



Land acquisition in West Bengal – shifting paradigm

Tania Ghosh

Faculty member, Department of Sociology, Serampore College, West Bengal, India

Abstract

The studies on development induced displacement conducted for last few decades, therefore had a selective character. During the last two decades we have witnessed a very dynamic development of studies on internal displacement. This problem has for the first time become a subject of debate within international institutions and agencies. This book is an introduction to land acquisition problem in India. The development activities induce the growth should be a holistic notion that encompasses the progressive development in the quality of individual's life in terms of food, clothing and shelter and the environment for a healthy living with rising longevity of life and happiness. In West Bengal the development process reveals the indications and effects of widening inequalities between the "haves" and "have-nots" and the growing deprivation of the vulnerable and marginalized sectors of the population. There are very small trickle-down effects of the economic development associated with this model of growth. But when it is necessary to undertake development projects that engage the displacement of communities, it is indispensable that these projects obtain the legal permission and support of the people who are affected and that in return for giving up their land and homes they receive priority if not exclusive rights to the benefits emanating from these projects. The present research conducted on New Town, Kolkata on population displacements caused by natural disasters and long-term environmental changes has nevertheless developed very successfully.

Keywords: Development, land acquisition, displacement, agriculture, employment

Introduction

From economic crises to land acquisition, whenever government authorities try to play a facilitating role for industry, it draws the ire of both the left ideologies and the right ideologies. To those on the right, a nanny state destroys characters and breeds dependency. To those on the left side, any support to capitalists is a betrayal of the underprivileged by some sweeping zero sum logic. It is not a rare observation that industrialists must acquire all the land they need through the market without any state assistance. This response was nodded by the new land acquisition bill, while keeping open loopholes. A liberalized economy, liberated from its moderate growth rate, is ambitious in setting up its factories, highways, power plants, mines, and townships (SEZ). It is increasingly raiding cropland and threatening traditional livelihoods. The conflict has given rise to *Nandigram*, *Singur*, *Bhatta-Parsaul*, *Kalinganagar*, and *Jaitapur* for land acquisition. This chapter is an attempt to investigate selectively the pros and cons of land acquisition taking place in West Bengal [15].

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio - economic impact of the land acquisition on local people. For this purpose, I included those whose primary occupation is agricultural and non- agricultural work, in order to gauge the effect of the acquisition on these groups as well.
2. To examine the changes in employment status of the affected people in pre- & post-acquisition scenario.
3. To focus on the types of compensation offered by the state government to the owners of land.
4. To explore how the compensation is being used (where it is already done).
5. To assess the impact of displacement in living standard of the people involved.

6. To make recommendations on the basis of the findings of the study. Those recommendations are expected to be very helpful in Government's policy making.

Methodology of the Study

For the purpose of empirical study almost entire South Bengal where concentration of industries is relatively high taken for study. Both descriptive and analytical approach is proposed for the study. As a tool an interview schedule is prepared to collect primary information from the people. Distracts like Birbhum, Bankura, West Burdwan, Hooghly and Howrah have been visited for empirical study.

The study mainly depends on direct intensive observation and interviews with individuals affected by land acquisition. The demographic and economic surveys are conducted among all the households with the help of structured and open-ended questionnaire schedules. The qualitative information regarding the feeling and attitude of the acquisition of the affected persons are collected through repeated conversations with those persons over long period of time. The stories of hardship and economic crisis are addressed from individual family members by the case study method. Apart from the above-mentioned field study, the earlier published and unpublished field materials collected from different sources are used in this study.

Interpretation of the Accomplishment of Land Acquisition in New Town in Kolkata

The acquisition of land of 6933.72 acres of agricultural land and fishing embankments in New Town, Kolkata has been completed under Part-II of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 to create an IT Hub and residential units for public purposes. The procurement of land occurred in various stages over a span of twelve years from 1996 to 2007. In 1993-94, the

West Bengal government aimed to launch this development project. Considering the initiation of the land acquisition process in the designated mouzas at the start of 1996 under the Land Registration Act (West Bengal Amendment) 1981, the government enforced restrictions on 'land registration' that effectively halted all forms of private land transactions. Additionally, this limitation prevented all real estate agents, property developers, land cartels, and speculators from entering these villages until the acquisition was completed [15]. To eliminate the chance of speculative increases in land market value in future years, the sales proceeds from 1995 were used as the foundation for calculating the market rate, with a yearly increment of five percent for 1996. While the process started in 1996 through the purchase of land in Teghoria mouza, it officially commenced in Jagadishpur mouza in 1998 with the issuance of preliminary notifications under section 4(1) of the LAA and was finalized in 2003. Acquisition initially began in the village of Kalikapur, then proceeded to Ganragari and Jagadishpur. The notifications to the individuals concerned (i.e., owners and registered tenants) regarding the designated lands were issued by the collector according to sub-sections 1 and 2 of section 9. Sample household respondents reported that the collector compensated only rupees 3.60 lakh per acre of land in 1998, regardless of its type and quality, while in 2003, the compensation per acre was raised to rupees 7.80 lakh. The collector disbursed twenty-five percent of this amount to registered tenants separately. In those instances, he submitted the compensation awards to the court as per section 31(2) of the LAA [14]. While engaging with the displaced farmers, some of those who experienced this situation lamented that obtaining compensation from the court was a remarkably challenging and distressing process. The officers of the land acquisition cell did not support these farmers; instead, they harassed them at every stage of the legal process. Nevertheless, the challenges in obtaining compensation from the court caused numerous farmers to feel frightened throughout the various stages of acquisition, leading them to relinquish their land in despair. During multiple gatherings with residents, the former minister of Housing and Public Health Engineering of West Bengal and various politicians from the ruling party pledged guaranteed employment for at least one member of each affected household in future industries on the acquired land [12]. Several years have passed, but no member of the sampled households has secured a permanent job in New Town Newtown. Currently, only the development of multi-story apartments, corporate offices, IT parks, hospitals, etc., is taking place. Certainly, corporate entities and IT behemoths

will not hire the local displaced farmers for more prestigious positions [15].

Acquisition of Agricultural Land and Change in Agrarian Status of Farmers

The size of land holdings in the sampled households is viewed as a key indicator for assessing the agrarian condition of farmers or farming families. However, the typical classification of sample households into large, medium, small, and marginal farming categories based on landholding size would not be suitable in the current study area and possibly in any other region of West Bengal (Burdge, 2012). This is due to two factors: first, a very small percentage of farmers possess more than 4 hectares (4 hectares = 9.884 acres) of arable land in the research areas, as a result of strict enforcement of land reforms and the distribution of unused land among the landless poor by the former government at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s; second, the continuously rising population density in the State and the splitting of joint families into nuclear families in rural regions have caused further fragmentation of farms; as a result, the size of landholdings at the household level has been consistently decreasing since Independence. In this study, the agricultural status of farmers and farming households has been assessed by examining the average size of landholdings of the sample households before acquisition. All sample households are classified into four categories: large (over 2.65 acres), medium (1.65 to 2.65 acres), small (0.65 to 1.65 acres), and marginal (under 0.65 acre) farmers or farming households [1].

The acquisition of agricultural land has notably resulted in a decline in the agrarian status of impacted farming households regarding landholding size in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur after the acquisition. Although no sample household lacked cultivable land before the acquisition, over eighty percent of these households became agricultural landless after the acquisition (Table 1). The undeniable truth is that no household has reported being classified as large or medium in these New Town villages after the acquisition. The typical size of land owned by households has significantly decreased from 1.95 acres before acquisition to 0.06 acres after acquisition (Table 2). This abrupt shift in agricultural status brought about by government involvement has raised significant concerns among a group of farmers in the area. The farmers in West Bengal have recognized the government's proactive role in acquiring agricultural land as a reversal of its land reforms and redistribution efforts from the late 1970s and early 1980s [4].

Table 1: Change in Status of Farming Households Due to Land Acquisition.

Study Area Households (Category)	Status of Farming	Before land Acquisition		After land Acquisition	
		No of Total Households	No of Household	No of Total Households	% of Households
Teghoria	Large (More than 2.65 acres)	22	18.80	0	0.00
Jagadishpur	Medium (1.65 – 2.65 acres)	31	26.50	0	0.00
Ganragari	Small (0.65 – 1.65 acres)	52	44.44	4	3.42
Kalikapur	Marginal (Less than 0.65 acre)	12	10.26	18	15.38
New Town	Households without any cultivable land	-	-	95	81.20
	Total Sample Households	117	100.00	117	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2023

Table 2: Distribution of Cultivable Land and Change in Mean Size of Landholdings at Household in Jagadishpur, Ganragari and Kalikapur.

Status of Farmers (Category)	Agricultural Land After Acquisition				Agricultural Land Before Acquisition			
	Total Land (Acre)	% to Total Land	Main size of land holdings at Family level		Land Acquired (Acre)	Land Acquired (% to total land)	Land remained (Acre)	% to total land
Large Farmers (More than 2.65 acres)	103.00	45.17		101.17	44.37	1.83	0.80	-
Medium Farmers (1.65 – 2.65 acres)	64.93	28.47		62.12	27.24	2.81	1.23	-
Small Farmers (0.65 – 1.65 acres)	55.04	24.14	1.95	52.81	23.16	2.23	0.98	0.06
Marginal Farmers (Less than 0.65 acre)	5.05	2.21		4.92	2.15	0.17	0.07	-
Total	228.02	100.00		221.02	96.91	7.04	3.09	-

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

Note: In present case workers have been considered whose age was above 15 years and below 60 years at time of land acquisition and who were engaged in financial activities.

Table 3: Change in Livelihoods of Working Population of Land Loser Households in Jagadishpur, Ganragari and Kalikapur.

Livelihood activities	Occupation Before Land Acquisition Count	Occupation After Land Acquisition		
		Percentage	Count	Percentage
Cultivators	233	88.59	1	0.38
Agricultural labour	1	0.38	3	1.14
Non-agricultural workers and waged non-agricultural labour, maid servants	2	0.76	62	23.57
Dairy and fishing	-	-	6	2.28
Carpenters, painters, and masons	2	0.76	30	11.41
Syndicate business	-	-	19	7.22
Divers, rickshaw drivers and conductors	-	-	13	4.94
Business (other than syndicate)	2	0.76	49	18.63
Brokers	-	-	2	0.76
Security guards	-	-	5	1.90
Government / private company employees	11	4.18	10	3.80
Teachers	4	1.52	3	1.14
Electricians and mechanics	2	0.76	2	0.76
Others (Anganwadi coworker*, private tutors, tailors etc.)	6	2.28	12	4.56
Jobless	-	-	46	17.49
Total Workers	263	100.00	263	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

'Anganwadi coworker' or 'Sahayika' serves as a key participant in Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The ICDS programme was initiated by the Government of India on 2 October 1975. This initiative aims to deliver a set of 'integrated services' (supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring and promotion, nutrition and health education, immunization, health services, referral services, and informal pre-school education) with an

emphasis on children below six years old. ICDS services are delivered via an extensive network of centers referred to as 'anganwadi' or 'anganwadi center'. An anganwadi is a village courtyard that provides the services. The primary responsibilities of an anganwadi helper include: transporting children to the anganwadi, preparing and distributing meals, obtaining water for the anganwadi, and daily cleaning of the anganwadi area [2].

Table 4: Level of Education Among the Working Population of Dispossessed Sample Farming Households in Jagadishpur, Ganragari and Kalikapur.

Level of Formal Education	Working Population	Percentage
Illiterate	21	7.98
Class I to IV	14	55.89
Class V to IX	74	17.87
Class X to XII	74	16.35
Graduation and above	35	1.90
Total	263	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

Note: In present case workers have been considered whose age was above 15 years and below 60 years at time of land acquisition and who were engaged in financial activities.

Livelihoods Pattern After Acquisition

Even the completion of land acquisition in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur, several land-losing households

were able to cultivate crops on the acquired lands for a few years since not all the acquired land was immediately utilized by the government for urbanization and infrastructure projects. The process of filling low-lying areas with infertile soil and the ensuing urban development, including road and building construction, began advancing from the south to the north, ultimately leading to the

cessation of cultivation on the acquired land in these villages by the end of 2007 [13]. Consequently, the livelihoods of the working population from dispossessed farming households in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur experienced a significant change over a few years [11]. The elimination of farming, transformation of agricultural areas into non-agricultural zones, and swift urban development forced most of the unskilled labor force from the affected households into varied non-farm economic pursuits, which encompassed roles such as security guard, taxi driver, mason, carpenter, rickshaw and trolley puller, construction worker, domestic helper, and both small-scale and thriving entrepreneurs (Table 3). Several individuals from land loser households have become real estate brokers and contractors, earning a substantial income as intermediaries between sellers and buyers of land, flats, or houses by securing deals with a 2 to 3 percent commission on sales agreements from both sides. Extensive urbanization in New Town has created a novel and distinctive source of jobs. Due to extensive construction projects for buildings and infrastructure in New Town Township, there is a significant need for raw materials such as sand, bricks, iron rods, cement, and other essential supplies [3]. To provide these materials, numerous cooperatives consisting of 10 to 20 members or more from land-losing households have been established with the agreement of the relevant village panchayat. These cooperatives are referred to locally as ‘syndicates. Most of the syndicate members come from relatively affluent land-losing families and maintain strong ties with local authorities and politicians. While an individual cannot be the exclusive owner of a syndicate, there is no predetermined portion for a member within it. Consequently, a significant share of the capital put into a syndicate is mainly provided by the wealthier households that have lost land [5]. The profit generated by a syndicate is shared among the members based on their proportion of the total. Although the syndicates are transient, they have

become significant income sources for dispossessed households in the post-acquisition phase. A significant percentage (17.49 percent) of the working population from the sampled households in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur has become unemployed after the acquisition stage [10]. This segment of the workforce falls into two categories. The first category comprises unemployed individuals who are at the lower range of the working age limit and come from relatively affluent, dispossessed families. Most of them can read and write, but they lack advanced skills and formal education. They are quite driven in their jobs and aware of the standing of low-status roles, like construction labor or domestic help, among others. The second group consists of unskilled unemployed individuals with relatively lesser physical capabilities, and they have approached the maximum age limit for work. Most of them are either uneducated or possess a very minimal level of education. As a result, it has become quite challenging for them to identify the best non-farm livelihood opportunities in the fast-evolving economic environment after the acquisition phase [6].

Family Income Sources Diversification

The purchase of agricultural land and its transformation into non-agricultural use has altered not only the livelihood patterns of displaced families but also broadened their household income sources (Table 5). Over three-fourths of the sample households relied exclusively on agriculture for their income prior to acquisition, but none are completely reliant on farming for their livelihood after the acquisition. While 56 percent of the overall sample households continue to derive their income from a lone source, it is noteworthy that none have indicated cultivation as their source of income. The percentage of sampled households with multiple income sources has significantly risen in the post-acquisition phase.

Table 5: Sources of Family Income in Pre- and Post-acquisition Stage Jagadishpur, Ganragari and Kalikapur.

Sources of Family Income	Before Acquisition No. of % to Total Households		After Acquisition No. of % to Total Households	
Single source, cultivation is only source of income	90	76.92	-	-
Double sources, cultivation is one of them	19	16.24	3	2.56
Triple sources or multi-sources and cultivation is one of them	8	6.84	-	-
Single source but not cultivation	-	-	66	56.41
Double sources but cultivation is none of them	-	-	30	25.64
Triple sources or multi-sources but cultivation is none of them	-	-	15	12.82
No source of income or jobless	-	-	3	2.56
Total	117	100.00	117	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

Acquisition of Land and Changing Lifestyle of Local People

‘Lifestyle’ can be described as the manner of living of individuals, families, or societies, which they demonstrate in dealing with their physical, psychological, social, and economic surroundings daily. Like other rural areas of West Bengal, most villagers in New Town lived a typical agricultural and traditional lifestyle until the land acquisition was finalized. Nonetheless, the swift urbanization of seized agricultural land and the influence of Kolkata metropolitan city culture have been altering the traditional way of life for dispossessed farmers and their families in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur of New Town for many years. In the pre-acquisition phase, most of the sample households

resided in katcha dwellings with walls constructed from mud or bamboo and topped with roofs of thatch, tin, or fired clay tiles; however, an opposite situation has been observed among them in the post-acquisition phase (Table 6). Approximately 61 percent of dispossessed households (families) now reside in pucca houses (buildings), many of which were recently constructed using compensation money received from the government for their land. During the field survey, it was observed that certain small dispossessed farming households began building concrete houses where old katcha structures stood, but they were unable to finish them despite using all of their compensation money [7]. This may possibly occur because of the ineffectiveness of these former farmers in assessing the quantity and expense of

construction materials. The inclination to utilize luxury items such as cars, washing machines, refrigerators, and particularly motorbikes has significantly risen among households that have lost land following acquisition (Table 6). While conducting the field survey, a prominent farmer from Kalikapur mentioned that prior to the acquisition, there were merely two motorbikes in his village; however, after the acquisition, the number increased to over a hundred, with numerous households that lost land purchasing multiple bikes for their families. The acquisition of arable land and the ensuing swift urbanization have also influenced the villagers' eating habits to some degree. In the past, members of the dispossessed farming families typically had rice as their primary food for both lunch and dinner. Nonetheless, without cultivation during the post-acquisition phase, wheat flour has substituted rice as the primary food at dinner for numerous land loser households. Numerous families have disposed of their cows, bulls, goats, and sheep because of insufficient fodder^[15]. The shift in lifestyle has become increasingly noticeable among those sample households that lost land but retained some even after the acquisition process was completed. In the post-acquisition phase, most (63.64%) of these sampled households have entirely sold their remaining arable land to speculators and realtors for significantly higher prices (ranging from rupees 90 lakh to 1.5 crore per acre) compared to the amount proposed by the government. Using a portion of this money, certain families have purchased cars and taxis. During

weekends, the young male residents of these households frequently gather in the upscale luxury malls that have been developed on the purchased land in New Town. Conversely, some more affluent dispossessed families have retained all their remaining land to negotiate 'better deals' in the future (Table 7). The significant rise in land prices in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur is mainly due to the growing demand for land from diverse users with different intentions. IT behemoths such as International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), Genpact, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL), Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and others, have now taken root in the acquired area. High-rise apartments featuring swimming pools, parks, community centers, shopping malls, educational institutions, hospitals, luxury hotels, and more are also being developed in this area. All these phenomena clearly indicate that extensive land acquisition and rapid urbanization have initiated a process of social and economic change in Jagadishpur, Ganragari, and Kalikapur in New Town. Conversely, swift advancement has turned into a nightmare, a threat, and a major concern for numerous disenfranchised small and marginal farmers, as land brokers and mafias are now directly targeting their homes. Consequently, amidst the shifting socio-economic landscape in New Town, it would not be unexpected if some dispossessed marginal farmers leave their hometowns by selling their homes to move to more remote rural areas soon, in order to adapt and survive^[8].

Table 6: Nature of the Houses and Luxury Goods Used by the Households Before and After Acquisition in Jagadishpur, Ganragari and Kalikapur in New Town.

Component No. of		Before Acquisition		After Acquisition	
		No. of households	Percentage	No. of households	Percentage households
Nature of Household	Katcha	79	67.53	7	5.98
	Semi-pucca	26	22.22	24	20.51
	Pucca	9	7.69	71	60.68
	Mixed	3	2.56	2	1.71
	Pucca under construction	-	-	13	11.11
luxury items	Total sample households	117	100.00	117	100.00
	Car/taxi	1	0.85	7	5.98
	Motorbike	11	9.40	71	60.68
	Washing machine	2	1.71	14	11.97
	Refrigerator	17	14.53	37	31.62
	Computer	-	-	6	5.13

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

Financial Status of Deprived Families and Agricultural Households Unaffected by Land Acquisition and Engaged in Agriculture. It is a fact that 'per capita income' is regarded as the primary measure for evaluating the economic standing of a family or society globally. Nonetheless, obtaining accurate information on the total or per capita income produced by farming households in rural regions of India is quite challenging. Therefore, household-level per capita consumption expenditure (in rupees) on certain essential food items, education, transportation, and other necessities has been chosen as a viable alternative measure for assessing the same. Per capita consumption spending was determined for the previous thirty days from the survey date in a sampled household. The amount of each food and other items utilized by a household during the specified period was multiplied by the prevailing local market price per unit at the time of the survey (rupees per kg)^[15]. Consequently, the total monthly consumption expenditure

(in rupees) for each sample household over the past thirty days from the survey date, along with the per capita monthly consumption expenditure at the household level, was evaluated. It was discovered that over a quarter of the dispossessed sample households (first sample set) fell into higher economic status categories (high and very high), whereas only a tiny percentage (3.33%) of farming households not impacted by acquisition (second sample set) were in the high category (Table 6). Nonetheless, most households in both sample groups fell into the categories of low and moderate economic status. Interestingly, none of the farming households that were not impacted by acquisition indicated their economic status as very low, which is supported by a minimal percentage (1.71%) of dispossessed households. This small fraction of dispossessed households fell into the category of very low economic status, owing to the inability of certain small and marginal farming families to secure their position in a

rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape with limited financial and physical resources or to locate appropriate employment in the post-acquisition phase for their unskilled family members who possess a very low level of education. Inequality levels were also assessed among the dispossessed households (first sample group) and farming households not affected by acquisition, which are currently involved in cultivation (second sample group), using a simplified Gini

coefficient (Table 7). It was confirmed that the level of inequality regarding per capita consumption expenditure among the dispossessed sample households was greater than that of households actively involved in cultivation. This might be feasible due to the varied livelihood activities of the workforce from dispossessed households during the post-acquisition phase^[8]

Table 7: Financial Status of Deprived Families and Agricultural Households Unaffected by Land Acquisition.

Category	Monthly per Capita consumption expenditure at household (in Rupees)	Dispossessed Households (Sample set-1)		Farming households unaffected by (Sample set-2)	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Very high	Above 1125	14	11.97	-	-
High	1125 - 815	17	14.53	2	3.33
Medium	815 - 505	41	35.04	35	58.33
Low	505 - 195	43	36.75	23	38.33
Very low	Below 195	1	1.71	-	-
Total Samples		117	100.00	60	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2023.

Note: Mean of the monthly per capita consumption expenditure of all households (sample set 1 & 2) is 662.12 rupees (approximated 660 rupees) and Mean Deviation is 312.49 rupees (approximated 310 rupees).

Conclusion

The impact of development projects on the tribal is not limited to the economic field but impinges on the social and cultural aspects. The tribal who live in a different type of society are forced to interact with another culture and society to which they cannot always adopt themselves. We have found that 71.43% of the tribal who had in the past developed a culture of sustainable use of forests have started cutting trees^[9]. Once deprived of their livelihood, tribal fall back on the same resource for survival but in this process, they make a transition from their traditional constructive to destructive dependence on it. While in the past most of the tribal communities had treated it as a renewable resource that had come down from their ancestors that they had to use according to their needs and environmental imperatives and preserve it for the future. Besides, as reported drunkenness has increased among the men and it subsequently led to more domestic violence. Most of the families we interviewed said that this is because of the frustration men suffer due to the deterioration of their economic status.

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