (Nielsen 2010). For NAPM activists, the Singur scenario as yet another instance of development induced displacement, in significant respects comparable to that caused by the construction of large-scale dams elsewhere in India. Like the struggle against dams the Singur movement too was for the NAPM a struggle for land, livelihood, and life, and the 'development victims' fighting the land acquisition in Singur were thus 'new entrants to the battle field' against displacement (Patkar 2006). However, one difference between the 'older' forms of displacement and the 'newer' forms of displacement was that earlier projects were driven by the state, whereas newer (Singur) projects were driven by globalized private corporate capital. In the era of globalization, the Nehruvian development state—unlike when the Narmada Bachao Andolan emerged—had vacated the commanding heights of the economy. The NAPM had now accordingly targeted the forces of global capital. The entire venture in Singur, NAPM argued, was nothing but a sham to generate profit for private players. Behind the public façade of generating industrialization and 'development," the hidden agenda of Tata Motors and other corporate groups was to grab land, kill agriculture, and develop estates and luxuries in its place (NAPM 2008). The significance of the Singur controversy thus lay in the fact that it raised fundamental questions on the overall development programs pursued in India, and brought to light their larger ideological underpinnings, which undermined food security, destroyed communities, and widened the disparities between agriculture and corporate industry through undemocratic means (Patkar 2006; Patkar 2007). In contrast, the NAPM wanted an open and public debate about what development and industrialization could and should mean[15].

Course Correction of the NAPM: Back to Basics

I would argue that is important to notice the "course correction" that the NBA/NAPM has effected over the years. To do that, let us first discuss the NBA's analysis of the situation facing displaced people in the 1990s. As Whitehead (2007) notes, when the NBA decided in 1988 to oppose the SSP dam construction in Gujarat, on the grounds that they believed adequate compensation for oustees was impossible, they subtly shifted the terms of debate from a concern with land rights and just compensation to one focused on environmentally sustainable development. Whitehead (2007) critiques the organization for thus shifting the framework of analysis from the underlying social relations of capital, value and labor, to a thing, the dam, which itself became imbued with the powers to radically alter the fate of the Adivasis. One effect of this shift in discourse was that ecological concerns tended to take precedence over issues of land ownership, resource, and territorial control. Protest among displaced communities focused

[15] On its part, NAPM advocated a path of democratic and meaningful development through industrialization without affecting agricultural land and farming and working communities (Nielsen 2010). This could be achieved by re-opening the more than 50,000 closed factories that litter West Bengal or by using the land they occupied to set up new industries. Such new industries, NAPM argued, should generate employment, secure livelihoods and protect the environment.

on land titles and just resettlement and rehabilitation, but the transnational discourse on dams tended to emphasize their ecological destructiveness. It is not that the NBA ignored the issue of land resettlement, but the question of inadequate resettlement seemed at times to become a means rather than an end—a way to prove how destructive large dams, in fact, were.

Whitehead (2007) argues that despite its success in articulating the plight of the dispossessed in the Narmada Valley, the philosophy underlying neo-Gandhian resistance does not provide a critical understanding of accumulation by dispossession and its relation to large-scale dams and other capital-intensive technologies. This is because it does not frame accumulation within capitalist reproduction, but sees it as an outgrowth of technological development driven by excessive consumption. It therefore tends to equate "development" with "consumerist greed," and to espouse small-scale technologies and anti-consumerism as the answer. In Gramscian terms, neo-Gandhian critique achieves its identity mainly through a series of negations of neo-liberal policies and cultural values, rather than through understanding the underlying forms of capital accumulation that drive the expansion of neoliberal policies and state forms. It therefore fragments issues on the basis of destructiveness of a particular technology, rather than providing a common basis of critique for all those facing the accumulation of their lands, forests, water, and other common resources (Whitehead 2007).

I will argue that the Singur resistance makes it clear that the NBA/NAPM has now challenged the separation between state and economy, and also challenged the process of accumulation by dispossession upon which such a separation depends. They have broadened their analytical stance sufficiently to enable all those affected by accumulation by dispossession –whether by large dams or by industrial projects--to find a common voice and organizational platform. The relative political clout of the NBA/NAPM is considerably stronger, since it has given issue-based support to important opposition political parties such as the Trinamool Congress in case of the Singur resistance. Of course, the question is whether the party which wins power in the 2011 Assembly elections in West Bengal will be able to promote alternatives to corporate-led industrial development and/or just land acquisition for industrialization.

Narmada Struggle and Singur Resistance: Problems of Representation

In connection with the NBA, Whitehead (2007) notes that despite its espousal of participatory politics and consensual decision-making, an unfortunate aspect of the movement is that its primary spokespeople have been urban-based, middle class activists. It is generally urban activists who have organized and led demonstrations, given press interviews, negotiated with the World Bank, state, Indian and other governments, attended international seminars and conferences, and networked with international environmental organizations. Adivasis, in this struggle for their lands and livelihoods, did not largely represent themselves, they were represented. Whitehead (2007) points out that mobilization of Adivasis came to be focused on an anti-dam policy that conformed to a Western environmental discourse that had transnational legitimacy, while the issue of compensation and land rights became secondary. The image of "naturally conservationist" small-scale communities that were being destroyed by large scale

technologies had an obvious appeal for such a constituency. Whitehead (2007) argues that the tendency to exaggerate the primitivism and subsistence-orientation of hill communities was evident in conversations she had with NBA activists. An additional factor in the projection of Adivasis as "unmodern" and "naturally conservationist" may derive from the anti-consumerist ideology and lifestyle of the urban-based activists that derives from their Gandhian training and orientation. This includes not only a distinctive political philosophy of militant, non-violent civil disobedience, but also a cultural ethos based on satyagraha (truth-seeking), and a non-consumerist lifestyle. Whitehead (2007) notes that she often observed and admired the habitus of activists, their forms of dress and address, their sense of sacrifice and service, and their voluntary poverty that matched lives with ideals. Yet she also noted that this contrasted with the pragmatism that many Adivasis in the Valley exhibited. "If we thought we could be film stars and live in Juhu, then of course we would moved to Bombay. But there is nothing there for us. Without our land, we are nothing," was a sentiment she heard expressed in different ways and at different times during her stays in submerging villages.

In the case of the Singur resistance, I would argue that the problems of representation of the unwilling landowners and other constituents of the protest was much more muted because of the following factors. First, in contrast to the Adivasis of the Narmada Valley in the 1990s, the rural people of Singur in 2006-08 are more urbanized (Singur is only 45 kilometers away from the metropolis of Kolkata), more modernized, more literate, and they have enjoyed higher ritual status in Hindu society (the bulk of the Singur farmers are Mahishya, thus they are incorporated into the Hindu caste system, unlike the Adivasis). Thus, their participation in the modern economy and Indian society is far more than in the case of the Adivasis of Narmada Valley in the 1990s. Second, major political parties (such as the BJP and Congress) kept their distance from the NBA in the Narmada Valley during the 1990s, but this was not the case in Singur in 2006-07. The Trinamool Congress had a local presence in educated individuals such as Becharam Manna, and these individuals played a large role in the resistance and such individuals had a major role in leading the resistance. As Jones (2009) has shown, the landowners and other protesters argued that they had a major role in the resistance, not any political party such as Trinamool Congress. Third, it is possible that the urban 'bhadralok'[16] intelligentsia of Kolkata and all-India groups such as the NAPM had learned their lessons from earlier movements (such as the one in Narmada Valley), and they consciously chose not to be the sole 'global face' of the resistance in Singur. In my conversations with Adivasis in the Narmada Valley (during the 1990s) and the Singur residents (in 2010), what I have found is a largely pragmatic approach towards questions of land acquisition and land rights. Of course, there are some Narmada Adivasis and Singur

[16] The "bhadralok" of West Bengal is composed of the Bengali Hindu upper castes of Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas. These three castes also constitute the bulk of the upper classes of West Bengal. The term "bhadralok" means "gentle" or "cultured." In many ways, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM is supposed to represent and reflect the interests of the non-landowning "bhadralok" groups, as opposed to the landowning "abhadra" groups. A discussion of why the CPM evolved as the "bhadralok" party, why it lost its rural base at least in Singur and Nandigram, and whether the TMC truly represents the "abhadra" groups is beyond the scope of this paper.

residents who primarily value land for non-material interests, and these sentiments resonate well with those of many activists from urban areas.

Summary and Conclusions

Since 1991, the Indian government has adopted the neoliberal model of development. Land is a state subject under the Constitution of India, and the central government has been legally and morally supporting the state governments which wish to acquire land for "public purposes" (which can include land for private industrial capital). Neoliberal globalization has unleashed a "free-for-all" competition among political parties of different colors for capital investment. The state governments are being forced to cater to the demands of the industrialists at the expense of other sectors of the electorate (e.g. peasants whose farmland is being acquired), at least in the short run.

Though CPM-led Left Front government in West Bengal could not be more different in terms of ideology than the ruling BJP government in Gujarat, both regimes have changed their earlier visions of "development" to be more in line with that of the neoliberal model. This change has been especially noticeable in the last decade or so, with the emergence of new, relatively young, charismatic leaders (chief ministers) in both states. Both chief ministers had inherited a seemingly compliant civil society from their predecessors which would allow them to strive for their model of "development" without any opposition. Achievement of hegemony by the ruling party depends partly on the kind of leadership they provide to civil society, and the arrival of "Vikas Purush Modi" and "Brand Buddha" on the scene suggested that both ruling parties and their chief ministers were ready to carry the masses with them in pursuit of their goal of corporate-led industrialization. However, the fragile hegemony upon which Left Front rule rested in West Bengal was exposed during the Singur-Nandigram resistances. The unwilling farmers of Singur were able to create an alliance with national and regional NGOs, middle-class urban intellectuals and opposition political parties such at the Trinamool Congress. This successful political alliance created a situation where the Tata Motors Company was forced to leave the state in 2008, and it also reaped dividends during the 2009 Parliamentary elections in West Bengal.

Though the BJP in Gujarat has yet not faced any sustained agitation over land acquisition issues, the main opposition party (the Congress) is wedded to the neoliberal model of development, and the urban civil society is hand in glove with the BJP, it is possible that some parts of the equation will change in the future, especially as there are reports of rural dissatisfaction with the BJP.

During the Narmada struggle, the NBA was painted as "anti-Gujarat" and 'anti-development" by then-Chief Minister Chiman Patel of Gujarat. Current Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat has made a cocktail out of the concepts of Narmada"dam" and "development," and he has thus succeeded in keeping rural and urban opposition to his plans for development to a minimum. This explains why there has not been any significant resistance to the Tata Nano project in Sanand.

The NBA has been critiqued for misrepresenting the Adivasis of the Narmada Valley, but the NAPM has not faced a similar critique in case of the Singur resistance. There can be various reasons for this: the ritually higher status of the castes in Singur, plus the greater literacy rate, and the fact that the movement began with the Singur peasants (whereas most of the early Narmada activists were urban and non-Adivasi), and many of local individuals were in leadership positions since the beginning. The NBA has been rightly critiqued by Whitehead (2007) for avoiding a direct critique of capitalism, but the NAPM has made a course correction and returned to the basics: the question of land, whom does land belong to, and what rights do the landowners have in the face of capitalist accumulation by dispossession.

Bardhan (2011) acknowledges that the majority of Indians are anti-capitalist, anti-market, and anti-Big Capital especially. He comments that Mahatma Gandhi gave sensitive and eloquent voice to these sentiments by his critique of industrialization and modernization. Gandhi's views influenced the appropriate technology, "small-is-beautiful" movement. Of late, Gandhians and leftists have joined hands to critique the Indian state for its neoliberal economic policies and its ruthless pursuit of neoliberal, corporate-led industrial development.

The Indian state is caught in a difficult situation: economic rationality dictates that it should support accumulation by dispossession, while political rationality dictates that it obey the sentiments of the masses, who are anti-Big Capital. Does this mean that the transition trope (agrarian-society-to-industrial-one) will not occur in India? Bardhan (2011), among others, argue that the Gandhian critics have not been able to show a viable, sustainable alternative to corporate-led industrialization that would work for large populations. Thus, especially among academics and policymakers, there is deep fear that the "NGOs of No!" will grind all progress to a halt and they will condemn India's masses to lives of drudgery. Activists, whether of the Gandhian or leftist variety, respond by arguing that viable alternatives do exist, but they may not be to the liking of city folks. The answers to the questions raised by Bardhan (as a spokesperson of the concerned academics) and Patkar (as a spokesperson of the activists) will only be solved with the passage of time. Right now, we can only be concerned with the ruling parties' attempts to create hegemony over the rural civil society and impose their vision of development, and the rural landowners' attempts to wrestle their rights from the government by using motley tools: from the language of "modern" rights to "primitive" caste associations, from legal challenges to protest marches, from alliances with urban disinterested intellectuals to opposition political parties. Protests of the Singur type will lead to deepening of democracy and the creation of an effective democracy in India, which will in turn lead to resolution of many conflicts over development. Respect for the rights of citizenship, emphasis on the centrality of democratic debate, and the importance of participatory development are what endeared the activists to Singur's unwilling farmers, even though their visions of development may not have been congruent. Singur's unwilling farmers were able to get their demands met. However, it remains to be seen as to whether the Singur resistance will improve the quality of Indian democracy by bringing to power a regional political party which can effectively address questions of democratic debate, participatory development, and alternative models of development.

Acknowledgements: I wish to thank Paul Wallace and Sage Publications for allowing me to read and use two chapters from Wallace and Roy (2011). I also wish to thank Eric Holt-Gimenez, Pilar Parra, and Daniel Little for taking the time to read the draft and for their insightful comments. I am indebted to all of them.

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