

NEGOTIATING DEVELOPMENT:
A STUDY OF THE GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE TO INDIA'S 2005 SPECIAL
ECONOMIC ZONES ACT

By

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To all of my new friends in India -
Thank you for the inspiration!

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This study examines a citizen resistance that occurred in India during 2007 against the country's 2005 Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act. The resistance largely began in two village blocks in rural West Bengal where farmers stood to lose their land and livelihood due to the establishment of an SEZ and another similar project. It quickly spilled out however into a wider resistance against SEZs that included various elements of India's civil society as well as India's opposition parties. This broad based resistance has resulted in notable concessions by India's state and national governments including increased compensation for land losers, a new policy that forbids the government to forcefully acquire land for SEZs, and the outright cancellation of a number of SEZs across the country.

This study poses two central research questions. First, how did villagers, and other Indian citizens come together to form an effective and unified resistance? Second, why did India's state and national governments grant significant concessions to the resistance? I argue that the success of the resistance was facilitated in part by the backdrop of India's democracy. India's democracy provided the impetus for the resistance and government

response in several respects. First, rural West Bengal has a legacy of past democratic resistance and subsequent policy concessions. As such, villagers in West Bengal have been conditioned in the art of democratic political protest. Second, India boasts a vibrant civil society, which came out in force to support the anti SEZ resistance. India's civil society had a critical role in the success of the movement, both in terms of guiding and empowering activist villagers and also by pressuring the Indian government to alter state policy. Third, some members of India's various opposition parties responded quickly to the resistance and helped channel the voice of the citizenry to the policy front. Finally, India's media reported heavily on the resistance to SEZs in West Bengal and across the country, and was highly critical of any acts of government violence to quell the resistance. These various forces of democracy have in turn shaped the positive government response.

Although the study focuses on India, it has relevance to other developing countries. The study illustrates that the strengthening of political democracy could have a positive impact on the world's poor as developing countries become increasingly exposed to the global economy. Although development might proceed more slowly in developing countries that are democratic, such growth might prove more sustainable in the long run.

CHAPTER 1
GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE TO SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN INDIA

Introduction

On May 10, 2005, after less than two hours of quite cordial debate, India's national parliament quietly passed the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) act. The overall goal of the act is to give India's government the regulatory tools in which to provide a market friendly legal infrastructure for the establishment of export oriented geographical enclaves. In these zones, foreign and domestic investors can manufacture and export goods (and sometimes services), in a heavily subsidized environment, free in many respects from India's infamous bureaucratic red tape. The act received very little attention both within India's parliament, and outside of it. Indeed, India's usually active media barely reported on the passing of the act, typically relegating the information to a one paragraph article buried deep inside of the business section of leading newspapers.¹ Soon after the act passed in 2005, a board of approvals, specifically established to facilitate the application process, began to quietly accept and approve proposals for the establishment of SEZs across the country. Within 2 years the central government had approved close to 400 zones, totaling over 700 square miles.²

The 2005 SEZ act, is the latest in a series of reforms meant to stimulate India's historically lackluster economic growth. After decades of underwhelming economic development, facilitated by the heavy hand of India's central government, the country enacted a series of economic reforms in 1991, meant to loosen government oversight of India's economy. Although

¹ For example, on May 11, 2005, India's leading national Newspaper, The Times of India, reporting on the passing of the act, in a small article in the Business section of the paper. The Telegraph, West Bengal's leading English Newspaper, gave the act a similar lack of attention, also relegating a small article to the business section on May 11, 2005. I reviewed both newspapers in the weeks following the act and found no subsequent reporting on the act.

² This information is available in the SEZ section of India's Department of Commerce Website. The information can be found at <http://sezindia.nic.in/>, accessed January 28th, 2009.

these reforms did much to stimulate India's economy, inefficient licensing procedures and regulations, as well as the reality that investors of today look for incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies, prompted the central government to pass the 2005 SEZ act. In table 1-1, I provide a brief synopsis of the SEZ act, touching on various aspects of the act that are intending to facilitate easier investment opportunities for foreign and domestic exporters.

It was the vague rules and procedures surrounding the acquisition of land for SEZs that woke the country up to the potentially negative impact that this policy could have on the country overall. The simple reality is that SEZs require land, and this precious resource is in short supply in India. To make matters more precarious is the fact that India is predominantly an agricultural country. Most of the country's population relies either directly or indirectly on cultivation. Land is simply the lifeblood for most in the country, and attempts to encroach on it often have life and death consequences for those that depend on it. To overcome the reality that land for SEZs would be in short supply, state governments began resurrecting an old colonial law called the *1894 Land Acquisition Act*.³ This Act allows state and central governments to forcefully acquire private land (at below market prices) if it can be shown that the acquisition would advance a public good. Declaring SEZs a 'public good', state governments began the process of forcibly acquiring land from farmers across the country.

It wasn't long before the ability of a state government in India to forcefully acquire land in the name of development would be put to the test. One SEZ that received quick approval was for a 10,000 acre chemical export hub that was to be established on the outskirts of a village block called Nandigram, located in the Indian state of West Bengal. The hub was to be developed by Indonesia's real estate conglomerate, The Salim Group, and was to host large

³ A copy of this act can be found online at <http://dolr.nic.in/hyperlink/acq.htm>, accessed 1 November 2008.

multinational chemical corporations, including Dow Chemical. In January of 2007, villagers in Nandigram received official word by way of a posted memo on the door of the local government office, that their land was about to be forcefully confiscated for the development project. Such a proposition had real life and death consequences for this predominantly farming community in South India and within hours of the memo being posted, tens of thousands of villagers had descended upon the government office and faced off with state police. A standoff between villagers and state police continued unabated for over two months, until on March 14, 2007, a day regarded as ground zero in terms of the ensuing national grassroots opposition to SEZs, West Bengal police and cadres of the ruling state government party opened fire on thousands of protesting villagers (some reading from the Koran, or reciting Hindu prayers in the hopes that the state would not inflict violence upon worshipping citizens). Fourteen villagers were killed in the hail of gunfire, many of them shot in the back as they fled the violence.⁴ In an attempt to further terrify and pacify the villagers, police and party cadres took over at least one village home in Nandigram and proceeded to use the home to sexually assault countless women. Hundreds of homes in the village block were also burnt to the ground.

The Nandigram incident was actually a continuation of West Bengal's state led campaign of violence that was being unleashed on its rural poor in the name of economic development during 2006 and 2007. Only months before the March 14 attack in Nandigram, the ruling state party – the Communist Party (Marxist), popularly known as the CPM, undertook a similarly violent response to activists in a village block called Singur, (about a 5 hour drive from Nandigram), who were protesting against the forced takeover of their land for an export

⁴ This is the official death toll. Villagers in Nandigram, claim that the real death toll is in the hundreds. Villagers also claim that many children were killed by police, who then hid bodies in undisclosed locations.

automobile factory. They undertook such action despite the fact that CPM has remained in power for over thirty years on a pro peasant platform, in a largely rural state.

Although the export automobile factory in the village block of Singur is not formally an SEZ, many elements of the project are similar to the SEZ in Nandigram, not the least of which is that the state government was attempting to forcefully evict cultivators from farmland in order to provide space for the project. Similar to Nandigram, villagers in Singur are heavily dependent on land for their livelihood. As such, an encroachment on their land is in many respects a death sentence.⁵ Villagers relentlessly (but largely peacefully) demonstrated against the project. The state government of West Bengal reacted by suspending democratic rights in the village block, (cracking down on gatherings of more than three people for example), and raining violence down on the village agitators. The most graphic and infamous display of repression was the rape and murder of an 18 year old village activist on December 18, 2006, her body set in flames by cadres of the ruling communist party in West Bengal. The story of village activism against the project and state suppression makes the Singur issue an ideal second case study for this project.

State suppression of its own citizenry is certainly not a novel means in which to facilitate economic growth in developing countries. Indeed, much has been written on the role of state coercion in pushing through economic reform and fostering development, the resultant passivity of the citizenry being the key variable.⁶ That the Indian government reverted to arms in the name of development is not in itself surprising. However, in Singur and Nandigram, villagers were not repressed into a necessary level of passivity in order to push through the unpopular

⁵ As explained to me during many interviews with villagers in Singur in the fall of 2007.

⁶ Esteemed political scientists such as Ezra Vogel (1991) for example, have argued that various Asian states effectively underwent rapid industrialization due in large part to political stability, and a passive populace induced by authoritarian governments, or quasi democratic governments with authoritarian tendencies. More recently, Atul Kohli (2004, 10) came to a similar conclusion, arguing that a coalition of capitalist entrepreneurs, coupled with a repressive government is the best means to foster economic growth.

development projects. Within days of the state led violence in both Singur and Nandigram, village activists regrouped, and demonstrations became increasingly spirited and vigorous. In Nandigram for example, protest marches in the villages that were thousands strong before the March 14, 2007 violence, became tens of thousands strong. What's more, opposition to the industrial projects and the violence that was being used to facilitate them, spread quickly beyond the small villages of rural West Bengal. The state's capital city, Calcutta, became a hotbed of political contention.⁷ Protest stages were set up in the downtown core of the city, where everyday citizens took time out of their work day to participate in ongoing hunger strikes, and where passionate speeches were given around the clock by well known Indian social activists, and non government organizations. Demonstrations took place almost daily, drawing protesters from all walks of life and all classes, often jamming traffic in the core of the city (as I discuss in Chapter 5, intellectuals became key spokespeople for the village resistances). Activists and opposition party members at the state and national level, descended upon the villages in droves denouncing the state violence, and calling for a halt to both projects, (the role of opposition parties is discussed in Chapter 6). Media coverage of the events was extensive, and often strongly critical of the government violence (I detail the role of the media in Chapter 7).

Although the approvals process is handled by the central government, state governments still retain significant regulatory powers in terms of zones to be established in their respective states. For example, the state government must approve the proposed location of a given SEZ, and certify that the land for the zone is in possession of the private SEZ developer. The state government can also cancel any SEZ project, even during the final stages of the approvals

⁷ Calcutta is now formally known as 'Kolkata'. However most outside of India still refer to the state capital as 'Calcutta', its colonial name. I refer to the city as 'Calcutta' in this study for readability purposes.

process.⁸ On March 19, 2007, five days after the state led violence in Nandigram, and in the midst of overwhelming grassroots opposition, the ruling CPM utilized its powers under the SEZ act and beat a hasty retreat, issuing a formal written notice indicating that the Nandigram SEZ project would be cancelled.⁹ This development was especially notable, given that only a few months earlier, West Bengal's chief minister, and state CPM party leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya promised that, despite initial resistance, the SEZ project would continue in Nandigram at any cost.¹⁰

It is important to understand that the concession to the villagers is significant to West Bengal's economic future because in essence, it gives the message to potential investors that the state government does not have the political power to pacify its electorate, without exacting costs that are unacceptable in a democratic setting. As discussed above, pacifying unruly citizens has been regarded as an important aspect of economic development in developing countries. Further, a few months after the March 14 violence, the state accepted a court ordered compensation program, agreeing to compensate the kin of those killed, as well as those raped and injured in the violence.¹¹ After a lengthy agitation, the Singur resistance proved successful as well. Citing the "existing environment of obstruction, intimidation and confrontation" at the site, Ratan Tata, CEO of Tata Motors, (the corporate owners of the automobile factory in Singur) pulled the plug on the project on October 3rd, 2008, after almost two and a half years of

⁸ The power to cancel a project is not explicitly set out in the act. However, the power of the state government to cancel a project became clear when the state of Goa cancelled all 15 proposed zones in the state on January 3, 2008, and the central government did not step in to halt the cancellation.

⁹ As of this writing, the state government is looking for a less politically sensitive area in which to house the chemical hub.

¹⁰ Sen, Saibal. 2007 "Fresh Flare-up over Bengal SEZs, 3 Die" *Times of India, Delhi edition*, 8 January 2007, Front Page

¹¹ "Nandigram victims to get compensation: Jyoti Basu", *Deccan Herald*, 27 October 2007, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/Oct272007/national2007102732581.asp>, 29 January, 2009.

continued agitations on the ground in the village block.¹² At the time, the construction of the factory was almost complete, as was the construction of several other factories designated to supply parts to the plant. The company had expected the first car to roll off production lines in 2008.

In Nandigram, the cancellation of the chemical hub soon after the March 14, 2007 violence did not quell the resistance in the area however. As I discuss further in Chapter 3, agitations continued full force for several months after, the focus of the movement changing from winning back land, to securing justice for those killed or injured in the violence. Also, soon after the March 14 violence in Nandigram, resistance against SEZ projects across the country, and indeed, resistance against the very concept of SEZs began to mount.¹³ Villagers in multiple states across the India, whose land was also at risk for SEZ projects, began to resist, many citing the Nandigram movement as their inspiration, and heralding the dead Nandigram villagers as martyrs in their anti SEZ resistance. For example, in countless media reports, villagers across the country warned of “another Nandigram” if attempts were made on their land. Land acquisition notices were symbolically burned, and highways were blockaded for hours at a time. Land prospectors and surveyors were often met by a wall of villagers, arms locked together, surrounding farmland at risk. Such dissent was captured by India’s media, and many of the agitations made front pages of daily national newspapers, (usually with an accompanying photo showing defiant villagers). National social activists traversed the country, giving impassioned speeches against land acquisition for SEZs and calling into question the whole concept of SEZs

¹² “Read: Full statement issued by Tata Motors on Singur pull out threat”, *Times of India*, 2 September 2008, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/show/3437910.cms>, accessed 30 January, 2009.

¹³ It is important to note that resistance against SEZs was occurring before the Nandigram resistance, however as I detail throughout the project, the Nandigram resistance is considered by most in the movement as the beginning of a national opposition to SEZs. Resistance against SEZs increased substantially after the Nandigram violence and many government concessions occurred after the Nandigram incident.

in general. Opposition party members also made the rounds, and were often seen holding placards at the front of large protest marches across the country.

The goal of many in the anti SEZ resistance, villagers, activists and some opposition party members alike, is the complete abolition of the 2005 SEZ act. If success is narrowly defined this way, then the movement must be considered a failure. As of this writing, the government shows no signs of abolishing the act, and approvals for zones continue at quite a clip. However, state and national governments have made notable concessions to the movement; the most touted being the official scrapping of the Nandigram and Singur projects, and the cancellation of all 15 proposed SEZs in the Indian state of Goa. By the end of 2007, six months after the Nandigram violence, the national resistance had also managed to slowly chip away at once hardened economic reform policies.

Within weeks of the initial Nandigram peasant uprising on January 3, 2007, the central government put a hold on all SEZ approvals, as it struggled to deal with the now sensitive issue of land acquisition for SEZs. The freeze lasted for over three months, which is significant in itself, given the rate of approvals occurring in the months preceding the freeze. The central government lifted the freeze on SEZ approvals only after making a policy change, setting a maximum ceiling of 12,355 acres on SEZ size (down from an initial ceiling of 24,710 acres). In another significant policy change, the central government also increased the minimum processing area in an SEZ from 35% to 50%, (thereby reducing the risk of the zones being used for real estate land grabs).¹⁴ Further, the non processing areas of SEZs (such as hotels,

¹⁴ A central point of contention amongst those in the SEZ resistance is that non processing areas of SEZs could be used to set up real estate investments such as hotels, condominiums, and restaurants. This led to fears that the SEZ policy would lead to tax free land grabs for real estate investments

restaurants etc. . .), would no longer be eligible for the tax exemptions that the processing areas enjoyed.¹⁵

Most significantly in terms of the land question however, the central government stipulated that state governments could only facilitate up to 10% of land acquisition for a zone, the other 90% of the acquisition process being the responsibility of the private developer. This effectively removed the government from the bulk of the land acquisition process. Further, the center directed state governments not to utilize any coercive methods when participating in land acquisition for SEZs. This in essence strips the government of its powers of eminent domain in terms of its ability to forcibly acquire land for SEZs under the *1894 Land Acquisition Act* (which gives governments the right to forcefully confiscate land if such confiscation would advance a ‘public good’).¹⁶ As discussed above, the CPM in West Bengal had drawn on the Land Acquisition Act to justify the industrialization projects in Singur and Nandigram, declaring both projects a ‘public good’. This new mandate by the central government means that land owners must now give up their land voluntarily for the establishment of an SEZ. A large SEZ zone in Uttar Pradesh was immediately halted due to this new mandate because the developers were counting on the state government to utilize the original powers of eminent domain to forcefully acquire land from farmers.¹⁷

In what became a landmark victory for those involved in the anti SEZ resistance across the country, the state of Goa completely conceded to the popular resistance against SEZs taking place in the state, and cancelled outright all fifteen proposed SEZs in January 2008, forgoing

¹⁵ “No tax sops for non-processing zones of SEZs”, *Times of India*, 7 May 2007, Business section.

¹⁶ “Ambani’s SEZ a casualty under new UP policy: Land For Special Zones Won’t Be Acquired Forcibly”, *Times of India*, 7 May 2008, Business section.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

immeasurable amounts of potential revenue for the state. I visited two of these sites just prior to the government decision to halt the projects, and both were well into the development process. Many factories were in various stages of construction on the site, and fencing had been erected around the perimeters of both zones. Thus the halting of the zones in Goa must be considered a major victory for those in the resistance. Interestingly the halting of the zones started a small skirmish between the Congress party at the Center and the Goan state Congress party with the former telling the latter that zones that have already been notified (the final stages in the approvals process) cannot be halted. The Center backed off within days however, and Goa's entire SEZ plan ground to a halt.

In another significant development, the Union Cabinet revamped the country's existing *2003 National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy* in October of 2007. The new policy contains various concessions for villagers who lose land in the name of industrialization. For example, 'Social Impact Assessments', which must include an examination of the impact of industrialization on utilities such as roads and drinking water, are now required where large numbers of families will be affected from land acquisitions. Under the new policy, compensation rates for land must take into account market value after the land has been converted (from agricultural to non agricultural for example). Where applicable, affected families are entitled to take up to twenty percent of the compensation in the form of shares or debentures in the project. Other concessions are notable, such as the guarantee of housing (and potentially land) if families are relocated. Displaced villagers also must get priority treatment for training and jobs. As of this writing, the policy has yet to be passed into law (although there are strong signs that it will), and it is too early to gauge potential issues of implementation (something that India is infamous for). However what is interesting about the revamped National Resettlement Policy, as well as

the other concessions is that such policy shift has been directly attributed to the resistances in West Bengal and elsewhere. During an interview India's commerce secretary, Gopal Pillai, (who has final signing authority on all zones being approved in India), explained the role of the resistance in the policy changes:

The good positive fallout from all this [the resistances against SEZs] has been on the land acquisition act itself. It forced people to think, if land is being acquired compulsively by the state. The person whose land is being taken must be adequately compensated. The result of all this agitation has been the Land Acquisition Act will be amended (sic). Farmers will receive higher market rate for their land, higher compensation for forced acquisition, as well as a better relief and rehabilitation policy. Further, no land will be compulsorily acquired for SEZs. Even though this will have a negative impact on SEZs, the positive fallout of this is wider.¹⁸

Research Questions

The story of the West Bengal resistances, the subsequent anti SEZ resistance across the country and the significant government concessions raises a number of theoretically relevant questions. How did the Singur and Nandigram villagers manage to rise up, so efficiently and effectively, braving state repression to advance their cause? Why did the state choose to concede rather than escalate the repression? How did these localized and somewhat insignificant resistances become the inspiration for a national campaign against SEZs, with involvement from villagers on the ground, as well as activists, NGOs and opposition parties? Why did the central government make significant policy concessions to the demands of the resistance? These are the questions that I attempt to address in this dissertation.

The Argument

I argue in this study that the resistance against SEZs and other similar industrial projects was directly facilitated by the fact that in important respects, India has an effective and functioning democracy, one that has been honed since independence from Britain in 1947.

¹⁸ Respondent #43 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

India's democratic framework has provided the political backdrop to a number of citizen driven resistances in the country's post independence history, and has provided the political impetus for a positive government response. This history has provided India's rural poor with what McAdam et al., term 'a repertoire of contention' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). India's rural poor understand that they are empowered to effectively resist the government (with only a small risk of repression), and that, sometimes, the government will respond favorably. This was especially the case in West Bengal where the state government conceded to a citizen led land reform resistance in the late 1970's, a movement cited by many in Singur and Nandigram as their inspiration for the current resistance. I detail this movement, and its implications for this current study, more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

India's democratic history has allowed the country to develop and improve various informal and formal aspects to its democracy. In addition to the importance of political history, I draw on three other democratic foundations of India's political process: its vibrant civil society, its functioning multiparty system, and its rigorous and free press, and argue that these three elements of the country's democratic structure served to both elevate the anti SEZ resistance to the policy level, as well as reframe the SEZ issues in many important ways. These forces have in turn shaped the government response. A history of democracy is a critical aspect to grassroots resistance and potentially positive outcomes.

In the sections that follow, I provide a theoretical context in which to frame the empirical chapters of this dissertation, drawing on important literature in peasant studies and democracy, which together contribute to an understanding of the anti SEZ resistance in India and subsequent outcomes. I specifically engage literature that has examined the dynamics of peasant resistance, as well as literature that factor in the importance of state structure in such resistance.

Theoretical Context: Grassroots Resistance and Government Response

As mentioned above, although resistance against SEZs began to burgeon soon after zones began to receive government approval, it was the violence in Nandigram, coupled with the subsequent government concessions to the villagers that sparked what is, as of this writing, a national resistance against SEZs. One of the central goals of this study is to illustrate that India's peasantry were key agents of the resistance (which makes sense in a way given that it was their land that was often at risk), and hence, important players in the subsequent government concessions. To provide a theoretical context for the anti SEZ resistance and government response, I tie the Indian story to various important intellectual works that provide insight into peasants as agents of political change. My goal in doing so is to survey key theoretical works that have delved into the important question: why do peasants resist?

Although many of the foundational works on peasant politics provide valuable insight into peasant resistance in India, I found this same literature lacking in terms of getting to a comprehensive understanding of the anti SEZ resistance and government response. What quickly became clear to me during fieldwork was that the resistance was directly and indirectly facilitated by the structural backdrop of India's democracy. Indeed, the democratic aspect to the resistance is precisely what differentiates it from a 'social movement'. In the latter, as Herbert Kitschelt suggested, traditional avenues of political participation are closed off to aggrieved groups, and as such, these groups cannot effectively communicate their grievances through established channels of the political process (Kitschelt 1993, 14). In this case, a *social movement* can ensue as citizens reject traditional institutions of government, and push for a transformation.

Political resistance differs from a social or political movement, in that aggrieved citizens and groups, although opposing certain aspects of the political process, also work within this same political process to foster social change. Thus the goal of political resistance can be seen as

within system social change, as opposed to complete system transformation. As I demonstrate in this dissertation the grassroots resistance continuously engaged and drew from India's formal and informal institutions of democracy, trying to facilitate change from within the country's existing democratic political system. For example, in most instances, demonstrations took place with police providing protection for the protesters (as opposed to suppressing them). In Calcutta I witnessed several protest marches, with upwards of tens of thousands of participants. Instead of dispersing the demonstrations, police were always on hand to block traffic (no small feat in a city of more than 15 million), allowing protesters a safe political space in which to express dissent. In this case, India's democratic state structure was supporting and facilitating the resistance. In another example, members of opposition parties were quick to embrace the resistance, something that most village activists welcomed. Further, opposition parties took the anti SEZ cause straight to state and national parliaments, shutting legislatures for days at a time, until ruling governments agreed to debate the efficacy of SEZs (I detail the role of opposition parties in Chapter 6). Many in the resistance that I spoke with welcomed the role of opposition parties in the movement. In a social movement, opposition parties are often seen as unresponsive to citizen grievances and are thus part of the problem, and in need of transformation. However, as I examine in Chapter 6, India's opposition parties were an effective channel of participation. Also, instead of channels of participation being closed off to villagers, the media, social activists, and academic researchers were, for the most part, allowed free access to the affected villages, and were similarly left alone to write and publish what they deemed important. Reporting often was highly critical of the government (I delve into the role of the press in Chapter 7).

I argue in this study that domestic political structure has been critical to the anti SEZ resistance in India, and this variable has not been given enough weight in the peasants literature. Thus, I contend that although we can find part of the answer to ‘why peasants resist’ in existing literature on peasant politics, bringing in literature on political structure (and specifically structures of democracy) however, can help further address both how peasants in India came to resist the SEZ policy, and why the government responded with concessions instead of more violence.

The Political Participation of the Rural Poor: There is a long academic history, beginning with Karl Marx that is quite dismissive or contemptuous of the peasantry as autonomous agents of political change.¹⁹ This was the purview of the ruling party in West Bengal as well. In response to the peasant resistance, the West Bengal state government unleashed a powerful campaign of misinformation, trying to pin the entire anti SEZ resistance on opposition parties, suggesting that the Singur and Nandigram peasants were innocent victims of opposition parties, vying for power in the state. Later in this study, I provide evidence to show that this perspective is entirely inaccurate. As such, it is important instead to focus on those scholars who have actively engaged the peasantry as autonomous actors, capable of political agency.

Why and how do peasants resist? How can we account for peasant political behavior? The literature on peasant political participation has developed largely in response to a debate that occurred in the late 1970’s by two eminent scholars on peasant politics, James Scott and Samuel Popkin. Their disagreement centered on whether peasant behavior was accorded to community norms and traditions (Scott 1976, drawing on Thompson 1971, see note 20), or rationalist

¹⁹ In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx famously referred to the French peasantry as a “Sack of Potatoes” (1963, 167). Others have taken a similar perspective. A good example is Theda Skocpol’s (1971) *States and Social Revolutions*. In this work, Skocpol is also quite dismissive of the peasantry, arguing that the structural erosion of the state is the key catalyst for peasant revolution.

individual motivations (Popkin 1979). As I show below, both perspectives have merit in terms of the anti SEZ peasant resistance in India, yet both also have limitations in terms of explaining the movement in a comprehensive manner.

The Communitarian Approach to Peasant Political Behavior

The communitarian approach to peasant political behavior is best represented by James Scott's seminal work, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976). Scott surveyed peasant rebellion in Southeast Asia, and developed the concept of a 'subsistence ethic' to understand peasant behavior. Scott argued that peasants are fundamentally risk averse, given that they perpetually live at the edge of subsistence (and thus cannot afford to take risks that might jeopardize their very survival). These two factors (risk aversion and living at edge of subsistence) conditioned peasants over time to behave in a community oriented fashion. Intimate ties of community and village reciprocity lessened the risk of disaster, as peasants who might have helped a neighbor in the past, can now turn to that same neighbor in time of need. Village reciprocity is tied to a notion of economic justice (that peasants believe they have a moral right to a just living), a concept Scott argued is also critical to peasant behavior.²⁰ Scott argued that justice often centered on the peasant's perceived moral right to have enough food to feed themselves and their family. However, Scott's notion of justice has been recently updated by Mark Edelman who argued that peasants also sometimes fight for the, "right to continue being agriculturalists" (Edelman 2005, 332).²¹ This is an important addendum to Scott's notion of what peasants constitute as just. Although the right to subsistence was key in the peasant

²⁰ The notion of a moral economy was first highlighted in a (1971) article by E.P. Thompson. Thompson argued that English food riots in the eighteenth century were preceded by a "a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, banking etc." (p79). Interestingly, Thompson recounts that advocates of free trade blamed the riots on a "misguided gentry" (p95). This has relevance in the Indian case, where resistance is credited to political parties. In both cases, rioting peasants are disenfranchised from the process of resistance.

²¹ For a similar argument, please see Anderson (1994).

resistances to SEZs in India, I often heard during interviews that the fight was also about preserving community traditions, and an agricultural lifestyle.

Scott's approach to peasant behavior spurred a broad range of scholarly works, all critically advancing the notion of communitarian peasant politics. Two aspects to this branch of literature are important for this project. First, is that it has been recognized that the global economy is an important (albeit indirect) contributor to economic change in the rural sector in that it induces governments to alter policies towards peasants. This ties well to this project, as SEZs are in many ways, a tool in which domestic governments can secure foreign direct investment. In some cases, peasants lash back at the state, as Cynthia McClintock documents in her (1984) account of the Sendero Luminoso rebellion against the Peruvian government in 1960's. In other cases, peasants bypass the state and focus their resistance on international organizations. Marc Edelman has recently written about the Via Campesina umbrella organization, a transnational mass movement that consists of 80 organizations in 50 countries, and has an overarching goal of mass mobilization against the suppressive effects of neoliberalism (Edelman 2005). The World Trade Organization has been one of their key targets.

A second development in this literature is that the notion of community has been stretched beyond that of a geographically bounded village. Both McClintock and Edelman recognized the importance of rural/urban ties for example.²² Edelman takes the notion of community even one step further, showing how a peasant community can now be transnational in scope.²³

²² Lichbah (1994) has also problematized the assumption of a community as being a geographically bounded village. In fact, a peasant community is much more complex than that, comprising complex power relationships and ties that stretch outside the village.

²³ Although I remained within the empirical bounds of India, I could have made a similar case in terms of transnational community networks. Indian street hawkers for example, key actors in the West Bengal SEZ resistance, are part of an international street hawking body. Various global NGOs, such as Amnesty international came out in support of the villagers. A global grassroots media campaign disseminated information about the resistance across the world. In many ways, the resistance was transnational in scope.

The Communitarian Perspective in India: Scott's communitarian approach has valuable explanatory power in terms of understanding the anti SEZ resistance in West Bengal and the rest of India, especially if Scott's notion of community is stretched to encompass areas outside of the traditional rural village. The communitarian response to SEZs extended far beyond the villages of West Bengal, with community ties evident in other poor communities, such as urban street hawkers in Calcutta (who staged a multi day hunger strike and a massive protest march in solidarity with the Nandigram villagers), or villagers affected by the 1984 Union Carbide chemical disaster (who traveled to Nandigram to lend support to the villagers under the common theme of corporate accountability for human rights violations).

Scott's communitarian approach to peasant political behavior also included the important reciprocal roles of village elite, who were expected to contribute more to the community pot than poor villagers, with the idea that they might need help later on down the road (Scott 1976, 41). Thus, bringing the discussion back to this project, an elite political actor might engage in protest (spending valuable time in doing so), even if it is not in their rational, immediate interest to do so. The village elite were indeed a critical aspect of the anti SEZ resistance in West Bengal (and the rest of India), however I found that an 'external' elite were at least equally as important. These actors comprised a vast network of social activists, writers, filmmakers, students, and importantly, intellectuals who came out in droves against the Nandigram violence and SEZs in general. Interestingly, many of these actors comprising the resistance community were not participating in the resistance based on Scott's traditional conception of reciprocity, where elite participated due to a fear of village sanctions and a desire to bank favors that might be cashed in at a later time. Many of the 'elite' in the anti SEZ resistance did not expect anything in return

from the villagers at all in fact. This became clear to me as I conducted interviews in comfortable apartments of prominent writers and journalists, or had discussions with student activists over coffee in Western style coffee shops. Nonetheless such elite actors were participating in the resistance for the cause of social justice, a key aspect of Scott's moral economy approach to political behavior. As such, these relationships were not built entirely on the rational notion of village reciprocity (which is key to Scott's theory), but they certainly show how community ties can factor into a rural resistance.

The Individualist Approach to Political Participation

When I went on my first fieldwork trip to the villages of West Bengal that were resisting against the industrialization projects in August of 2007, I anticipated passionate interviews in which peasants described their agitations in terms of the greater good for Indian democracy, and their democratic rights as citizens of India. My romanticized hopes were quickly doused within my first few interviews however as I quickly came to realize that much peasant agitation stemmed from the life and death implications that the projects potentially had on the livelihood of upwards of tens of thousands of families. As a Singur farmer named Debesh explained to me in simple terms, "if this project goes through, our family will perish".²⁴ Quite simply, peasants were often driven by a purely rational desire to stave off death for themselves and their families. It is important to acknowledge the individual rational motivations underlying the peasant resistance.

The Individualist approach to peasant political participation was popularized by Samuel Popkin's *The Rational Peasant* (1979). In this work, Popkin criticized Scott's communitarian model, arguing that peasants are primarily self interested and calculating political actors, making

²⁴ Respondent #50 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

rational decisions so as to advance their individual interests. As such, political behavior is solely defined by such calculating decisions involving elements of risk and calculated investment decisions, all with the goal of advancing economic well being (Popkin 1979, 18).

Popkin applies this individualist perspective to community relations in villages, arguing that peasant behavior will not be defined by any notions of norms or reciprocity, given that such things are uncertain – there is no future guarantee that reciprocity will be returned (Popkin 1979, 22). Indeed, Popkin argues that in times of crisis, community approaches to participation will devolve even further as individuals do not want to participate in collective action, preferring instead to focus on individual survival (Popkin 1979, 23). Invoking Olson’s (1965) analysis on the problems of free riders, (in which individual actors are tempted not participate in collective action because they believe they will receive any gains made due to the resistance even if they don’t participate), Popkin argues that, “it is difficult under the best of circumstances to organize peasants to provide collective goods, and the coalitions formed may be precarious” (Popkin 1979, 25). In fact, Popkin goes so far as to argue that the poorer a social group is, the more difficult it will be for them to organize politically (Popkin 1979, 250). Thus agricultural laborers will inevitably be more difficult to organize than say sharecroppers or tenants, because “[a]s long as they cannot be excluded from the good, there is the potential for free riders, individuals who do not contribute to the provision of goods because they believe they will receive the gain or security even if they do not participate” (Popkin 1979, 25).²⁵

A recent body of literature has drawn on the Olson/Popkin approach to explaining suboptimal collective action in an attempt to account for the erosion of social welfare in developing countries, and the subsequent lack of citizen response. The central premise of this

²⁵ Many have since developed nuanced versions of Popkin’s perspective, while remaining within his central arguments. See for example, (Lichbach 1994).

body of work is that, due to inherent problems of collective action, the poor will inevitably be unable to mitigate downward pressures on the welfare state, which results from increased exposure to the global economy (see for example, Rudra 2002; Wibbels 2006) It is theorized that issues of collective action are only exacerbated in developing countries where the poor are often divided by significant economic inequality, geographical distance, and religious diversity, suffer from a lack of education and literacy, and simply must work too hard to have the time to engage in the luxury of political participation. Erik Wibbels for example argues that, in times of global economic downturns, developing countries save money by making cuts to social spending, because such spending is generally redistributive towards the poor. It is easier to make cuts that affect the poor because this ‘constituency’ is inevitably weak and unorganized (Wibbels 2006, 438-440).²⁶ Marcus Kurtz employed a similar logic to argue that liberalization policies in Latin America have caused an “...underarticulation of societal interests, pervasive social atomization, and political quiescence founded in collective action problems” (Kurtz 2004, 263). He cites various staple variables, such as the decline of unionism, the increase of informal sector workers, the uprooting of the poor from traditional patterns of residence, by products of liberalization, to argue that political conflict in Latin America has been reduced overall (For similar examples, please see, Rudra 2002; Wibbels and Arce 2003; Rudra 2005).

The Individualist approach in India: Of course, the immediate difference between the collective action problems and associated tepid grassroots response to the erosion of social welfare in developing countries and the collective action against SEZs in India is that land, the

²⁶ These authors have take up this argument in response to some who have argued that labor is effective at coming together to foster positive change in the form of social welfare. Although these authors did not directly engage him, Peter Swenson’s (2002) book *Capitalists Against Markets* provides a good account of the perspective that labor can be a key variable in fostering a robust welfare state. Swenson argued that scarce labor in Sweden was able to condition the interests of capitalists, thereby fostering positive reform. The key difference according to Rudra (2002) and others is that labor is abundant in most developing countries, causing issues of collective action.

central point of contention in the Singur and Nandigram resistance, is an excludable good, whereas Olson and Popkin's perspective centers on the notion of non excludability, (goods where it is not possible to prevent others from enjoying its benefits, an example being reducing groundwater pollution). As such, it can be argued that collective action against a potential encroachment on land still fits into the rational actor paradigm of collective action. Popkin's perspective certainly accounted for the resistance undertaken by the countless small landowners, who were facing threats to their livelihood.

Also, operating in the theoretical paradigm of rational choice, one might make the case that peasants in West Bengal had engaged in a similar resistance in the recent past, (the land reform movement in the late 1970's for example). As I discuss in Chapter 4, in the case of West Bengal, peasants had mobilized in the name of land reforms in the 1970's, voting the CPM into power in the process. The CPM in turn, instituted a series of pro peasant land reforms, to which the peasants responded by repeatedly voting the party back into power. As such, it can be argued that this past successful resistance changed the perceived cost-benefit ratio of participating. Peasants had an incentive to participate knowing that they had an increased chance of winning, based on past successes.

This perspective provides another theoretical window in which to gauge the collective action against the chemical hub in Nandigram (and to a lesser extent the collective action against the automobile factory in Singur). In a democratic setting, the electorate and the government engage, and will continue to engage with one another, the electorate through voting and other political participation (such as demonstrations), and the government by providing benefits to citizens as a means to shore up legitimacy. Thus citizens in a democracy have an incentive and opportunity to demand benefits (again expressing their demands through voting, or alternative

forms of participation), and the government has an incentive to provide them. Repeated interactions between both parties can yield cooperation.

The explanatory power of the rational choice perspective however is reduced in a number of ways with regards to this study however. First, many of those involved in the agitations were not landowners, but those indirectly involved with the overall economic life of Singur and Nandigram. Landless laborers for example became key players in the anti SEZ resistance, as did rickshaw pullers, warehouse workers, and truck drivers, all who indirectly depended on the economic vitality of the villages. These actors could have transitioned to work in other villages in West Bengal, but instead they chose to fight.²⁷ As such, at least some of the village activists did not have a purely rational reason to participate. Further, street hawkers, Bhopal villagers, students, NGOs, social activists, intellectuals and the many middle class professionals that I met during demonstrations in Calcutta (some of whom undertook days long hunger strikes on the streets), and across the country would not have suffered much if the industrialization projects went through.²⁸ The Goan village activists further problematizes Popkin's rational actor approach, given that the Goan resistance operated on a platform of advancing environmental sustainability. Goans were more concerned about effects of groundwater than land loss (indeed many of the SEZs were to come up on government owned land). Thus where Popkin's

²⁷ Bo Rothstein's (1998) work, *Just Institutions Matter* has relevance here. In this book, Rothstein argues that welfare states can develop from a nation wide sense of solidarity that includes "concern and respect" amongst citizens. It is this sense of solidarity that has allowed for the development of the welfare state, where in reality, some citizens benefit more than other. Although the solidarity with regards to the Singur and Nandigram resistance is of a different sort, the notion of solidarity as an important aspect of a political system is relevant.

²⁸ Christen Monroe has engaged the importance of human identity in her (2004) book *The Hand of Compassion*. Monroe examines the motivations behind people who rescued Jews during the holocaust. She argues that a key motivator behind these actions was a sense of common identity that rescuers shared with victims, which fostered "core values of a shared humanity and the commitment to human well-being" (p242). This common sense of identity is a complex aspect of the resistance to SEZs, but is evident in the many diverse actors involved in the resistance. The village activists felt a sense of common identity, which extended out to 'external' activists such as Calcutta's street hawkers and West Bengal's intellectual community. This is a complex matter which would benefit from further research.

perspective predicts a suboptimal climate for collective action against SEZs (outside of the landowners) in India, the resistance was successful due to vibrant collective action.

Second, even if the resistance were theoretically able to overcome collective action problems due to rationalist, cost benefit calculations at chances of success due to success of past resistance, as well as the reality that many in the resistance were fighting for their land, an excludable good, this resistance should have still suffered from issues of large group size. In large group settings (as the collective action against the projects almost always was, sometimes drawing tens of thousands of protesters), actors have an incentive not to participate, as they would probably receive the benefits anyway and not have to be monitored. However, as I witnessed first hand, peasants came out in large numbers.

Third, even if peasants were initially participating for rational reasons associated with land (an excludable good), the peasants in Nandigram continued to resist after the project had been cancelled, this time demanding justice for those killed and injured during the violence, and renouncing what they perceived as an encroachment of their rights as citizens in a democratic country. The notions of ‘justice’ and ‘citizenship rights’ are of course, non excludable goods, and thus do not fit into the rational actor paradigm.

A Gap in the Literature

In addition to the limitations outlined above, the key element missing from both the communitarian and rational actor approaches, in terms of this study, are the political structures within which peasant political participation occurs, and specifically *how* political structure can both condition political behavior *and* the subsequent policy outcomes resulting from such behavior. The rational actor approach, by applying the theoretical logic of rational choice, is inevitably individualist, predicting a suboptimal climate for collective action due to the large number of those who potentially could be involved in the resistance. Decisions to participate

therefore are made entirely on rational calculations of self interest. That state structure (specifically democratic state structure) can both condition *and* channel peasant behavior, and induce policy concessions lies outside the explanatory realm of rational choice theory. While some might contend that peasants in West Bengal had an incentive to participate due to past success, this perspective does not account for the fact that many in the current resistance did not participate in past resistances (although most knew of them). Further, this perspective does not account for the various nuances that can occur within a democratic resistance. Looking at the important roles of civil society, opposition parties, and the media for example would fall outside the purview of rational choice theory, yet proved critical to the resistance captured in this study.

The communitarian approach puts more weight on reciprocal relationships that can occur within communities, and as such is important for this study. This approach however tends to regard the state as primarily a coercive apparatus, a suppressive structure that peasants fight against. Scott for example regarded the state as a key locus of peasant revolts, because it cuts through “the integument of subsistence customs and traditional social relations to replace them with...uniform laws” (Scott 1976, 189). Similarly, writing in 1984, McClintock attributes peasant rebellion in Peru to the fact that peasants blamed the state in adopting changes to agricultural policy (McClintock 1984, 49). Recently, some works in the communitarian paradigm have bypassed the state entirely. Marc Edelman argues that the state is “no longer the principal focus of the counter-movement to the market. New supranational governance institutions such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank – have become major targets as well” (Edelman 2005, 337). This literature has not addressed how state structure, can potentially facilitate political behavior.

What is also missing from the foundational schools of thought with regards to peasant motivation is that peasant behavior in India is driven partly by their perception that they are not only peasants, but citizens in a national community with historically derived democratic political rights. In modern democracies, the population is bestowed full and equal citizenship under national laws (Lipset 1964, x). With such rights in hand, "...a great deal of democratic politics involves the efforts of the lower strata to equalize the conditions of existence and opportunity" (Lipset 1964, xi). Especially pertinent to this discussion is T.H. Marshall's notion of civil rights, inherent in democratic politics. Civil rights entail, "...the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice" (Marshall 1964, 71). In other words, under democratic conditions, people embrace their rights as citizens, strive to be accepted in society as such, and sometimes fight when such rights are compromised. Of course such rights have not been historically bestowed on people, but are the outcome of prolonged struggles and bottom up pressure that compel political elite to confer rights on the popular masses (O'Brien 2001, 423). As we shall see in Chapter 4 of this study, the historical aspect of struggles for citizenship and rights in West Bengal became especially pertinent during the current struggle.

Importantly, it has been argued that notions of citizenship and rights can often be nurtured in rural environments. Indeed, it is often in rural environments that such notions have been initially fostered (Somers 1993, 592). During my interviews with peasants in West Bengal and Goa, motivations behind the resistance were often couched in language of citizenship, rights, and especially, justice. Thus while peasant motivation to participate in the anti SEZ resistances were driven both by communitarian notions of reciprocity, as well as individualist motivations of rational survival, they were also driven to participate in the resistance because they saw the

encroachment of their land for SEZs as a violation of their rights as citizens of a democratic India. Peasants in India saw the land encroachment as a violation of their right of self determination. They also saw the reality that a government elected on their vote, was driving the land acquisition process – a gross violation of justice in their mind. Further as I detail in this study, peasant resistance continued long after the state government in West Bengal formally cancelled the SEZ project, this because peasants were demanding justice for those wronged in the violence.

In sum, I contend that the key ingredient missing from those scholars who discuss peasant motivation is political context in which peasant behavior is occurring. In a democratic political context, peasants are motivated, not only by Thompson's (1971) "popular notion of right", as espoused by Scott's moral economy approach, but also by a notion of political 'rights' in terms of being citizens belonging to a wider community. Therefore, we must also account for the political structure when trying to understand and define peasant motivation. I turn to this aspect of my argument next.

Bringing in the State: The state centered approach to understanding peasant political behavior amongst the poor is represented by many works that are widely grounded in the theoretical framework of Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* (1979). Although Skocpol does not focus on peasant behavior outside of a revolutionary context, her theory is useful in understanding the statist underpinnings of peasant behavior overall. Skocpol argues that peasant revolutions are powerfully shaped by existing social and economic structures (a premise that I show in later chapters is critical to understanding the Indian case). Although Skocpol focuses only on peasant revolutions, this premise is helpful for the India case in that Skocpol draws our attention to how state structure can powerfully condition political behavior, and how state

structure can create channels in which political participation can induce social change. As I discuss below, India's democratic state structure was critical in both of these respects. Skocpol takes her analysis too far however by suggesting that individual motivations or community relationships are completely irrelevant to peasant political action. Although I will make the argument in this study that state structure (and specifically India's democratic structure) conditioned peasant behavior and outcomes, this same structure did not entirely drive the process. Instead, I show both how India's rural activists utilized India's democratic structure to channel the resistance to the policy level, and how this same structure played a role in framing and re-framing the SEZ issue overall.

Thus, a blend of both the communitarian and individualist approaches, while paying credence to the importance of state structure provides the theoretical key to the anti SEZ resistance in India. Some students of peasant politics have already undertaken such a task. Leslie Anderson (1991) for example showed how interaction between peasant unions and the Costa Rican state conditioned the behavior of the former. In this case, closer interactions with the state served to pacify the disruptive capacity of unions. In a later work Anderson (1994), made a similar attempt as I do in this study to blend the individualist and communitarian approaches to political behavior, while also paying attention to the role of the state in molding such behavior. As Anderson noted, "state structure partially determines the portfolio of political tactics from which peasants may choose, regardless of the local economic structure", and notes that, "in a democratic political structure, political action is safer and more predictable...". This compared to an authoritarian system where "the price for inappropriate or unlawful behavior is high, because laws are designed to benefit the dictator at the expense of the population and offenders cannot count on any protection from the law or respect for their rights as human

beings” (Anderson 1994, 21). Indeed, Anderson argues, “[i]n either a dictatorship or a democracy, the state plays a direct role in determining subsequent action after peasants take the political initiative. Once peasants have opted for organized action, they have entered the political arena, for their acts have a political effect” (Anderson 1994, 22). Thus Anderson argues that a democratic state has specific elements that help to limit the coercive capacity of the state. Democracy limits state power over its citizens. In this study, I extend Anderson’s arguments by suggesting that a democratic state, not only constrains state power, but also enhances the capacity of citizens to participate in the political process, and indeed motivates citizens to do so in ways that go beyond the communitarian or individualists approaches. As O’Brien aptly puts it, the spread of citizenship “leads to changes in people’s hearts and minds, and it leads to changes in behavior” (O’Brien 2001, 423)

In sum, my argument in this study is as follows: peasants as citizens of a democratic political process have various channels, or ‘portfolios’ of political action that are not available to peasants in authoritarian settings. These portfolios of action not only protect and enhance the capacity of peasants to participate in politics, they also condition peasant motivation, and allow peasant unrest to spread beyond localized sites of resistance and channel peasant resistance into realms that can become effective in terms of policy change. Although the various schools that define the intellectual field of peasant politics have provided important insight into peasant political behavior with regards to the anti SEZ resistance in India, the question still left unanswered is: how important is political structure in accounting for peasant political participation, in terms of conditioning peasant behavior and motivation?

Empirical Context: India’s Democratic Political Structure

India’s democracy has not surprisingly been the subject of countless academic works. Many authors have specifically examined the relationship between India’s democracy and

economic growth (or lack thereof). Together they help to highlight the importance of democratic politics in the country, and help us understand the impact India's democracy has had overall. I delve more deeply into some of these works, and their relevance for this study in Chapter 2, however I touch briefly on two competing themes that have defined a large aspect of India's political economy literature, namely the role of the elite and the role of the poor in the country's political processes.

The works that primarily engage the role of the economic elite in shaping India's economic structure provide only a limited contribution to this project. Atul Kohli for example does focus on the rural sector, but his unit of analysis is primarily the rural elite. According to Kohli, given that it was this sector that collected taxes on the rural poor on behalf of the British (in exchange for land), the Congress party was unable to gain control of it without engaging in patron relationships with wealthy rural elite, who given their landowning status, could sway the political behavior of the rural poor (Kohli 2004, 261). This in turn drove a wedge between India's capitalist class and the government, thus stagnating industrial growth.

While the role of India's rural elite is undeniably important in Indian politics, the rural poor are not without their political voice. Ashutosh Varshney has argued that a democratic structure can help to overcome barriers to collective action that typically inhibit the participation of the poor. Speaking of mobilization of the rural sector over agricultural prices, Varshney argues,

If the state can repress farmers without any electoral or political sanctions, rural mobilization can be easily stilled at its birth. However, a democratic system places serious constraints on the state's repressive capacity vis-à-vis the peasantry, particularly as farmers themselves are well represented in the upper tiers of the polity (Varshney 1995, 198).

Varshney goes on to argue,

What is critical is that in democratic systems, the costs of collective action are significantly lower because repression cannot normally be exercised with impunity. Opposition parties

have a vested interest in embarrassing the government, as they do in India. A free press puts constraints on the government in India. And support groups form easily as they do in India. Mechanisms countervailing repression are built into the system. Controlling for all the customary obstacles to rural collective action in the third world (size, dispersion, poor communication), the nature of the political system thus makes a difference (Varshney 1995, 199).

Thus the rural poor can sway the political process in India. Indeed, the Tebhaga movement in the 1970's in West Bengal, a source of inspiration often cited during interviews with Singur and Nandigram activist villagers, was designed to re-establish tenancy rights for sharecroppers who were cultivating Zamindari land (land given to Indian elite during colonialism in exchange for taxation). The movement was spearheaded by activist villagers (the most famous of which was from a village in Nandigram), as well as the then activist opposition party, the CPM. As I detail in Chapter 4, the rural poor subsequently voted in the CPM in 1977, which in turn embarked on a campaign to establish tenancy rights for sharecroppers. In other words, in rural West Bengal, the rural poor succeeded in reducing the economic power of the rural elite in terms of land reform. The voice of the rural poor must hold weight in any analysis of Indian politics. Overall, perhaps Myron Weiner sums up best the contribution of existing literature to this study.

Weiner argues that,

In the main. . . India's leaders have opted for both democracy and economic growth. Indeed, in spite of India's enormous poverty, her leadership has resorted neither to mass coercion nor to widespread suppression of political groups. Indians are, on balance, willing to pay an economic price for their freedom if need be. Thus, when the goals of economic development and political development do not mesh, Indians increasingly stress their political ideals, not with any sense of guilt, but with a sense of pride (Weiner 1962, 240).

This study adds then to those authors who analyze the political power of India's poor. Scholars such as Weiner and Varshney have made important steps in this regard. These empirical works on India (and many others) are important in that they help us understand the relationship between political participation, India's democratic political structure, and the

county's trajectory of economic development. I add to this body of knowledge by devoting significant parts of the dissertation to specific aspects of India's democracy that helped to facilitate and frame the anti SEZ resistance. Before laying out the empirical evidence for my claims, it is necessary to touch briefly on the specific aspects of India's democratic structure that I engage.

India's Democratic Structures

Until fairly recently, it was fashionable in the comparative politics discipline not to look too far beyond the presence or absence of elections when defining a democratic structure.²⁹ A growing body of work in the 1990s however came to recognize that functioning democracies encompass much more than the simple holding of elections.³⁰ This has spawned concepts that try to dig beyond elections, such as 'second transitions', 'democratic deepening' or 'democratic consolidation'.

Defining democracy beyond the simple presence of elections is a complex and perhaps futile task as countless potential variables can be used in terms of a definition. However with regards to the anti SEZ resistance in India, I found that four specific aspects to India's democratic structure played both an important role. These are: a history of democracy in rural settings, a vibrant civil society, viable opposition parties, and a free and rigorous press.

²⁹ This has been termed a 'minimalist' approach to defining democracy. This approach has been attributed to Joseph Schumpeter (1947), who defined the democratic method as "...that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will". This minimalist interpretation of democracy (defining democracy via the presence or absence of elections), has formed the basis of much work that has defined the field of comparative politics. For two examples of work that employ this minimalist method of defining democracy, please see Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) and Huntington (1991).

³⁰ One notable example is Guillermo O'Donnell's (1994) piece titled *Delegative Democracy*, in which he argued that electoral democracies with weak institutions should not be included in the same category as democracies in which elected leaders are accountable to society.

Although each of these elements of democracy have been the subject of entire bodes of scholarly thought, I necessarily touch on each of them only briefly below.

History of Participation in a Democratic Setting: In a democracy, citizens understand that participation in terms of political protest can be undertaken with minimal risk of state repression. In some cases (as in Nandigram) state repression does occur, but agitations continued because state repression in a democratic framework usually has long term consequences for the ruling government. For example, injured Nandigram villagers received compensation for the state violence, the result of a court order against the government. The confidence that the village activists in West Bengal had with regard to their democratic rights became clear to me during my first day of fieldwork in Singur, when a villager walked me right up to the heavily guarded front gate of the factory perimeter fence in Singur. I expressed my trepidation at being within a few feet of dozens of heavily armed police, to which the rural activist replied, “don’t worry! They can’t touch you! This is a democracy!”³¹ I ran into a similar scenario in Goa, where agitators stood on a road beside the proposed SEZ, loudly proclaiming the injustices of SEZs in Goa into my voice recorder, as security personnel and police stood within a few feet of us listening to the interview. I found this confidence stemmed in part from knowledge about past democratic movements that garnered a favorable government response. As I document in Chapter 4, many (though not all) West Bengal village activists knew of past rural movements (such as the Tebhaga movement in the 1970s), and how such movements conditioned the then opposition party to adopt a pro peasant platform, after which West Bengal’s peasantry duly elected them to power (and they have remained in power ever since).

³¹ Respondent #9 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

The idea that political history shapes current political participation (and the structure within which it occurs) is quite established in the comparative politics discipline. Classical works, such as Tocqueville (1864), and Barrington Moore, (1966) all point towards the premise that the past significantly conditions the future in the political realm. Looking specifically at the importance of history in political participation, McAdam et. al, have appropriately termed this “a repertoire of contention”, or a depository of resources (in this case democratic historical ones), where citizens draw knowledge, and in the India case, confidence, to forge ahead with political resistance (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 45). Indeed the similarity between the tools and techniques used by the Nandigram protesters and the protesters of past movements in West Bengal was quite striking. Most importantly however, as I detail in Chapter 4, villagers in West Bengal knew full well that the CPM was in power due to the rural vote, and therefore expected them to behave in a pro poor fashion. When they did not, agitations ensued. The history of rural democratic participation in West Bengal is a key focus of Chapter 4.

Vibrant Civil Society: In his classic work, *Polyarchy* (1971), Robert Dahl solidified the importance of inclusive participation for democratic politics. Dahl argued that a citizen must have “o[pp]ortunities to oppose the government, form political organizations, express oneself on political matters without fear of governmental reprisals, read and hear alternative points of view” (Dahl 1971, 20). Such freedoms are especially important in countries with large populations (such as India), according to Dahl because they condition governments not to adopt repressive policies (Dahl 1971, 27). Inclusive participation often comes from the ambit of civil society, which Larry Diamond defined as

...the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules...it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests,

passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable (Diamond 1994, 5).

Of course, free political space for political participation provides the structural foundations in which a country's civil society can flourish. Civil society depends on a basic element of freedom of expression and freedom of association - constitutional platforms in which a civil society can be built upon.

The importance of civic engagement in terms of the quality of democracy was popularized in Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993). Although Putnam focused primarily on non-political associations, (such as sports clubs), his emphasis on the importance of what Anderson and Dodd have called "a citizen-centered understanding of democracy", proves fruitful in understanding the Indian case (2005, 28). Although not conforming specifically to Putnam's leisure type associations, I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 how villagers in Singur, Nandigram, and Goa have a rigorous associational life, evidenced by the fact that the villagers were able to form highly organized resistance committees, and sustain them for long periods of time. Village associations were only buttressed by the role of NGOs, activists, writers, and intellectuals, which, together forms the basis of a civic response to India's SEZ act.

A Functioning Multi-Party System: In the past few decades, India has effectively transitioned from a one party to a multi party system.³² As such, legitimate and effective opposition parties have arisen to monitor and criticize the ruling party, as well as become vehicles in which citizens can express their dissent against the government of the day. The importance of a functioning multiparty system for democracy was laid out in Anthony Downs' classic, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). Downs argued that one of the key services that multiparty politics gives

³² Various authors have written about India's transition to multi party politics. Please see for example, Tilly (2007) and Varshney (1998).

to the electorate is the generation of electoral platforms based on ideology. Downs defines ideology as “[a] verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society” (Downs 1957, 96). With ideology based party platforms, citizens are able to distinguish between parties (given that each party must differentiate themselves from other parties in order to try to gain a winning niche with an electorate). Citizens are also able to orient themselves based on ideologies that are similar to their own. I found that Downs’ notion of party ideology contributes greatly to an understanding of the role of parties, and the healthy relationship between citizens and parties in India. With regards to the West Bengal case, Downs’ party ideology arguments worked in reverse order. The ruling CPM remains in power primarily due to an ideology of promoting the agricultural sector. As such, a vote for the CPM was a vote for agriculture. The attempted forced land encroachment for industry signaled to the rural voters in West Bengal an ideological shift in the party. During many interviews, villagers in Singur and Nandigram described to me how the CPM was in power due to its pro agricultural policies, and that they would now vote against the ruling party due to its ideological shift away from agriculture (Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 6, in the local government elections in May 2008, the CPM was removed from power in many of the villages affected by the Singur and Nandigram projects). The main opposition in West Bengal, the TMC, came out against the CPM on an ideological platform that proclaimed to be against forced land acquisition for industrialization (but was not anti-industrialization, thus keeping with its right wing ideology in many respects). Party ideology also was in play at the national level. The current opposition party in India is the BJP, a right wing, pro business party. The BJP however has come vehemently against land encroachment for SEZs, without compromising their pro business platform. Indeed, during an interview, a high ranking member of the BJP reiterated that the party was pro-SEZ, but anti

forced land acquisition for them. In both cases, the right wing TMC and BJP parties can be regarded as aligning themselves with the traditional party ideology of the right, given that both parties were involved in the anti SEZ resistance mainly to help protect private property rights. In essence, India's multiparty system worked with regards to the anti SEZ resistance. Opposition parties effectively picked up on, and channeled the voice of dissent in the resistance to the level of policy. Further, given the democratic structure of India, ruling parties had to make concessions to maintain legitimacy amongst the electorate.

A free and rigorous press: Another element of Downs' theory of democracy is his notion of the importance of information exchange in the political process. It is through the dissemination of political information that citizens gain the capacity to make informed choices during electoral cycles, and monitor governments in between them. A free press is a critical vehicle of communication between elected officials and citizens. It is through the media that citizens can become knowledgeable about the functioning of their government on a day to day basis. A free media also however provides a means for citizens to hold elected governments accountable for their actions outside of electoral cycles because it has the political space to criticize and scrutinize the actions of government. Figure 1-1 lays out the process of how these elements of India's democracy magnified the voice of the anti SEZ resistance, as well as channeled this voice to the policy level.

Brokering and Framing

It is not enough however to show how India's various democratic elements channeled the voice of resistance to SEZs, serving as static mediums of communication between citizens and their government. As McAdam et. Al., have argued, political resistance in a democratic setting must be understood as comprising dynamic and continuously interacting mechanisms and processes that both define the contention and drives it forward, and its power to induce social

change (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 73). Key to this process is the somewhat independent role India's elements of democracy played in brokering the SEZ issue between villagers and activists across the country, as well as framing and re-framing the SEZ issue overall.

First, India's civil society, the media, and opposition parties acted as *brokers* in the resistance, in terms of playing a part in "...the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 201). As I will show in this study, the media, civil society, and opposition parties played the role as brokers between otherwise disparate sites of peasant resistances against SEZs, in the case of social activists and members of opposition parties, often traveling to different anti SEZ village resistances bringing stories of one to another, and helping to foster national solidarity.

Second, these same elements played a role in *framing* the SEZ issue. McAdam et al define framing as "...the interactive construction of disputes among challengers, their opponents, elements of the state, third parties, and the media". This ties directly into McAdam et al, as they argue in their work, "[w]e treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversation not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness, or culture but as active sites of creation and change" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 22). In essence, the peasant movement in West Bengal began as a response to threats of land encroachment. During an interview with a key village activist in Nandigram, my interpreter (who is also a prominent Bengali journalist and social activist), had to pause and explain what an SEZ was, which subsequently angered the village activist even further. In other words, various forces, such as the media, civil society (including NGOs, and India's intellectual community), as well as opposition

parties helped to redefine the anti SEZ resistance from mainly a land issue in the villages, to one questioning a variety of injustices with regards to SEZs, such as environmental impacts and impacts on labor. It is critical to note here, that I am not arguing that these elements *drove* the resistance. Villagers were the crucial force in the anti SEZ resistance. However, these elements did help to re-frame the SEZ issue in different ways, which in turn led to a more comprehensive resistance against SEZs overall. As such, we must ascribe a somewhat independent role to the elements of democracy I have described above in terms of brokering and framing.³³ I illustrate this premise in figure 1-2.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I have presented the case of citizen resistance to SEZs in India, as well as subsequent government response. The anti SEZ resistance in India presents a puzzle of sorts as it goes against many theoretical assumptions that define the rural poor as somewhat stoic political actors, accepting of whatever the government dishes out to them, or revolutionary political body, with a narrow goal of overthrowing an existing political system. In the Indian case, the rural poor rose up, and did so effectively, causing the government to concede on various aspects of India's new development policies. Simply put, the rural poor changed the future path of development in India.

To account for the agency of the rural poor, I drew on various important works that engage the role of the poor in the political process. I found explanatory power in both the individualist/rational approach, as well as the communitarian approach to the politics of the rural poor. Building on these approaches, I emphasized the importance of state structure in the

³³ Important work has been conducted on the role of the media in framing issues. For a representative example, please see, Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992, 54).

political process. With regards to the Indian case, its democratic political structure conditioned the peasantry and provided the anti SEZ resistance the opportunity to engage in meaningful dissent, without too much fear of government repression. India's democratic structure also helped broker between otherwise disparate resistances occurring across the country, while re-framing the SEZ issue along the way. This same structure conditioned India's political leaders to make significant concessions to the anti SEZ resistance due to the importance of maintaining legitimacy in a democracy.

This study also provides evidence that while India's democracy might be imperfect; it is functioning and continues to develop. As such, the study provides an alternative viewpoint to the large body of scholarly work that argues that India's democracy is in a process of erosion. Instead, it seems that the foundation of India's democracy remains strong, and is indeed becoming stronger. Thus a developing democracy need not be consolidated to be functioning.

In the remainder of this study, I explore the questions and arguments set out in this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 provides a general overview of India's democratic political history, showing that in many ways, the foundation for India's democracy was laid even before its independence from England in 1947. In Chapter 3, I set out the stories of resistance in Singur and Nandigram, West Bengal. These two cases provide much of the empirical basis for the arguments in this study. I would like to note here that many interview respondents have been kept anonymous, due to the sensitive nature of SEZs in India. Details are set out in appendix A of this study. Chapter 4 makes the case that the grassroots resistances against the export automobile factory in Singur and chemical SEZ in Nandigram were facilitated by the democratic history of West Bengal, including past successful political resistances, the continued empowerment of a pro peasant political party, and institutionalized democratic governance at the

local levels. I also briefly touch on a similar resistance in the state of Goa to buttress the Singur and Nandigram cases. Chapter 5 explores the role of civil society, and especially social activists, intellectuals, and NGOs, in the resistance. The chapter provides evidence that India's civil society helped frame and elevate the resistance. Chapter 6 examines the role of some of India's opposition parties in the social resistance. I argue that the heavy involvement of opposition parties provides support to the argument that India is proceeding down the path of institutionalized multi party politics. In Chapter 7 I look at how India's print media reported on SEZs and the resistance to them. I make the case in this chapter that India's print media is capable of heavy and timely reporting on an important social issue, and further, is capable of scrutinizing and criticizing India's state and national governments. In Chapter 8 I conclude the study by revisiting the arguments I set out in this introduction. I also lay out wider implications of this study and potential avenues for further research. My research methods are set out in the appendix of this study.

Table 1-1. Some relevant details of the 2005 Special Economic Zones Act.

Category	Details
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 year income tax holiday, including 100% exemption for first 5 years • 100% exemption from all taxes for goods and services imported in/exported out of zone • 100% exemption from all customs and tariffs • 100% exemption from service and securities transaction taxes • 100% exemption from central sales taxes • State subsidized infrastructure as well as tax exemptions on utilities
Approvals Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company, state, or central government can apply to set up an SEZ. • Single Window clearance process: one government body oversees the approvals process. • Approvals process subject to strict timelines. For example, the government approvals body must conclude the approvals process within 30 days of receiving zone application.
Zone Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone managed by a 'Development Commissioner' government approved authority, not below the rank of Deputy Secretary. • Duty of Development commissioner is to develop zone infrastructure, promote zone exports, and review zone performance. There is no mention of functions in term of adherence to labor or environmental standards. • Inspection of zones by any government body must receive prior approval from development commissioner • All civil and criminal offenses tried by a special court appointed by the state government • States have power to relax labor laws inside zones • SEZ exempt from local government jurisdiction in many states • Minimum processing area in zones 35% (65% of zone can be used for non processing purposes)

Source: Government of India: The Special Economic Zones Act. 2005. No. 28, and Gopalakrishnan (2007).

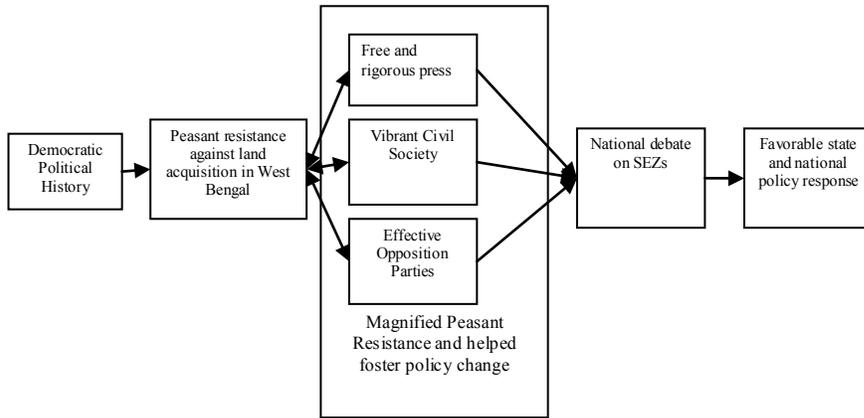


Figure 1-1. The process of Political Participation regarding the SEZ issue in India

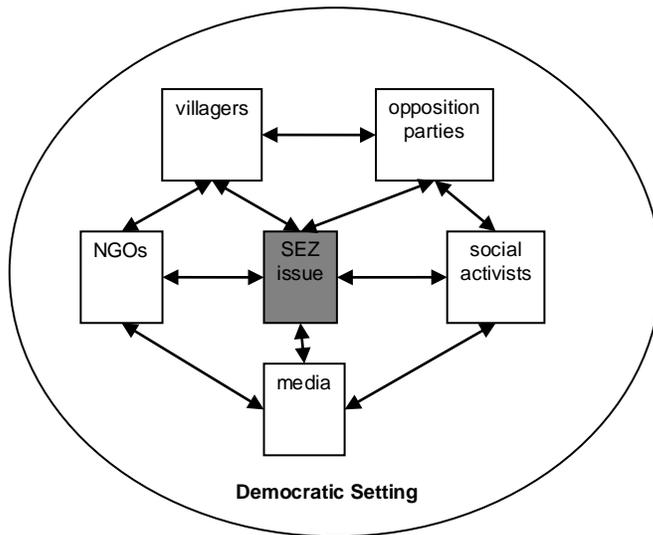


Figure 1-2. Brokering and framing the SEZ issue

CHAPTER 2 A BRIEF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF INDIA

Introduction

India's democracy has been called 'baffling' and a 'paradox' (Weiner 1989; Varshney 1998), and a whole section of a 1998 edition *Journal of Democracy* (vol 9:3) was devoted to understanding how 'India defies the odds' in terms of its long standing democracy. Although India's democracy might seem anomalous (especially when considering the country's high levels of poverty and ethnic diversity), its democratic foundations are deeply rooted in various political events that occurred during colonialism and the mass nationalist movement that ended British occupation.

Many have blamed the reality that much of India's populace remains in destitute poverty on two aspects of the country's political history. The first is that India's democratic political structure, established during colonial rule, preceded meaningful economic growth and industrialization. As such, there were too many cooks in the kitchen and a leadership concerned with legitimacy and accountability to push meaningful economic growth, centered on industrialization. Second, many have blamed India's historically heavy government intervention in the economy on the country's underwhelming economic performance in the first four decades after independence. Government control over much of the country's economy was the political will of the country's first key leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Before launching into the resistance against SEZs in India, as the rest of this study does, it is important to pause for a moment and reflect on the impact of India's economic and political history on the current events surrounding SEZs. The reality of underwhelming industrial growth in India was the catalyst for significant economic reforms starting in the early 1990's and culminating in the passing of the 2005 SEZ act. The deep democratic history of the country also

provided the foundation however in which the establishment of SEZs in the country would occur in a negotiated fashion between a variety of stakeholders, including India's rural poor.

India's Democratic History

India's democracy has been subject to extensive and justified critique, as all democracies are (see for example, Bardhan 1984; Kohli 1990; Chhibber 1999). At the same time, the country's democratic politics has been a source of marvel. Writing in 1966, Barrington Moore stated that

[i]f imperfect, the democracy was no mere sham. There had been a working parliamentary system since Independence in 1947, an independent judiciary, and the standard liberal freedoms: free general elections in which the governing party had accepted defeat in an important part of the country, civilian control over the military, a head of state that made very limited use of formal extensive powers (Moore 1966, 314).

How did India, a large, ethnically diverse, and poor country, emerge from colonialism a democracy? How has it managed to sustain its democratic political system? The colonial foundations of India's democracy are an important part of the country's political story. India was under British colonial occupation from the end of the 17th century until independence in 1947.¹ Although colonialism in India had all the typical aspects of forced occupation, including repression and economic pillage, the colonial period in India also provided the political foundation on which India's post independence democracy would be built. I touch on the relationship between colonialism and democracy in India in this section.

Indians have historically been contentious, and the resistance in Singur and Nandigram against the industrial projects is a continuation of centuries of grassroots political activism.²

Various rebellions and a mutiny occurred during colonial rule, which in turn led to a number of

¹ It is difficult to establish the beginning of colonial occupation in India. However by the end of the 17th century, the British East India Company had already gained significant political power in various regions across the country.

² For an interesting account of this trend, please see Sen (2005). A.R Desia (1979) has edited a comprehensive volume on the history of peasant struggles in India. Charles Tilly (1995) influenced my use of the term 'contentious' here.

important political developments. The British incorporated India's elite into the colonial fold, tasking them with the collection of taxes in return for compensation, and private property rights. Doing so made sense for the British who were trying to control the country with minimal financial input. The local elite in India had in fact already played a role in tax collection under the Mogul empire in the 1700's, and thus the British simply strengthened an already existing framework established for the purposes of taxation.³ However the establishment of native property rights was a new twist on the existing tax structure. The incorporation of the Indian elite (including princes and landlords) into the colonial system, as well as the legal guarantee of private property led Barrington Moore to argue that "[p]eace and property... were the first gift of British domination" (Moore 1966, 347). The institutionalization of private property (in exchange for tax collection) also led to the establishment of a basic court system in 1861, which provided the foundation for India's court system after independence (Kohli 2004, 231).

The British also developed an effective and professionalized civil service in order to facilitate the collection of taxes in an orderly fashion (Kohli 2004, 237). Kohli called India's civil service, the 'heart' of the Indian colonial state, "collecting revenues, maintaining order, and executing government policies on a daily basis in often remote regions..." (Kohli 2004, 237). Although the civil service was initially mostly staffed by the British, Indian citizens increasingly joined the civil service following World War I, and by 1939 half of the civil service comprised native Indians (Kohli 2004, 239). This highly professionalized and efficient civil service was kept intact after independence, and many native Indian's involved in the British controlled civil service went on to join India's civil service. As such, India' had an efficient bureaucratic structure in place at Independence, staffed with homegrown professionals.

³ For more on this, please see, Moore (1966, 325).

Although some power was devolved to local elite in the form of tax collection, a mutiny in 1857, which started with Indian soldiers and progressed to a full scale rebellion across the country, caused the British to establish centralized control over the country with a strong troop presence under strict command of the colonial occupier.⁴ In keeping with British ideology of good government however, the army was continuously subject to civilian control (Indian soldiers received training in this regard) and remained largely apolitical (Kohli 2004, 235). Thus India has a large and effective army, but one that stays in the barracks until called by civilian rulers, is a legacy of British rule.

India's Federal Structure

India's federal structure has been cited by some as helping to sustain the country's democracy (see for example, Weiner 1989). The foundations for India's federal structure were established with the Montague-Chelmsford reforms which were approved by the British parliament in 1919. These reforms accomplished a number of things, including the extension of limited suffrage to Indian citizens. Most importantly however, the reforms devolved some political power to India's provincial councils. As Weiner notes, "no longer were provinces the administrative agents of the central government, but they had substantial powers of their own" (Weiner 1989, 185). Thus at independence, India's provinces (later legalized into states) already had experience with political power, based on electoral legitimacy (Weiner 1989, 185). Post independence, Nehru continued to decentralize political power to India's states. Nehru's acceptance of a federal political structure in turn advocated the election of state and local leaders, who in turn set down political roots in India's states. India's federal structure has worked to contain conflict that might otherwise have erupted into national issues. While some states might

⁴ Some, (e.g. Embree 1963) have called this India's first war of Independence.

be rumbling with political turmoil, the national government can be somewhat insulated. As Weiner aptly puts it, “India is...like a huge lorry with a dozen or more tires; a puncture in one or two tires does not throw the lorry into the ditch” (Weiner 1989, 36).

Although India’s political structure is federal, it is important to note that significant power is maintained at the central level. For example, the concept of ‘president’s rule’ is embedded in the country’s constitution. President’s rule gives the center the power to dissolve a state assembly if a state is unable to contain civil unrest. Under President’s rule, India’s president governs a given state directly for a period of 6 months after which elections must be held. This provides an important stabilizing element to India’s democracy, and in fact has been used many times to calm unrest in India’s various states (Manor 2001, 83).⁵

India’s Party System

Colonialism in India also provided the impetus for democratic party politics once the country achieved independence in 1947. India’s most famous political party, the Indian National Congress, was established in 1885, long before independence, and was a political force throughout India’s colonial history. In keeping with British realism that India could not be ruled without extending some sovereign power to the vast and diverse country, the Congress party was permitted to govern to a limited extent in various regions across India. In 1910, the British government declared it would allow restricted parliamentary sovereignty to develop across the country, including a gradual extension of suffrage to select Indians. In 1935, Indians were also granted legal rights of limited political participation in the central government. This in turn led to the adoption of responsible government in many regions in India, with a basis in elections

⁵ Various presidents have abused president’s rule in the past, taking over power of states when not really necessary. A landmark 1994 Supreme Court ruling however has laid down strict guidelines in terms of the Center’s power to impose president’s rule. For more on this, please see Manor (2001).

(Misra 1976, 167). The Congress party, with deep historical roots in the country, gained power at the local level in many areas, and between 1937 and 1939 gained political power over select states (Varshney 1998, 39). At independence, the party gained formal control over the country, and was already well versed in the skill of democratic governance. The Congress party in India thus gained experience in governing under colonial rule. As Rudolph and Rudolph note, the party, by virtue of its resistance against the British, also gained experience in terms of participating in political opposition. This “taught India’s political class that party politics and political participation could be competitive as well as revolutionary. This lesson powerfully shaped post-independence politics” (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987, 128).

Although the Congress party dominated the political scene for many decades, other parties had also developed in the decades preceding independence, at the same time that the British extended limited suffrage to India’s citizens. This helped develop the notion of political participation and the party system. As Weiner notes, “[p]arties had to form local organizations; a machinery for choosing candidates had to be established; and party leaders had to be selected, platforms prepared, funds raised, and electoral campaigns conducted” (Weiner 1989, 187). All this gave experience to India’s parties in terms of participating in elections prior to independence. Importantly, Weiner argues that, “[p]olitical parties and organizations in India are an outgrowth of an historical process, not a foreign transplant” (Weiner 1989, 185).

Democracy was historically a key mandate of the Congress party prior to independence. As Kohli notes the demands of the Congress party included “full democracy in India, regular elections, mass adult suffrage, and the basic liberal freedoms of speech and association” (Kohli 2004, 244). At Independence, the Congress party, and especially its leadership, maintained its commitments and played a key role in the strengthening of the country’s infant democracy.

Although India's first Prime Minister (and key leader of the independence movement) Jawaharlal Nehru could have easily become a populist leader, he was deeply committed to rule through democratic institutions. Whenever disputes arose within the party for example, Nehru subjected them to India's democratic institutions, including the court systems (Varshney 1998, 45). For example, although Nehru regarded the centralization of authority a key tool for tasks such as the alleviation of poverty, he did not stand in the way of the party's prior commitment to implement a federal system that was largely based upon the many languages spoken in India. Thus as Weiner notes, in the years immediately following independence the country was, "governed by a leadership committed to parliamentary institutions, representative government, electoral process, and political parties" (Weiner 1989, 190). This ideology fostered the adoption of the constitution of 1950, in which,

[s]uffrage was made universal for all men and women twenty-one years of age and older, with neither property nor literacy requirements....The constitution provided that parliament and state assemblies were to be elected at least every five years. An independent election commission was created with responsibility for delimiting more than 500 parliamentary and more than 3000 state assembly constituencies. The commission was responsible for registering all eligible voters, for recognizing state and national parties, for establishing procedures for the nomination of candidates, and for managing all elections (Weiner 1989, 190).

Party Dominance after Independence

Riding a wave of nationalist sentiment, coupled with its transformation into a catchall, mass based political organization, the Congress party became a dominant party in the India. Due to the party's popularity, no competitors arose to challenge its leadership, thus sparing civil conflict that often comes with independence movements (Varshney 1998, 39). The Congress party governed the country uninterrupted for 25 years after independence at the national level. Due to Indira Gandhi's (Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter) tinkering with the country's democracy in

the late 1970's, the party lost national elections in 1977. The party regained power again in 1984, but has been much less powerful ever since.

The historical dominance of the Congress party in India's political scene has stagnated the development of viable opposition parties in the country for several decades. Indeed until recently, most opposition parties have had mainly regional roots, and were thus unable to challenge the Congress nationally. However the legal framework for multi party political competition was grounded in the country's constitution and opposition parties did historically play a role in continuously pressuring the Congress party and trying to work with factions of the party that might be like minded (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987, 128). Indeed, the Congress party has fragmented a number of times since independence. The Congress did begin losing state elections, and only winning nationally with a minority since 1967. This has left open the possibility of viable opposition parties and coalition governments (Weiner 1989, 34). As I discuss in Chapter 6, a number of parties have merged as viable opposition, and the BJP, India's second most powerful party took over the reins of the central government for a number of years after the 1997 elections.

Nationalism and the Foundation for Social Solidarity

India's Congress party has also had a role in conditioning Indian citizens in the art of political protest. Under the charismatic stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi, the party was transformed in the first half of the 1900's from an organization representing primarily India's upper class, to a mass based social movement against British occupation. Gandhi encouraged leaders of the congress party to directly engage with the masses of rural villagers in the country, thus establishing important links between rural India and the party, and engaging India's rural poor in political participation (Frankel 2005, 9). This movement successfully mobilized the lower classes and helped turn the party – from one representing upper class Indians to one

incorporating multiple classes, and especially the rural poor. This evolution of the INC gave the party widespread legitimacy and strength as the party became the symbol of independence and freedom for India (Varshney 1998, 39).

Mahatma Gandhi of course was the key figure in conditioning Indian citizens to protest and participate in politics. Much has been written about Gandhi's ideology of peaceful resistance as an effective means to foster social change. As Varshney notes, "[e]mbracing the idea of a free and united country, millions came out to protest and thousands went readily to jail" (Varshney 1998, 39). The national movement in India against British colonialism, under the leadership of Gandhi provided the foundation for nationalist solidarity amongst Indian citizens. Gandhi's well known practice of non violence, as well as his desire to empower the rural poor in India incorporated this sector into the nationalist cause.⁶ As Barrington Moore points out, "...the main thrust of Gandhi's program was the revival of traditional village India. It was with the peasants that Gandhi's heart really lay, and it was they who responded most enthusiastically to his movement" (Moore 1966, 375).

To be sure, Indian society is deeply divided in terms of caste, language, ethnicity, and class, and it would be a romantic claim to argue that India's citizens have historically transcended such boundaries in the name of political solidarity. Indeed, India has been torn by strife, and especially ethnic conflict numerous times throughout the country's history. However the continued resistance against British occupation in the early 1900's, blossoming into a national mass political movement involving all classes, laid the prospect for the transcending of social barriers when engaging in political resistance. Thus at independence, India's citizens were

⁶ The important role of the rural poor during India's independence struggles, and India's leaders such as Gandhi touting the importance of village life, might provide insight into the country's historically left leaning populace.

well versed in widespread civil disobedience, and the British had left behind a political party capable of funneling such disobedience through electoral channels (Weiner 1989, 190).

Ashutosh Varshney has also made the claim that the potential for social solidarity amongst ethnically divided Indians was fostered during the nationalist movements against the British in the first half of the 20th century, and that this notion of solidarity has in fact quelled ethnic violence in the country to a large extent. In fact, Varshney notes that ethnic conflict is isolated primarily to urban settings, and thus is not a significant issue to the two thirds of Indians who make up the country's rural populace (Varshney 2002, 4). The presence of nationalist solidarity in India can also be contrasted with various states in Africa where a sense of nationalism was not imbued amongst the African populace at the time of independence, with the result of continued ethnic strife and civil war.⁷

One famous example of the potential of Indian citizens for grassroots social solidarity is the social resistance occurring to secure justice for victims of the Union Carbide chemical disaster in Bhopal India. In 1984, a deadly gas leak occurred at a chemical plant in Bhopal, owned by the US multinational Union Carbide. As many as 20,000 Bhopal citizens have died due to the disaster and over 100,000 citizens still suffer adverse effects from the chemical disaster. Union Carbide implemented a sub par compensation package and to date, no one has been sent to jail for the tragedy.

The quest for justice from the Union Carbide disaster has morphed into a large multi-pronged resistance against a variety of involved parties, including the Indian government and Dow Chemical (who bought Union Carbide in 2001). It would be difficult (but worthy of further research) to capture this resistance in its entirety, as there are countless activist citizens and civic organizations involved in the cause. However it is important to touch briefly on this movement.

⁷ Atul Kohli (2004) effectively contrasts Indian nationalism and the lack of nationalism in Nigeria.

Soon after the Bhopal disaster, a group of activist women formed the *Bhopal Gas-Affected Women's Stationary Worker's Union*, with the goal of securing better wages for those citizens who were crippled by the disaster, and who were subsequently re-trained by the government to work in less physically demanding jobs. The movement quickly began to blossom into a wider campaign for justice in Bhopal, and the organization was re-branded into *The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal*. The movement engaged in the tried and tested methods of resistance including a thirty three day protest march to Delhi, a demonstration at Dow headquarters in Mumbai where activist citizens popped balloons filled with red paint to signify that Dow now has blood on their hands with the purchase of Union Carbide, and countless hunger strikes.⁸ Although the disaster is now over two decades old, the movement to secure justice for Bhopal continues to grow. In 2004, two Bhopali citizen activists were awarded the globally renowned, Goldman Environmental Prize. In August 2008, after an especially prolonged resistance against Dow chemical, the Indian central government finally agreed to pursue Dow for further compensation for victims of Bhopal (and agreed to several other demands made by the movement – including stepping up the extradition of Warren Anderson, former CEO of Union Carbide).⁹ This was seen as a major victory for the resistance. In September 2008, activism at a Dow Chemical plant in another Indian state Maharashtra caused the Chief Minister of the state to stop work at the plant for a month so that the government could evaluate objections to the plant.¹⁰ Currently, the *International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal* and a variety of other organizations are engaging in a 'Dow Quit India' campaign, with obvious

⁸ A memorial in Bhopal reads, *No Hiroshima, No Bhopal. We Want to Live*

⁹ "Historic statement by the Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers", *International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal*, accessed 30 January, 2009, http://www.bhopal.net/blog_pr/archives/2008/08/historic_statem.html

¹⁰ "Protests force CM to Order Halt to Dow Project Work in Maharashtra", *International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal*, accessed January 30, 2009, <http://www.bhopal.net/dowindia/archives/2008/09/index.html>

parallels to Gandhi's Quit India campaign during the Independence movement.¹¹ The next item on the movement's agenda is spearheading the *Global Day of Action for Corporate Accountability* on December 3, 2008. As of this writing, 75 groups from around the world have signed up to take part.¹²

Thus citizens in India are well versed in the potential adverse affects of corporate irresponsibility in India. As I discussed above, Indian citizens are equally as well versed in the art of political protest. The methods of protest used in the movements for justice in Bhopal have easy parallels with past movements in India, and with the current resistance against SEZs. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter 5, the Bhopal movement has become intimately involved in the SEZ resistance, and Bhopali villagers have visited Nandigram villagers in a show of solidarity. Further potential parallels between the Bhopal movement and the current anti SEZ resistance would be an important and interesting venue for further research.

Thus a number of aspects of India's political history have led to the sustaining of democracy in the country. Much of this history is attributed (at least in an indirect manner) to the legacies of British colonialism. Upon achieving independence, India inherited a highly centralized government, indigenous leaders with important political experience, an efficient and professional civil service, a professional army that was subject to civilian control, a population that understood the power of political protest, and a political party that was well versed in the art of democratic governance. Thus, in many respects, the structural seeds of a burgeoning democracy were established under British colonialism.¹³

¹¹ Boston 4 Bhopal, accessed January 31, 2009, http://www.boston4bhopal.org/writefax_pune.php

¹² "Global Day of Action for Corporate Accountability", *No More Bhopal, No More Dow*, accessed 30 January, 2009, <http://actionsignup.puphin.com/index.php>.

¹³ Myron Weiner (1989) notes that an impressive number of former British colonies have maintained British style democratic institutions.

India's Economic History

India's vibrant political history is of course intimately entwined with the country's economic development and a full overview of the relationship between the two is far beyond the scope of this study. I will touch on some important points in this section however, which will set the study of SEZs and the resistance to them into the broader economic framework of the country. Most notably is the notion that various aspects of India's democratic political history has resulted in significant economic stagnation, and the subsequent reality that India remains a destitute poor country. I bring up two aspects in this regard. The first is that India's fairly institutionalized democratic structures precluded development as elected leaders sought to balance political legitimacy with economic growth, with an overall negative effect on the latter. The second is how India's early leaders set the country on an economic path with socialist overtones, stagnating development in the process.

Some have argued that India's democratic political structure caused elite conflict, which in turn undermined economic growth in the country. In *The Political Economy of Development in India* (1984), for example, Pranab Bardhan argued that India's economic growth stagnated because India's democracy contained the political space in which a political conflict between the industrial class (comprising wealthy business families in India), wealthy farmers in the rural sector, and a myriad of civilian and military bureaucrats could occur in the political arena. The result has been that there is no dominant industrial class that can forge ahead with industrial growth because there is an uneasy coalition of the three conflicting classes (Bardhan 1984, 61). A similar sentiment was echoed by Atul Kohli in *State-Directed Development* (2004). Kohli characterized India as a 'Fragmented Multi-class' state, in which political leaders must "...worry more about political support than do leaders of other types of developing country states..." (Kohli 2004, 11). Placing significant weight on India's colonial history, Kohli argued that,

The Indian state often lacked the political capacity to translate its enormous economic ambitions into outcomes. Central to this incapacity is its fragmented authority, characterized by both intraclass and elite-mass schisms and ruling coalitions that are generally multiclass. Leaders in such a state worry perennially about their legitimacy, inclining them to adopt economic policies based on whether they can help to consolidate their political position, rather than on whether they will necessarily produce rapid industrialization and growth (Kohli 2004, 286).

Other works have placed similar emphasis on the role of everyday Indian citizens in defining India's economic trajectories. An early and seminal example was *The Politics of Scarcity* (1962), where Myron Weiner succinctly outlines the problems in India associated with development in a democratic political framework:

The chief political problem of economic development in a free society arises from the very freedom of men to try to influence government policies and administration. Vast numbers of Indians, availing themselves of opportunities provided in a society of free political institutions, have organized to press a host of demands upon government. Given the limited resources possessed by government, a vast gap remains between what organized groups demand and what government is capable of providing....The requirements of political responsiveness and the requirements of economic planning are thus often at odds with one another (Weiner 1962, xvii).

One segment of India's society that has had significant political voice is the country's rural poor (by virtue of their electoral might). Although, one must be careful not to romanticize political power amongst the rural poor (much power resides with the rural landowning elite), Varshney notes that the rural poor have had a direct impact on the course of the country's development, a consequence, he argues, of democracy preceding India's industrial revolution (Varshney 1995, 3). In many states, representatives of the rural sector have managed to rise into the upper echelons of government, which in turn have put India's rural sector into impressive positions of political power. For example, Varshney notes how the countryside successfully beat back an attempt to increase taxes on agricultural income in the 1970's, which was especially notable given that agricultural income contributed 45% of national income at the time, yet only contributed 1% of tax revenue (Varshney 1995, 95).

Thus India's democratic political framework has provided Indian citizens with the political opportunity to voice demands, and India's economic realities dictate that India's government usually cannot accommodate such demands. The desire for legitimacy in turn encouraged the Congress party in India to pursue an agenda of "accommodation and absorption", in terms of trying to incorporate the interests of a variety of organized stakeholders, such as trade unions, student organizations, peasant organizations, cultural groups, welfare associations, elite agrarian interests, which all conflict with the demands of the business community (Weiner 1962, 217). India's democracy was simply too messy to promote meaningful economic growth.

Economic Socialism under Democratic Rule: India's early post independence economic history has been defined by the country's central government exercising significant control over many aspects of the economy to limit the latitude and maneuver of private enterprise and to place higher priority on public concerns than a pure market approach would normally allow. Although not socialist in a political sense, the first decades after independence can be branded a form of economic socialism that has been dictated by the center (Frankel 2005, 114). This approach to development had firm roots in the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, and also India's first post independence prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. By playing a key role in India's independence movement, Nehru had the political capital that enabled him to adopt a brand of economic socialism, rooted in democracy, that aimed at reducing scarcity and poverty that so plagued the pre independence Indian populace.¹⁴ With Nehru at the helm, India's dominating Congress party used the wave of nationalism fostered by independence from the British which in turn, "[h]elped to legitimize political and policy choices, again by subordinating the private to the public good"

¹⁴ In *Capitalists against Markets*, Peter Swenson (2002) provides a good account of how Sweden constitutes a 'social democracy'. In Sweden, a democratically elected government has historically exercised significant control over many aspects of Sweden's economy. Thus economic socialism within a democratic political framework is not unique to India.

(Kohli 2004). As such, the Congress Party, under Nehru's leadership successfully implemented a state led process of modernization, one that specifically favored an ideology of interventionism at the hands of the central government (Weiner 1962, 2). The goal amongst India's early leaders was to dramatically increase the public sector's role in basic and heavy industrialization, and then to harness its fruits, so that economic wealth could be spread more evenly across the country, instead of being concentrated into the hands of a private few (Frankel 2005, 71).

A major political development occurred in 1950 when the central government established a national planning commission, which was tasked with advising the national cabinet, in terms of the economic direction of the country, by developing periodic economic 'plans' for the country. Reforms in 1955 brought the commission directly under the control of the country's prime minister, giving Nehru immense political power in terms of setting the economic direction of the country. As Frankel notes "[f]rom 1955 to 1964, Nehru's pivotal position permitted a handful of men to determine national economic and social policy and methods of development" (Frankel 2005, 114). Thus from the outset, India's post independence political economy was to be heavily guided by the central government.

Two key economic developments occurred in India while under the rule of Nehru and the Congress party. The first is that the government assumed control over large swathes of the country's economy. As Bardhan notes, over the first several decades after Independence the Indian central government,

accumulated powers of direct ownership and control in the economy to an extent unparalleled in Indian history, both in the spheres of circulation (banking, credit, transport, distribution and foreign trade) and of production – directly manufacturing much of basic and capital goods, owing more than 60 percent of all productive capital in the industrial sector, running 8 of the top 10 industrial units in the country, directly employing two-thirds of all workers in the organized sector (Bardhan 1984, 38).

Second, the central government also established an elaborate regulatory framework called the ‘license-raj’ (rule), where private capitalists could hardly move without significant government oversight.¹⁵ Economic growth in the country was subject to elaborate and inefficient licensing procedures that allowed the government significant control over the economic direction of the country.

India has historically suffered from lackluster economic growth while under this government driven and highly regulated economic program. This has largely been attributed to inflexible regulation and an overly interventionist state in the economy. In 1991, the Economist famously referred to India as a ‘caged tiger’ in terms of the potential for growth in the country, held back by government regulation.¹⁶ Indeed, India’s early model of development has been fingered by many as being a prime reason that a large proportion of the country remains in destitute poverty (Sinha 2005, 6).

In 1991, following the money laden and market oriented advice of the International Monetary Fund, the Congress led government adopted a variety of liberalization reforms, including the relaxation of licensing regulations, and the reduction of tariffs, in an effort to stimulate growth.¹⁷ The reforms contributed to a significant up tick in economic growth (GDP increases have been in the arena of 6-9% a year since).¹⁸ However, as has been much noted in

¹⁵ Several key pieces of socialist legislation were put in place and stand to this day, such as the Development and Regulation Act which forced industry with a certain amount of workers to seek government approval for any expansion of operations. The 1947 Industrial Disputes act, regulates the settlement of disputes and subjects firms with over 300 employees to seek government approval for layoff. These are just two of the myriad of complex socialist legislation put in place during the country’s first several decades of democratic rule.

¹⁶ The Economist, ‘Survey of India’, 4 May, 1991.

¹⁷ According to Rob Jenkins (1999, 16), tariffs were reduced from over 300% pre 1991 to 40% in 1997-98. Most restrictions on imports were removed, and in some cases foreign companies could own a full 100% of domestic industry. As well, according to Rohwer (1995) dozens of state owned firms were privatized.

¹⁸ I derived this statistic by averaging GDP growth in India from 1991 to 2007. Data on percent GDP growth for India is available from the World Development Indicators dataset at the World Bank. This dataset can

the economic literature on India, increases in foreign investment have contributed only a small proportion of this growth. This has led many to argue that India's labor laws are overly stringent and that overwhelmingly complex and cumbersome government bureaucratic processes have stymied foreign direct investment into the country (see for example, Besley and Burgess 2002). In the current era of economic globalization, developing countries are predominantly looking to increase foreign investment and stimulate trade flows to drive economic growth. Factors that render a developing country uncompetitive, such as India's overbearing regulatory framework, position it poorly in terms of securing such investment. The poor levels of FDI inflows into the country was the key reason that India's ruling Congress party set out to update the export processing zones act in the first place, (the older version dated back to 1960).

These historical trends in India provide the framework for both SEZs as a proposed model of development in India, and for the reality that this model has been subject to significant resistance. India is desperately trying to emerge from poverty, and is attempting to harness foreign direct investment as a means to do so. At the same time, this rash model of development is running into significant social resistance by a public well versed in the skill of political participation. In the next section I outline why West Bengal provides a good case study in which to examine the relationship between SEZs and political resistance in some detail.

West Bengal – Industrialization and Political Participation

West Bengal provides an ideal case study in which to examine the relationship between economic growth and political participation in India on a more micro level. The state has been characterized by the extensive politicization of its citizens, most famous being the freedom struggles against the British in the early 1940's and a large sharecroppers rights struggles in the

be found online at

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20398986~menuPK:64133163~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html>, accessed 3 February, 2009.

first decades after Independence. The latter struggle, known as the Tebhaga movement, led to the election of a pro peasant communist party (the CPM) in 1977, which then promoted rural development over industrialization for a number of decades. Partly due to this, the state has suffered economically. Most of the population in the state is dependent on agriculture for its income and the state has been slower than most others in India to foster industrialization (Sinha 2005, 184).

To combat West Bengal's poverty, stagnating growth, high unemployment and continued dependence on agriculture, the latest chief minister of the state, and CPM party leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has pursued an aggressive strategy of liberalization and industrialization. Called 'Brand Budha', the chief minister has sought to change the developmental path of the state.¹⁹ His overarching goal was to reduce the dependence of the state on agriculture, and the catchphrase for the party during the 2006 state elections was "Agriculture our Foundation, Industry our Future" (Basu 2007, 294). Indeed, with the Left Front government in the state continuously coming to power with upwards of 80% support, the party had the political capital in which to do so.

While still espousing the pro poor rhetoric that has defined the CPM in the state, Bhattacharya argued that it is impossible to engage in socialist style growth while being surrounded by capitalism both in other states in India and globally (Basu 2007, 292). With this altered political ideology in hand, Bhattacharya set the state on a course of economic change, focusing primarily on rapid industrialization. For example, he promised to rein in unions, and relax land holding restrictions in the state to cater to industries that required large tracts of land, all of which in turn began to draw the notice of India's big industrial houses, such as the Tata Family. (Basu 2007, 294). Foreigners began to take notice too. In 2005, the US ambassador,

¹⁹ This term was coined by Basu (2007).

David Mulford said, “Bhattacharya should serve as a role model for other left leaders on how to attract investments”.²⁰ Importantly, the relaxation of land holding restrictions paved the way for the future attempt at establishing the chemical SEZ in Nandigram. Thus it was no surprise that the state began to aggressively promote SEZs (all the while proclaiming the injustices of them to the center).²¹ The violence that ensued at the hand of the government during opposition to the automobile factory in Singur and the chemical SEZ in Nandigram illustrated just how far the ruling government was willing to go to push forth Brand Budha’s economic plans.

Once Brand Budha’s program was put into action however, with the proposed construction of the Singur automobile plant in Singur and the chemical SEZ in Nandigram, it was no surprise that vehement grassroots resistance ensued. As former land reform commissioner, Debabrata Bandyopadhyay told me during an interview, “West Bengal is highly politicized. All the time. There is no time that it is not”.²² The state has had historically high rates of election turnout (I set out this data in Chapter 6). As I detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the state also has prolonged history of grassroots political participation. Two historical events are worthy of note. The first is the freedom struggle against the British in Midnapore (the region in West Bengal where Nandigram is located). The people in this region were heavily involved in the struggles for independence from England, decades before colonialism ended. This included periods where villagers in this region refused to pay tax, broke cloth quota rules, and the burning of shops that were selling English goods (Maity 1975, 52). The most famous resistance in

²⁰ Hindu, Business Line, August 20, 2005

²¹ As of November 2008, the state had 16 zones approved by the center. This data can be found at *The Citizens Research Collective on SEZ*, accessed 30, January, 2009. http://sez.icrindia.org/files/Formal_approvals_granted_under_SEZ_Act.pdf. As Basu (2007) points out, Bhattacharya even took efforts to silence critics within his own party that the Salim Group, the Indonesian developer that was to build the chemical SEZ in Nandigram, had played a role in the killing of communists under the Suharto Regime.

²² Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

Midnapore occurred in 1942 when villagers forcefully took over police and administrative offices and established political sovereignty for a period of 18 months. The British were only able to re-gain control once a cyclone hit, devastating region and the movement (Maity 1975, 74).²³

The state is also famous for a sharecropper's rights movement known as the Tebhaga movement that occurred in the first few decades after independence. I detail this struggle in Chapter 4, but suffice it to say for now that the struggle played a role in the election of the CPM party in 1977, who until recently was considered pro peasant. It is worthy of note that the CPM is the longest running democratically elected communist party in the world.

Thus the state of West Bengal makes a good foundation in which to examine the story of economic development within a democratic setting. The state has a long history of democratic participation and subsequent government response. More recently however, the state has promoted a program of rapid industrialization as a means to emerge from the destitute poverty that characterizes West Bengal.

At this juncture, it is important to revisit a central premise of this study. The story of SEZ development and political resistance does not start and stop with West Bengal. The people of the state however were among the first, and certainly the loudest in terms of resisting projects of this sort. Indeed, during pilot fieldwork, many activists and journalists encouraged me to visit the state, as it was often called 'ground zero' of the anti SEZ resistance. Once there, I quickly became captivated with the story of resistance. As such, I start this study with the story in West Bengal. However, in later chapters of this dissertation, I do not confine myself solely to this one

²³ The region actually has a long history of popular resistance, dating back to 1783. For a brief, yet comprehensive history of grassroots struggles in this region, please see (Chatterjee 1986). A website has also been developed to honor the tradition of struggle in the region. *Legacy of Midnapore*, accessed November 26, 2008, <http://www.midnapore.in/>

Indian state. Although comparative case work at the state level in India would certainly be a worthy endeavor (and indeed many researchers in India are undertaking such a task), the story of how the West Bengal resistance was magnified across the country; how national level NGOs, media outlets, and opposition parties picked up the cause, is the equally important empirical focus of this study.

Conclusion: The Path to Economic Development in India?

Both Samuel Huntington and Atul Kohli have succinctly outlined an alternative development path for countries such as India. *In Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), Huntington argues that developing societies must not extend democratic freedoms until the state is sufficiently strong and stable so as to mitigate the potential instability that comes with modernization. In essence, modernization leads to an increasingly literate, educated, and mobile population all with renewed demands on government. The government must be strong enough to absorb such demands. Huntington lauds the one party system under the Mexican PRI as an example of the strengthening of government before modernization (Huntington 1968, 320). Thus in India, the Huntington argument would imply that the rapid extension of democratic freedom at Independence has stunted the country's political and hence economic growth.

In State Directed Development, Kohli (2004) makes a similar argument to Huntington. Kohli argues that political stability, fostered by a strong, powerful (and if need be repressive) state augurs best for economic development. He characterizes his ideal state type as 'cohesive capitalist', a state which has "centralized and purposive authority structures that often penetrate deep into society". Key to this authority structure is a "tight control over labor" so that capitalist entrepreneurs are availed of a cheap, disciplined and flexible labor force in which to manufacture goods and foster growth. The result is a "marriage of repression and profits, aimed at economic

growth in the name of the nation” (Kohli 2004, 10). Kohli acknowledges that such political contexts have typically occurred under authoritarian regimes.

This leads to a fundamental dilemma that this study helps highlight. How can a developing democratic state reconcile the cross pressures resulting from need to grow the economic pie and the reality that such growth is subject to limitations inherent in a political democracy? A definitive answer eludes me. However, I return to this question in the conclusion to this study and speculate that the negotiated path to development, while invariably slow, is the ideal path for sustainable development, especially as countries today attempt to develop within an increasingly globalized economy.

CHAPTER 3
THE CASES: SINGUR AND NANDIGRAM

Introduction

One does not have to delve too deeply into India's demographic statistics to see that the cards are stacked against sustained political participation in the country. Despite over a decade of solid economic growth, India ranks 128 of 177 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index, behind several African countries, including Namibia and Equatorial New Guinea. One quarter of Indian children have dropped out of school by grade five and only 61% of Indian's are literate. Indians are also in relatively poor health. Life expectancy is 63.7 years, and infant mortality is 75 per 1000 live births. Economically, the story does not bode well either. The vast majority of India's populace live a life of poverty with 80% of the Indian population surviving on less than two dollars a day.¹ This dismal economic situation should, according to James Scott, compel the Indian peasant to adopt the 'safety first' principle, only engaging in collective action when their very life is at risk (Scott 1976, 5). Social demographics should also erode the potential of collective political participation in India even further, given the diversity of religion and language in the country. Although India is 80% Hindu, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists (among others) make up a notable proportion of the total population. There are also over 1000 languages spoken in the country. Indeed, the country's 52 states are largely divided along linguistic lines. Given the above statistics, many marvel that India's democracy has sustained itself for over six decades.²

By recounting two closely related peasant resistances to export oriented development projects in West Bengal, this chapter lays out what constitutes a puzzle in terms of much of the

¹ These figures came from The United Nations Development Program. 2007. *Human Development Report*. New York. The specific data cited above is available online at http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/indicators_table.cfm, accessed 31 August, 2008.

² For a good essay on how India 'defies the odds', please see Varshney (1998).

dominant works on peasant politics. Although both resistances had elements of Popkin's rationalist individualism, and Scott's safety first principles, they also tread far beyond these perspectives in many ways. As a precursor to any analytical undertaking of these resistances however (analysis begins in Chapter 4), it is first necessary to lay out the stories of Singur and Nandigram in some detail. In this chapter, I tell the stories of two separate, but closely related village resistances in 2006 and 2007 against export oriented industrial projects slated to be constructed in rural West Bengal. Both resistances were forceful, effective, and ultimately successful. They also illustrate the ability of the state's rural citizenry to quickly band together and form a legitimate, unified, and sustained voice against forces that go against their interests.

In the first resistance, peasants in a rural village block called Singur agitated against an export automobile factory that was being constructed on their farmland. In the second, a different group of peasants in a nearby block of villages called Nandigram, agitated against a chemical special economic zone (SEZ) that was due to set up shop on 10,000 acres of their farmland.³ In the Singur case, the resistance had lost steam during the months of November 2007 to March 2008 (encompassing the time of my fieldwork). Interviews revealed that many of the activist villagers felt that they had lost their battle against the project and the government, and it appeared that the project was going ahead.⁴ Construction began on the Singur car factory in January 2007, and was in full swing when I visited the site in January 2008. The first car was set to roll of production lines sometime in late 2008. However, after local elections in West

³ The village block is an administrative and political unit in India. A number of villages are organized into 'village blocks'. Various state representatives have offices in village blocks, including a taxation official, as well as officials involved in the environment and social welfare. Village blocks also have a role in maintaining land records. A multitude of village blocks comprise a village 'district'. The district is the highest administrative and political unit below the state level in India.

⁴ Interviews with villagers in Singur however revealed that many saw their resistance as highly successful because they believed that their resistance helped catalyze the nation wide social movement against SEZs. I elaborate on this point later on in the chapter and in Chapter 4.

Bengal in May of 2008, the Singur village resistance gained steam once again, and after two and a half years of sustained resistance, Tata motors, the company who owned the car factory pulled the plug on the project. In the Nandigram case, the communist government of West Bengal ultimately cancelled the chemical SEZ slated to be constructed in Nandigram. The potential economic consequences of the cancellation of these projects are immeasurable.

In both cases, peasants mounted a vigorous and unified opposition to the projects. The villagers in the affected regions took it upon themselves to organize and participate in daily demonstrations. Various village committees met regularly, where resistance plans were hashed out. Some villagers were responsible for disseminating committee plans, and soliciting feedback from common villagers for future meetings. Many villagers participated in door to door campaigns to further bolster support in the villages. Some wrote letters to the government, in many cases requesting information about the industrial projects under India's Right to Information (RTI) Act. Others gathered evidence for ongoing legal battles related to the struggle. In sum, villagers in Singur and Nandigram engaged democratic political expression to its fullest extent in their fight against the industrialization projects.

The Singur Resistance

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of the resistance to SEZs in Nandigram and indeed, across the country, it is important to start with the village resistance to the car factory in Singur, a block of villages about 60 miles North East of Nandigram. To be clear, the site of the export car factory is not designated as an SEZ. Nonetheless, two factors dictate that the Singur story be included in this dissertation. First, the West Bengal government was attempting to engage in forced land seizure for the project, similar to Nandigram. Second, although not an SEZ, the car factory, has been given a variety of economic incentives from the state government of West Bengal (many of which are classified). Thus economic and political parallels can quite

easily be drawn between the car factory and an SEZ: set up shop close to a shipping port, and where economic incentives are most attractive. In fact, the West Bengal government won the right to host the factory only after a heated battle with Uttar Pradesh, another Indian state vying for the factory. West Bengal offered the most attractive incentives and won the rights to host the project. Third, as I elaborate on below, Nandigram villagers often spoke of the inspiration and know-how that they gained from the Singur resistance, which was in full swing by the time the Nandigram resistance began. Nandigram villagers saw what worked and what didn't in the Singur resistance, as well as the levels of force the state government was willing use to push the projects through. They then planned their agitation accordingly. Indeed, the inspirational role the activist villagers in Singur played for similar movements against SEZs was often discussed during interviews with villagers, NGOs, and opposition party members across the country. Thus I start with the resistance in Singur. A quick caveat is in order first. The cars that were to be produced from the proposed factory in Singur, and other similar factories across the country are as much intended for domestic consumption as for export. Indeed, in addition to the close proximity to the shipping port in West Bengal, the Singur plant would also abut a highway that would provide efficient access to Delhi, the country's capital. Thus it is important to note that these automobiles are not being manufactured solely for export, which is different from items manufactured in SEZs (which by law must be exported).

The Tata Car Project: On January 10, 2008, Tata Motors, a multinational automobile company based in India with revenues of over \$US 9 billion in 2006, unveiled the prototype of its much hyped 'Nano' at the annual national auto expo in Delhi. The flash and fanfare associated with the unveiling would rival the release of any Hollywood blockbuster, complete with fireworks and scantily clad models draped over the vehicle. The 'one lakh car' (approximately \$2,500 US

dollars) was set to roll off the production line in late 2008, and once in production, will gain the recognition of becoming the cheapest automobile on the planet. The tiny vehicle will house a 30 horsepower engine and will be able to reach a top speed of about 50 miles an hour, making it an ideal and affordable city vehicle. Not surprisingly the company's target markets are emerging middle classes in India, and China, but the company also has its sights on Latin America and parts of Africa. If successful, the car will have a global reach.

Behind all the glitz and hype of the upcoming production rollout of the Nano however lies a story of violence and death, but also of democracy. On December 1, 2006, the state government of West Bengal revived a century old colonial law, the 1884 Land Acquisition Act that gave them the legal right to forcibly acquire land for a 'public good'. Without the consent of most of the villagers the government, backed by a strong police presence, began to cordon off almost 1000 acres of agricultural in Singur (about 60 miles West of Calcutta), to provide the real estate for one of the key factories that was to produce the Nano.⁵ As table 3-1 shows, all of the five villages that constitutes the Singur block Singur were affected by the land acquisition process.

Singur block comprises five separate villages which, together envelope 165 square kilometers. The block has a total population of 260,827 and, in keeping with the demographics of West Bengal overall, has a staggeringly crowded population density of 1582 people per square kilometer.⁶ Indeed the overwhelming presence of people was something that I expected in urban India, but not of the rural areas of the country. I envisioned village life in India to be quaint,

⁵ This colonial act allows governments in India to take possession of land for a 'public purpose'. Although public purpose is supposed to entail entities such as schools and hospitals, the Bengal government put a new twist on the law, using it to acquire land for the car factory. Other countries have similar laws. In the United States for example, eminent domain has been used many of times to facilitate public takeover of private land.

⁶ Especially when considering the all India average of 329 people per square km. This data came from Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal, 2005. District Statistical Handbook: Hooghly

quiet, and idyllic, and was hence surprised to find Singur overrun with people, animals, and vehicles. While passing through the center of the village block, I felt as if I was in the middle of the downtown core of a large metropolis, rather than in rural India.

Although conspiracy theories abound regarding why Singur was chosen as the site for the car factory (the most colorful of which is that the ruling party set out to teach villagers a ‘lesson’ for voting in the Trinamool Congress, the state’s central opposition party, during local elections in 2003), it is clear that the site was chosen for the practical reason of economic viability. Singur directly abuts the Durgapur Expressway, a relatively new, high speed, multilane national highway that provides easy access to the Haldia port, the state’s key export point.⁷ Close proximity to sea is of course critical for the profitable export of a product as heavy and bulky as an automobile. The expressway also provides efficient transport to Delhi, the county’s capital, and other regions across India.

The vast majority of families in Singur are supported by the cultivation of large swaths of agricultural land that weave through the villages. A wide variety of crops are grown in the region, including potato, jute, paddy, cereals and oil seeds, such as mustard. Land in Singur is very fertile. Out of the 26,000 acres of farmland in Singur, 22,500 acres are labeled as ‘multi crop’ (In other words, the cultivator can harvest multiple crops from the land in a given year).⁸ Interviews with villagers revealed that farmers typically cultivate 4-6 crops a year from the land, making farming a relatively sustainable economic endeavor. It is important not to romanticize

⁷ The Haldia port currently processes 21 million tones of cargo per annum, and has the largest dock facilities in all of India. For further information on the port, please see, <http://www.hdaindia.com/>, accessed August 31, 2008.

⁸ This data came from The Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal, 2005. District Statistical Handbook: Hooghly

farming in Singur however. As table 3-2 shows, most of the cultivators in the village block are marginal farmers, or landless laborers.

In many ways, village life in Singur reflects viability of farming in the area. The households that I visited were small and simple, but comfortable. Dwellings are well constructed and all that I visited had working electricity, and television sets. Most homes had more than one room, often including separate kitchens and eating areas. In most cases, the homes also had a small but functional yard, which usually provided some space for additional subsistence, such as chickens, cows, or a small fishing pond. The yards clearly served many other purposes however, including the drying of rice husks, long sticks of jute, or laundry. In short, village life in Singur is sustainable. Although the villagers are not well off, and must work hard to support themselves, they are not starving either. Indeed, all villagers that I interviewed in Singur indicated that they are satisfied with their life and desired to continue with farming as their central livelihood.

One must not only speak of farming when considering dependence of livelihood on land in Singur however. Past fieldwork conducted in Singur by other researchers gives a more complete picture of the economic importance of land to the people in this region. Arup Sen reported on a collective study undertaken by several activist groups, who found that:

Many of the non-agricultural families are actually engaged in agriculture-related supplementary occupations. There are roughly 500 van-rickshaw drivers who transport agricultural commodities, 200 families depend on rearing cows and goats, 150 families are vegetable vendors, and roughly 5,000 people work in local cold storage facilities (Sen 2007).

Thus agricultural land is crucial to the economic livelihood of Singur villagers. 33% are directly involved in the cultivation of the region's farmland, and many others indirectly depend on the region's farmland for their and their family's livelihood.⁹

The Car Factory: The first thing one sees upon arrival in Singur from the Durgapur expressway is the car factory site. Although the area was cordoned off in December 2006, when I visited the site almost 8 months later, the factory was still in the initial stages of construction, and workers were just beginning to lay the concrete foundations that would support the factory. The late start to the construction project was directly due to the almost year long village campaign against the factory, which has caused numerous delays to the project. As a testament to the impact of the village resistance, a ten foot high brick wall encircled the factory site, which was heavily guarded by state police. When I visited the site, there were dozens of police officers patrolling the outer perimeter of the factory wall. The factory was also guarded by heavily armed officers in several watchtowers that were strategically placed to be able to allow guards to keep watch on the surrounding villages. There were over a dozen police officers at the entrance to the factory alone. One activist villager I interviewed insisted that he take me up close to the entrance of the factory site. As we approached the fenced perimeter, several police officers raised their rifles in an unspoken warning for us to stay back. The security presence resembled that of a maximum security prison, except in this case, the guards were there to keep people out, not in. The security situation around the factory however also illustrates the impact of the village resistance that had been going on against the factory for almost a year prior.

The government did not anticipate much resistance to the car project from the villagers, and initially predicted a smooth acquisition process. To grease the wheels of the acquisition

⁹ Ibid.

process, the state government actually provided economic incentives that went above and beyond the regulations of the 1894 Land Acquisition act (which sets out clear procedures and calculations for the payment of compensation). For example, under the CPM's plan, sharecroppers were to receive 25% of the gross cost of the acquisition, as opposed to 6 times the value of the crop, (as per the act rules); the former calculation being much more lucrative for a sharecropper. As well, although the 1894 act does not have any provision for unrecorded sharecroppers, this demographic was treated the same as recorded sharecroppers in the land acquisition process as long as their status as sharecroppers could be verified. Per the provisions of the 1894 act, all stakeholders were to receive a 10% bonus if they agreed to part with their land, or their interests in the land amicably (Bose 2007, 1575). Finally, in a further effort to appease the agitating villagers, the CPM promised Singur villagers that several thousand villagers would be hired for work at the car factory.¹⁰

In an attempt to appease potential resistance to the car factory within the famously politicized middle class, intellectuals, and writers of Calcutta, the government initially insisted that the land being acquired in Singur was mostly barren or mono-crop land. Under pressure from various stakeholders, including villagers, NGOs and opposition parties, the government backed off this claim several months later, with Industries Minister Nirupam Sen admitting to the media that government records were inaccurate and many multi-crop plots within the factory perimeter were treated as mono-crop during the acquisition process.¹¹

Although the government naively anticipated a smooth acquisition process, the land use data cited above however quickly points to the reality that the compensation package would not

¹⁰ This seems to have been a bluff however, and as of January 2008, only 17 villagers had been hired for work in the plant.

¹¹ "Map to disarm Mamata," *The Telegraph*, 4 October, 2006, Bengal Section

have adequately captured the majority of villagers whose livelihood is dependent on farmland in Singur. Over half of all directly involved in cultivating land in Singur are landless laborers, and are thus completely left out of the compensation package. As well those who indirectly make their living off of the agriculture industry in Singur would be negatively impacted by the acquisition, but would not be eligible for compensation. Interviews with villagers also revealed other shortcomings with the compensation process. For example, one woman I interviewed spoke of how her family had purchased four acres of land 50 years ago. However, indicative of the informal nature of village life in Singur, as well as the reality that villagers find the state government's bureaucracy overwhelmingly complex, her family did not submit the necessary paperwork to change the land title with the government. As such the transaction remained unofficial in the eyes of the government and when the compensation process for the car factory began, the daughter of the original landowner of some 50 years ago came forth to collect the compensation money, leaving the true owners with no financial relief.¹² Indeed, a locally elected government official in Singur told me that many villagers had fallen victim to similar injustices, because they too had purchased land, but did not take the extra step to change the land title with the state government.¹³ This hole in the process provided important ammunition for the state government however to argue that landowners were coming forth to collect their compensation checks without a fight, which gave the perception that villagers in Singur were amicable to the land acquisition process.

Thus, on the basis of the lackluster compensation package alone, it is no surprise that the villagers of Singur were not amiable to the land acquisition deal for the car factory. Although land owners and sharecroppers would receive compensation for the acquired land, and indeed,

¹² Respondent #51 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹³ Respondent #5 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

compensation above and beyond as required by law, many would be left out of the process. As well, even if the compensation package was monetarily attractive, it does not mean that the landowner or sharecropper would like to sell their stake in the land. Indeed, as one sharecropper eloquently explained to me:

Our cultivation yields relatively consistent annual returns. Compensation however is a one time thing. We know that, once we put this money in the bank, the interest will be fixed, while inflation continues to rise. While the interest from the compensation might sustain us now, this might not be the case several years from now.¹⁴

In light of the sub-par compensation package, the heavy dependence of villagers in Singur on land, and the reality that many simply did not want to give up their way of life, villagers began to resist the forced takeover of their land. Villager leaders I interviewed cite the beginning of the prolonged resistance as May 25, 2006.¹⁵ It was this day that a representative from TATA motors came to visit the proposed site for their new factory. Unaware of the visit beforehand, but aware of a potential land acquisition deal in the making due to media reports, peasants from ten villages spontaneously came together to protest the visit. On May 29, 2006, a visit to the same area by the Bengal State minister of Industry, Nirupam Sen was met by hundreds of peasants flying black flags in the fields adjacent to the highway.

Within days of the May 29 demonstration, villagers got together and formed what became the organizational backbone of the resistance to the car project in Singur – *The Save Agricultural Land Committee* (SALC).¹⁶ To recruit volunteers for the committee an all village meeting was called by village elders in early June of 2006. There was no formal selection process, and anyone who wanted to participate in the committee was welcome. After this

¹⁴ Respondent #52 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁵ Respondent #7 (Please see Table A-2 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁶ In Bengali, called the Krishijami Banchao Committee

meeting, the committee consisted of 113 members who volunteered their time to help organize the resistance to the car project. It was also ensured during this meeting that each of the affected villages had at least one representative on the committee, and most villages had several. The SALC held bi-weekly meetings, (more often when there were emergencies) for most of the year. It was during these meetings where resistance programs were hashed out and dates for protests were set. The committee also participated in letter writing campaigns to the government, and some committee leaders contributed news articles to local newspapers and magazines.

Approximately fifteen sub committees were also formed to help coordinate the activities of the SALC. Included in these groups were a student/youth committee and a women's committee. These sub committees performed many important tasks. For example, the women's committee took the lead on a key logistical challenge of the resistance – how to establish a communication system in order to quickly amass demonstrators if the need arose (such as the arrival of a government official to the villages for example). It was decided during these committee meetings that women would blow conch shells to warn villagers when police or other relevant business/political figures were arriving at the block. Any woman who heard the conch shell being blown was to blow hers in turn, thereby setting off a chain reaction communication system that would alert all villages in the block in a matter of minutes. If the conch shell was heard, villagers were supposed to rush to the center of the village block for a demonstration. This tactic became an effective way to organize a mass protest in a matter of minutes, and the system proved so successful that the villagers of the larger Nandigram resistance that began several months later, adopted a similar system, except that megaphones used in the villages for the daily Muslim calls to prayer were also employed.

The SALC organized and participated in almost daily demonstrations against the project for about six months. The tension significantly increased however when, in a highly controversial decision, the state government imposed Section 144 of India's constitution in Singur on November 30, 2006. Section 144 provides state governments with the constitutional right to suspend individual liberties in a region, where agitations have the *potential to cause unrest or danger to peace and tranquility*. In the government order that imposed section 144, the district magistrate for the region outlined the limitations that would be placed on the Singur villagers:

I thus order a complete ban on holding any meeting, rally procession demonstration etc. in whatever form within the Singur P.S. area. I further prohibit the assembly of five or more than five persons in the five mouzas [villages]. . .under Singur Police Station¹⁷

In other words, the state government completely suspended the villager's constitutional right to freely assemble during the important phases of the land acquisition process. Singur was under the section 144 ban from November 30, 2006 until February 14, 2007, a period of almost four months. It is not surprising of course, that this suspension of the villager's freedom of expression was invoked just before the state government began to fence off the land for the car factory on December 2, 2006.

Section 144 allowed the government to declare the village demonstrations illegal, and on December 2, 2006, the state deployed over 6000 police to curb the ongoing agitations. Demonstrations continued unabated however, and the resistance quickly took a violent turn as police engaged in a common crowd control technique in India called 'lathi-charging', in which officers, armed with long bamboo poles administer painful blows to quell protesters. Violent confrontations between police and village protesters continued for several weeks and on

¹⁷ Memo from Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Chandernagore, Hoogly, dated December 12, 2006

December 18, 2006, the agitation recorded its first casualty. During the night on December 18 18 year old Tapasi Malik, a highly popular member of the SALC, and the daughter of a landless Singur villager was abducted as she walked out of her home to use the latrine a few yards away. Her captors took her to a previously dug pit, where she was raped, and then murdered. Her body was thrown into the pit and set on fire. Police initially concluded that her murder was the result of a family rivalry, and the CPM distanced itself from any role in the crime. The party's involvement however increasingly came under scrutiny however and on June 28, 2007, Suhrid Dutta, a CPM member of the Singur Zonal Committee, was arrested, along with 4 others, in connection with the rape and murder. He was formally charged with her murder in December of 2007 and the trial is ongoing as of this writing.¹⁸

In the midst of the ongoing agitations in Singur, the lease deal for the export car factory was signed on March 10 2007, four days before the now famous violent village crackdown in Nandigram (which I detail below). In the deal, the Tata car company was given the right to lease the land for 90 years. Details of the cost of the lease, and any incentives being given to the company were not disclosed however.¹⁹ Despite these setbacks, resistance continued and villagers fought the land acquisition on all fronts, including enlisting the media, and trying to prove via the courts, that the acquisition did not fit the legislative requirement of 'public good'. On January 18, 2008, the Calcutta high court upheld the legality of the acquisition of land by the

¹⁸ "CPM local boss arrested for Singur girl's murder", *Indian Express*, 28 June, 2007. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/CPM-local-boss-arrested-for-Singur-girl%92s-murder/203224/>, accessed February 4, 2009. A verdict is anticipated in January 2009. The role of the courts in the Singur and Nandigram resistances provides an interesting avenue for further research. The arrest and trial of this CPM party official provides evidence that India's court system is an important and effective part of the country's democracy. Research would be needed to establish the role of the courts in SEZs and the resistance against them across the country.

¹⁹ "Seal on Tata deal, from hospital bed," *The Telegraph*, 10 March, 2007, Front Page

state government, calling the car factory a ‘public purpose’, thereby placing the acquisition within the scope of the 1894 land acquisition act.²⁰

The court ruling seemed to have taken the wind out of the sails of the Singur resistance during my fieldwork in the villages. When I visited the villages last in January 2008, villagers seemed dejected and defeated. In an ironic twist of injustice, many villagers had taken up construction jobs in the very factory that is being built on their farmland, as they had no other means in which to support their families. Suicides also began to rise in Singur, and several villagers that I interviewed spoke of how elders in the villages killed themselves to ease the economic burden on the villagers.

However, I posed the question “do you see any successes in your movement?” to all villagers I interviewed, and was surprised by the answers I received. Most indeed saw their movement as successful in some way. One villager told me “We were successful. We focused the issue. Now everyone across the country is discussing the issue of land acquisition for Industrialization”.²¹ Another proclaimed, “Because of us, because of our movement, other similar movements have developed across the country. In this sense, we have been successful”.²² One villager who had traveled to Delhi to participate in activist work in the country’s capital told me, “We in Singur have shown the country that people can speak out against government decisions, and procedures, and that villagers can fight back against

²⁰ Deepak Prahladka, “HC green light to Tata Nano plant in Singur,” The Hindustan Times, January 18, 2008, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/StoryPage.aspx?sectionName=&id=3fb45e2f-ccd7-4929-9569-7571253a7b15&MatchID1=4922&TeamID1=4&TeamID2=2&MatchType1=1&SeriesID1=1244&PrimaryID=4922&Headline=HC+green+light+to+Tata+Nano+plant+in+Singur>, accessed February 3, 2009.

²¹ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²² Respondent #18 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

governments who have an ‘anti people’ policy”²³ I received a similar response from the peasants I interviewed that participated in the Nandigram struggle (which I elaborate on below). Indeed the Singur villager’s perception that they have had a key role in raising awareness for unjust land acquisition seems correct based on interviews I conducted in other Indian states. Nandigram, a resistance that started sometime after the Singur uprising revealed that activist villagers drew great inspiration from the Singur resistance. I found a similar sentiment during interviews with activist villagers in Goa. That villagers in Singur were able to see success in the movement, even though, at the time of my fieldwork, their movement was not successful in a material sense (Construction on the factory was proceeding unabated at the time of the interviews), speaks to motivations that go beyond the individualist perspective of Popkin, or the safety first principles of Scott (as laid out in Chapter 1).

The Nandigram Resistance

In late 2006, the government of West Bengal sought and received approval for several SEZs, among them a 10,000 acre export chemical hub to be headed up by the Salim Group, an Indonesian based multinational conglomerate that is involved in large scale real estate transactions. The hub was to host several chemical multinationals, including Dow Chemical. To host the SEZ, the state government set its sites on Nandigram block, a rural region comprising 28 villages, and home to over 175,000 people. Similar to Singur, Nandigram is overwhelmed with people, with a population density of 916 people per square km.²⁴ As with Singur, the reasons for choosing Nandigram as the potential host for the hub has been subject to intense speculation, and it is difficult to delineate the true reason why Nandigram was selected. The most compelling

²³ Respondent #33 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁴ Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal, 2005. District Statistical Handbook: Purba Medinipur.

reason however was explained to me by Debarata Bandopadhyaya, a former land reform commissioner in the state.²⁵ During our interview, he showed me on a map of the region how Nandigram is virtually surrounded by two major rivers – Haldi and Hooghly, which in turn flow into the Bay of Bengal. The geography therefore makes the site ideal in terms of the easy disposal of chemical effluent. See figure 4-3 at the end of this chapter, for a map of the region, with the boundaries for the proposed SEZ marked out. (I received this map directly from the Nandigram villagers).

Nandigram is about a five hour drive from Calcutta, about two hours of which is on potholed backcountry dirt roads. Nandigram looks very much like Singur. Homes seemed modest but comfortable, and all that I visited had substantial yards, and large ponds for fish harvesting. Most homes also had a milking cow. I spent some time visiting the vast agricultural land that surrounds Nandigram. Most land in the district is considered multi crop, and similar to Singur, farmers in Nandigram report a 4-6 crop yield a year. The land use data also shows similarity to Singur. Over 60% of the total working population are cultivators or agricultural laborers. The average size land holding is just one acre, classifying most landowners as marginal farmers.²⁶

The state government of West Bengal won formal approval for the chemical hub from the Center in late 2006. On January 3rd, 2007, a fateful day in the history of the resistance to SEZs across India, the Haldia Development Authority, a division in the state government responsible for promoting economic development in the region, placed notices at local government offices, informing villagers of an imminent and forced acquisition of 10,000 acres of prime farmland to host the chemical SEZ. The acquisition would have affected all 28 villages in the village block

²⁵ Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁶ Any farmer with land below 2.47 acres

in terms of direct land loss. Villagers were not caught unaware of the potential for forced takeover of land in the region. Some prominent members of the villages had come to know of the potential risk through various media outlets in the months leading up to the notice (more on the role of the media in Chapter 7). These village leaders had already begun a campaign against the SEZ, and had submitted a written memorandum to the Haldia Development authority, voicing their opposition to the proposed SEZ. Thus the villagers in Nandigram were aware of the potential risk to their land and livelihood months before the land acquisition notice was served. This explains how, on the day that the notice was served, approximately 4000 people gathered in protest along one of the main road that traverses the block.

The protest on the 3rd of January quickly became violent. Police fired their weapons and lathi-charged the demonstrators, causing 10 injuries, (5 of which were serious). Soon after, the demonstration swelled in numbers and protesters formed a human barricade on the road, blocking access to the villages for over ten miles. The sheer number of protesters participating at the demonstration caused the police initially to make a hasty retreat. They quickly returned with reinforcements several hours later however. Even so, the Nandigram villagers stood their ground, and a few days later, in retaliation for the police violence, burnt a local party office to the ground.

Protesters clashed with police for several days, resulting in the deaths of three Nandigram villagers. As demonstrations continued, the State Secretariat of West Bengal was infamously quoted as saying “if they want to make things difficult for us, we are prepared to make life hell for them”²⁷. This quote became famous throughout the country, and is important to remember in the context of this whole dissertation. It is crucial to understand that, initially the government of

²⁷ “Mobilisation and Mayhem hitback men and motive,” *The Telegraph*, 8 January 2007, Bengal Section.

West Bengal was determined to implement both the Singur car factory, and the Nandigram SEZ with an authoritarian hand. However, as I discuss below, it wasn't long after the state chief minister uttered these words that the government completely backed down on the project in Nandigram.

Within three days of the initial January 3rd protest and subsequent police attack, the villagers of Nandigram gathered to form the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC). The BUPC was initially organized by what one villager called 'prominent faces' of the villages, such as village teachers and lawyers, and the goal of the committee was to provide a logistical command center to fight a project that had the potential to affect close to 175,000 villagers. I was told that these same village leaders had also played leadership roles during protests that occurred in the block back in 2004 when the region came under the developmental jurisdiction of the Haldia Development authority. Thus, as one villager explained to me, villagers were naturally drawn to these political activists who led the 2004 campaign, to now lead the BUPC.²⁸

I questioned several villagers about the necessity of having the resistance committee in place to fight the proposed land acquisition. Answers all spoke to a common theme: given that the site selection and construction was facilitated by the state, the forces against them were highly organized. They thus felt that their movement only had a chance of success if they were similarly organized. As one villager told me, "only a common mass movement and mass protest can stay the government. If the people are not organized, we do not stand any chance against such a force".²⁹

Of the 28 villages, 17 had direct representation at committee meetings, and representation at the meetings depended on village size. Some of the larger villagers had two representatives,

²⁸ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁹ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

but most only had one. The BUPC met frequently to organize daily demonstrations (details of which were announced daily using megaphones and vehicles which traversed the region). The committee however also wrote letters of protest to the government, including memorandums of demands on behalf of the Nandigram villagers. Later the committee would also prove pivotal in defending the various charges levied on the villagers. As the resistance grew more violent, Nandigram villagers feared that police, or the state army would attempt to enter the village block at night (one that ultimately proved justified, as I discuss below). The BUPC subsequently organized rosters for night vigils that consisted of a minimum of 20 villagers keeping watch at night. These night vigils continued for almost a year, and many that I interviewed participated in them.

Village protests, and skirmishes with police continued in the region for over a month, and the state government began to realize that they had a growing political nightmare on their hands. On February 11, 2007, under tight security and heavy police presence, the Chief Minister of the state, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, at a party meeting near Nandigram, stated to the press that no land would be acquired in Nandigram without the consent of the villagers. Then, in an attempt to regain the support of the Nandigram farmers, the chief minister proceeded to distribute ownership rights of 22 acres of government land to about 3,500 landless farmers in Nandigram, while asking the crowd, “If the state government is truly anti-farmer, do you think we will have come to distribute patta [land rights] to you?”³⁰

Given the recent spate of police violence, the BUPC remained unconvinced however that the government would remain true to their word. I was told by many activist villagers that they simply did not consider a media speech by the chief minister enough of a guarantee that their

³⁰ “No land to be acquired in Nandigram, employment for people: CM,” [WebIndia123.com](http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20080304/900515.html), 4 March 2008, <http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20080304/900515.html>, accessed August 31, 2008.

land would be safe from the SEZ. Also the villagers wanted some sort of recognition of injustice for the mass injuries and three casualties sustained by the protesters. Thus in response to the Chief Minister's speech, the BUPC submitted three demands that would have to be met in order for the BUPC to dissolve

- the government's statement that no land would be acquired for an SEZ in Nandigram must be put in writing with a proper government seal;
- compensation would be given to families killed or injured in the police firing between January 3 and 6;
- court cases against protesting villagers would be dropped.³¹

Not surprisingly, the government didn't meet any of these demands however, and the BUPC vowed to continue agitations. The village movement then took a significantly violent turn for the worse on March 14, 2007. For three days prior villagers became aware of an organizing police presence outside of the southern boundary of the block in a neighboring village called Kejuri. Assuming that the government was coming back to take their land, the villagers themselves began to gather. The scene began to resemble a battlefield, with village protesters gathered on one side of a river bank, and approximately 4000 police on the other side.³² The BUPC quickly convened a meeting and two key strategies were hashed out to try and prevent police violence. First, Hindu villagers would begin to pray and Muslim villagers would in turn, read from the Koran in the hopes that police would not fire on worshipping citizens. Second, women and children would be put on the front line to try and prevent violence.³³ Many of the

³¹ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³² Later, it was determined in an investigation that some of the 4000 police were actually party cadres of the ruling CPM dressed up as officers. CPM members were later arrested with stockpiles of police gear, and non police issue bullet casings were found at the firing site.

³³ The ruling party often accused the BUPC of forcing women and children to the front of the line, but interviews in Nandigram revealed in fact that women went to the front willingly, taking their children, because they felt confident

male villagers had in fact returned home on the morning of March 14 to care for the children so the women could be on the front line.³⁴

At 9:15 in the morning on March 14, police were given the order to enter Nandigram. Allegedly, they were ordered to use utmost restraint; however they, along with party cadres dressed as police began to fire on the protesting villagers with only minimal provocation.³⁵ Villagers began to flee the area in the midst of the firing. Reporters and activists were on scene and the violence in its entirety was filmed (and later the footage was used in multiple documentary films). The footage clearly reveals that many of the dead and injured villagers were shot in the back as they were fleeing police and party cadres. Medical records further support this reality.³⁶

The government officially listed the death toll as 14 (no police were killed). Interviews in Nandigram however tell a different story. Villagers told me that in fact hundreds were killed. The true figure is probably somewhere in between, and investigations regarding the incident was continuing at this writing. What is indisputable however is that injuries to the villagers were

that police would not fire on them. Such tactics have been employed in protest movements elsewhere. Under the military Junta led by General Videla In the late 1970's in Argentina, thousands of citizens were 'disappeared'. Mothers and grandmothers of those who were disappeared formed an activist organization, demanding investigations into the plight of the disappeared. The most famous of their activism was the weekly demonstrations at the Plaza de Mayo, a symbol of Argentine independence, and the site of the Argentinean central government. Marysa Navarro (2001) argued that mothers and grandmothers were able to undertake such activism (as opposed to men), because it was perceived that they were less at risk of being persecuted by the military junta, in a society that glorified motherhood. For a good account of the role of the Grandmothers specifically, please see Arditti (1999).

³⁴ This point was expressed to me in detail by a grief and guilt stricken father who had returned home to care for his grandchildren so his wife and daughter could join the front line. Soon after, his son was killed in the protest. For details on this respondent, please see: respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁵ It is important not to paint the villagers as peaceful protesters. They began throwing bricks and stones at the police. The ruling party also accused villagers of throwing pipe bombs at the police, but this claim has not been verified. It is telling however that police sustained only superficial injuries, yet many villagers were killed in the violence.

³⁶ Medical evidence of the violence is captured in a number of fact finding missions and reports. One good example is the *People's Tribunal of Nandigram*, organized by the All India Citizens Initiative. The group held hearings, led by two high court judges, in Nandigram. Their final report can be accessed online at, http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/nandigram_deposition_final.pdf, accessed 15 October 2008.

numerous and in many cases grave. One year after the firing, 100 villagers were still undergoing medical treatment for the injuries they sustained during the violence on that day.³⁷ Also independent investigative teams who went into the villages soon after the firing found evidence of a rape house where women and children were allegedly gang raped.³⁸

Instead of backing down to the violence however, villagers began to regroup, and with the noted support of various opposition parties in the state, effectively and violently kicked the government out of the region. They also torched the homes of most local party cadres involved in the violence and forced them from the village block. The government reported that upwards of 4000 CPM supporters were ousted from their homes, but Nandigram villagers told me that the number was closer to 500, and only those families who had members directly involved in violence towards villagers were forced out of the village block. It would be difficult to ascertain the correct number of refugees.

On March 19th, 2007, five days after the political catastrophe in Nandigram, the state government of West Bengal ceded to the demands of the village movement and issued a written notice that no land would be acquired in Nandigram for the Chemical SEZ. A written notice however was now inadequate for the villagers, who, since the March 14 firing, had entirely lost trust in their government. As one villager told me:

We didn't trust the government anymore. It wasn't an administrative decision. It was a decision that the chief minister announced at his party headquarters, not the administrative headquarters. The chief minister didn't even come to Nandigram once. How could we trust him?³⁹

³⁷ "Nandigram Revisited", *The Telegraph*, 14 March 2008, Bengal Section.

³⁸ Evidence of the violence is captured in a number of fact finding missions and reports. One good example is the People's Tribunal of Nandigram, organized by the All India Citizens Initiative. The group held hearings, led by two high court judges, in Nandigram. Their final report can be accessed online at, http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/nandigram_deposition_final.pdf, accessed 15 October 2008.

³⁹ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

Further, after the March 14 violence, the objective of the BUPC and the village movement changed somewhat, with villagers now demanding justice for the violence reigned down on them.

Mary Katzenstein et al., have written about how India's courts have historically served an important representative function for social movements in India, and the demands of many resistances across the country were yielded to in various courts of law across the country (Katzenstein, Kothari, and Mehta 2001).⁴⁰ This argument seemed to hold true in the Nandigram incident. Soon after the March 14 violence, the high court of Calcutta asked the Country's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate the incident. As well, the high court introduced a public interest litigation (PIL) case related to the violence.⁴¹ On November 16, 2007, in what the Nandigram villagers call a landmark decision, the high court ruled that the actions of the police on March 14 were unconstitutional, and therefore not justified. The court further ordered the state government to compensate the village victims of the police violence, including \$US 25,000 to the kin of the 14 killed during the violence, \$US 20,000 to each victim of rape, \$US 12,500 to each of the 162 villagers injured, and \$US5000 to each villager who was allegedly molested.⁴² As a sign of the legitimacy of India's court system, by the end of 2007 the Bengal government reported that it had paid full compensation to the kin of 13 of 14 killed in the March 14 firing.⁴³ I was able to verify this claim during an interview with the father of one of

⁴⁰ They have argued that social movements surrounding identity politics in India have projected their activism towards the country's bureaucracy and court system, while interest based issues tend to coalesce around electoral politics. It could be argued that the Nandigram movement encompasses both identity and interest based issues,

⁴¹ A Public Interest Litigation Case is a case not introduced by the aggrieved party, but by the court itself, or by an outside interest.

⁴² "Nandigram firing unconstitutional: HC", *The Hindu*, 16 November 2007, Business Line.

⁴³ "Compensation paid to Nandigram firing victims", *India e-news*, 31 December, 2007. <http://www.indiaenews.com/politics/20071231/88914.htm>, accessed 31 August 2008.

those killed on March 14, and he informed me that he had indeed received the full compensation due to him from the government. At the time of this writing, the state government was dragging its heels with regards to compensation from those raped or otherwise injured, and the process was still being worked out.

After the March 14 police firing, there was a heightened level of distrust amongst the villagers of Nandigram, and the BUPC redoubled their efforts to keep the state police and party cadres out of the region. Nandigram remained in a stalemate situation, with police and party cadres remaining outside the borders of the region, and armed villagers on constant watch along the block's perimeter. The stalemate remained as such (with occasional skirmishes) until November 11, 2007, when the ruling party violently quashed the resistance. It was later determined that days before November 11, the CPM began amassing party cadres, along the borders of the village block. Any police near the area were also withdrawn, and there were reports of the chiefs of police being ordered not to intervene under any circumstances. On November 11, a 'red army' violently entered Nandigram, quashed the BUPC resistance, and quickly re-captured the village block. Villagers most active with the BUPC were especially targeted, but most villagers fled the violence and refugee camps were quickly formed. Some villagers remained in these camps for upwards of a month after the November 11 crackdown. On November 13, the CPM Chief Minister said that the Nandigram resistance had been "paid back in the same coin", a statement he apologized for a month later.⁴⁴

Soon after the November 11 violence, and at the pleas of opposition party members, the central government sent in the powerful Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to provide a buffer between the two sides and restore peace to the village block. Within a month, most villagers had

⁴⁴ "Oppn paid back in same coin, Says Bengal CM", *Rediff India Abroad*, 13 November 2007, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/nov/13nandi6.htm>, accessed 3 February 2009.

returned to their homes and life began to resemble some sort of normalcy. The situation has remained relatively calm since. Despite the violence and crackdown, the BUPC is still active however. As of January 2008, the committee was busy mounting defenses for the almost 1900 villagers that have been charged with various public disturbance crimes (including many with attempted murder charges), and were also working to ensure that village interests were well represented in upcoming local elections in May 2008.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out in some detail the village resistances against the export oriented industrial projects in the village blocks of Singur and Nandigram. There is no question that the resistance in Singur, and especially the resistance in Nandigram has been fraught with violence, both on the side of government, and the villagers. As such, it became common place to refer to the village resistances, and the government responses as anything but democratic. But through the fog of violence that has enshrouded the village resistance is a story of democracy. In both Singur and Nandigram, villagers were able to come together quickly and find a common voice to oppose the industrial projects. Both resistances were ultimately successful. As is discussed in later chapters, the Nandigram and Singur agitations also became the symbolic heart of the resistance to SEZs across the country. But first, I ask, how did the villagers in Singur and Nandigram form a unified voice for social change? In Chapter 4, I argue that villagers in Singur and Nandigram were able to effectively resist the export projects due to a long and deep history of democratic activism in the region.

Table 3-1. Details of land acquired for car factory in Singur

Village	Total area (acres)	Total acquired (acres)	% Acquired
Gopalnagar	1656.55	399.98	24
Beraberi	1043.82	327.21	31
Khaserbheri	229.62	180.59	79
Bajemelia	355.13	47.77	13
Singherbheri	310.75	41.56	13
Total	3595.87	997.11	28

Source: This data was taken from the January 21, 2007 edition of 'People's Democracy', a weekly newsletter of the Communist Party of India. The newsletter is available electronically at http://www.cpim.org/pd/2007/0121/01212007_nilotpal%20box.htm, accessed 22 September 2008.

Table 3-2. Land demographic breakdown of cultivators in Singur

Type of Farmer	Number
Sharecropper	2969
Landowner	1035
Small farmer (2.5 – 5 acres)	3500
Marginal farmer (up to 2.4 acres)	12410
Agricultural Laborers	15584

Source: Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal, 2005. *Statistical Handbook: Hooghly*.

CHAPTER 4
THE VILLAGE MOVEMENTS AGAINST EXPORT INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS IN WEST
BENGAL: GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Introduction

As the Chapter 3 has shown, villagers in Singur and Nandigram came together forcefully and effectively to form a unified voice for social change. This chapter examines the underlying forces behind the resistance, and argues that the villagers engaged in grassroots democratic political participation because the resistance occurred in a political setting that has been structured by a past history of democracy. Prior experience with democracy helped condition those involved in the movements to engage in political participation. More specifically, I argue that villagers in the affected regions in the state were able to participate in sustained collective political participation because of a political history of rural resistance in West Bengal. Popular rural resistance over land rights in the 1940's provided the state's communist party, the CPM (then in the opposition), with a pro peasant political platform. Rural West Bengal responded by voting the CPM into power in the late 1970's. Understanding that in order to sustain political power, the CPM had to make good on its election promises, the party implemented various pro poor land reforms and established localized institutions of democracy, (called panchayats). These reforms in turn helped strengthen grassroots democracy over time, as peasants learned that popular participation, channeled through democratic institutions could sometimes yield tangible results. This history has helped empower the voice of the rural poor in West Bengal, as the state currently negotiates the forces of industrialization, brought on by the SEZ policy from the center. Thus, established rural democracy provided the underlying foundation for the current resistance, and provides the explanation for why the villagers of West Bengal defied many theoretical arguments that would suggest such resistance highly unlikely.

I suggest throughout the chapter (and in the chapters following) that various aspects of the resistance differentiate it from social movements in a traditional sense, in that the agitations were interspersed with various elements of India's democratic framework. As such, I argue that the resistance is an example of grassroots democratic expression, and not just simply peasants rising up against an overpowering state. Indeed, one critical element of India's democracy that is intimately intertwined with the resistance is India's opposition parties. I devote Chapter 6 of this study to a discussion of how various state and national opposition parties in India have played a key role in helping organize the grassroots resistance, often leading protest marches, and sometimes physically bringing villagers together from across the country to unify otherwise disparate movements. These same parties have stood up in India's state and national legislatures, speaking out against the projects and the associated violence. Simply, opposition parties in India have provided a critical link between the grassroots movement and India's democratic government.

Although I give significant credence to the important role of opposition parties in Chapter 6, it is important to consider whether opposition parties actually dominated the resistance, driving and shaping political expression at the grassroots. If this is the case, it is a sign that India's democratic framework is actually weak, with opposition parties dominating political participation. This would mean that the political arena in India is overwhelmingly dominated by political parties, with India's citizens having only minimal true input to the political process. The proposition that opposition parties overwhelms India's political process has been put forth by a number of respected authors on Indian politics (I detail them below), and as such, it is necessary to consider this explanation.

The argument that opposition parties dominate the political process in India has been the purview of many respected political scientists who are considered experts in the field of Indian politics.¹ Pradeep Chhibber argues opposition parties dominate Indian politics because grassroots associational life in India is quite weak. He argues that, “[i]n nations where associational life is weak, there are no intermediate organizations between society and the state. As a result, individuals look directly to the state to resolve their concerns” (Chhibber 1999, 10). This in contrast to states with a well developed associational life where, “political parties have to compete with those associations and are therefore less central” (Chhibber 1999, 13). According to Chhibber, the weakness of associational life due to several factors including a history of being governed by a catchall dominant party, unions and student organizations tied to political parties, and a complete lack of autonomous rural organizations. As such, there is no associational buffer between India’s citizens and the state. Political parties therefore have been able to foster a direct and unhealthy relationship with India’s citizenry, which in turn has further stagnated associational life in India. Chhibber goes on to argue that the lack of associational life in India, the fall of the catchall Congress party (in the late 1970’s) gave way to the rise of various localized parties that are rooted in the various social cleavages that define India, such as caste, language and religion.² This latter point is rebutted in the Chapter 5, where I show how and why the movement against SEZs has in fact transcended the various barriers that supposedly fragment India’s citizenry. Although Chhibber is addressing a quite different empirical question than I am

¹ I touch on three works in this regard in the pages below. For other works that offer a similarly dismal view of India’s party system, please see Rudolph and Rudolph (1987), esp. chapters 4, 5, and 6, as well as Frankel (2005), esp. chapter 15.

² It is important to note that Chhibber provides very limited evidence to support his contention that associational life in India is in fact weak. Interestingly, much of Patrick Heller’s (1999) work on the strength of associational life in Kerala, another southern state in India, suffers from the same empirical shortfalls.

here, the implications of his argument are important. Chhibber is implying that political parties dominate politics in India, with Indian citizens having limited autonomous agency in the political process. As Chhibber suggests, “[p]olitical parties are central to Indian political and economic life because in the absence of associational life and the presence of an activist state they came to provide one key link between state and society” (Chhibber 1999, 180). With regards to India, Chhibber argues that:

Associational life in India is weak, as most Indians do not belong to formal associations and many of the associations that do exist are either tied to political parties, or, if autonomous, are either transitory phenomena or are ineffective politically (Chhibber 1999, 13).

As such, Chhibber’s premise could potentially account for the formation of the SALC and BUPC. With his perspective, the argument could be made that the committees were created and run by opposition political parties. Or, if shown to be autonomous, simply blips in the political process in West Bengal, and not indicative of any sort of sustained political participation, (I rebut this argument in a few paragraphs). In a way, Chhibber is correct with regards to his second point. Both committees were not in existence during the initial stages of the village resistances. In the case of the SALC, the committee was already starting to peter out as the prospects of the villagers winning their fight became increasingly dim (at the time of my fieldwork in 2007 and early 2008). In Nandigram, the BUPC is changing its focus from autonomous village committee to political party for the upcoming may 2008 panchayat elections. As such, both committees were quickly formed to help fight the cause and showed signs of petering out as the resistance wore down.

Chhibber adopts an unrealistic, Putnam (1993) style of defining associational life in India, arguing that associational life in India is weak simply because Indians do not formally belong to, or are members of formal associations. As Anderson and Dodd point out, such a definition of

associational life is better ascribed to more affluent urbanized settings (Anderson and Dodd 2005, 28). Membership in bowling clubs, or in the case of Theda Skocpol, large national organizations (2003), is not the only means in which rigorous associational life can be fostered however. The concept of associational life must be widened in developing country settings to encompass citizen capacity for collective civic engagement, (as Anderson and Dodd do in their (2005) study of democracy in Nicaragua). Within this conceptualization of associational life, many alternative factors can nurture social capital. For example, Lily Tsai (2007) has examined the importance of ‘solidarity groups’ in rural china - informal collectives formed by citizens who are informally bound to each other through common heritage, common moral obligations, and common interests. In these groups, civic participation was seen as contributing to the collective good of the village, and as such, participating villagers gained high moral standing amongst villagers. It was such rigorous solidarity groups that enabled villagers in rural china were able to secure public goods from political officials. Tsai found small village temples key arenas for the forming and nurturing of solidarity groups, but also more informal linkages, such as general solidarity within small village settings to be enough to form linkages between villagers. What Tsai’s work illustrates is that rigorous civic engagement does not need to conform to Putnam style formal civic associations. Civic participation can stem from more informal political aspects such as community linkages among villagers, nationalism at the village level in a sense. In *Bandits and Bureaucrats* (1994), Karen Barkey has also spoken about the importance of informal (and formal) community ties in nurturing collective civic engagement. Barkey argued that collective action amongst village communities is easier “...under conditions of strong internal village communication and solidarity and intense inter-village exchange” (Barkey 1994, 133). Importantly, such interaction must spread beyond simple familial ties. Various relationships can

nurture civic engagement and the potential for collective action. One example is economic ties that can be fostered amongst villagers who interact with each other in village market settings, or when villagers are economically interdependent with each other in terms of cultivation, such as one villager sharecropping the land. Ties are also fostered when community leaders have deep and stable roots within the community. For example, political leaders who also are part of every day village life can provide legitimate leadership during times of collective action.

While not belonging to Saturday morning soccer clubs, such informal community ties as Tsai and Barkey espouse were evident in both Singur and Nandigram. Both village blocks contained a vibrant market area where villagers came to sell produce and other goods, as well as make purchases. The markets had bustling restaurants and tea stalls, packed with chatting villagers. (Many of my interviews were conducted in such settings). Further, I was invited to the community clubhouse (which also served as a pharmacy), in Singur where I conducted interviews with a number of villagers. As well, as I discuss further below, it is important to note that many of the leaders of the activist movement were also long standing members of their village community; a popular retired teacher in one case serves as an illustration. It is also important to note that these intimate community ties within the villagers were nurtured through history – many of the villagers I interviewed laughed when I asked them how long their families had been in the villages, talking about how their families had been here for generations. History also played a role in strengthening ties as many members of the community were motivated by knowledge of past social resistance during the land reform movements in the 1970's. Further, the community solidarity in the villages I studied, gave rise to natural leaders for the movements against the industrialization projects. These leaders were previously respected in their communities, and in fact in some cases had participated in past activism on behalf of their

respective villages. Perhaps the best indication to me regarding the notion of community solidarity in the villages of West Bengal though occurred during an interview with a Hindu villager in Nandigram who told me that we needed to finish up our interview in good time so he could go participate in Muslim festivities taking place in his village that day.³ Thus it was rigorous community solidarity that enabled villagers in Singur and Nandigram to quickly and spontaneously form effective organizations that ensured representation from all villages and legitimacy from all villagers. This solidarity is indicative of a rich associational life in these villages.

Atul Kohli (1990) has also argued that Indian citizens exist in a direct and unhealthy relationship with the state, with no associational buffer in between. He focused on India's historically dominant Congress Party, and argues that the party became so embedded in Indian politics that it became a catchall for all issues and needs amongst India's citizens. As such, India's Congress set the stage for political parties to establish direct relationships with the Indian populace. This has given rise to the risk of populism in the country, most evidenced by the Indira Gandhi regime in the 1970's and 80's. While there can be no argument about the reality that the Gandhi regime was a populist one, it is dangerous to assume that this direct relationship between citizen and state, coupled with a lack of associational life applies simultaneously across the country, both in terms of geography and history.⁴

Some have focused specifically on West Bengal's political parties and have argued that rural political history in the state has been specifically dominated by political parties. A defining moment in the rural history of the state was the sharecropper's rights movement which took

³ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴ In fact, as I elaborate on below, Kohli singles out the CPM in West Bengal as anomalous in terms of party effectiveness.

place in the 1940s called the Tebhaga movement (a detailed account of this movement is described in the next section). Sen argues that the movement was launched, organized, and carried out by political elites:

The agrarian struggles organized by the Kisan Sabha from 1936 onwards made a deep impact on the consciousness of the peasants. Surely the peasants were drawn in the political movement in the Gandhi era. But radical ideas hardly grew within peasant society. These ideas came from the outside. Political consciousness of the peasant masses had to be shaped above (Sen 1982, xxiii).

He goes on to write, that, “[t]he outlook of the socially backward peasants was progressively transformed by contact with the communist intellectuals during 1936-47” (Sen 1982, xxiii).

Thus, according to Sen, and following the theoretical premises of Chhibber and Kohli, the villagers of West Bengal probably had limited political agency during the sharecropper’s rights struggle. Their import to the movement was their sheer numbers, which lent physical weight to the political ideology of the communist elite. Sen’s writing leaves one with the impression that Bengali villagers followed somewhat blindly along, adhering to the whims of the radical political elite at the time. Indeed, a key leader of the Tebhaga struggle came from the then opposition CPM party. I heard the name Bhupal Panda many times during interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the current resistances, including villagers and politicians, and many recounted the critical role he played in organizing the Tebhaga movement. Debarata Bandopadhyaya, the land reform commissioner of West Bengal in the late 1970’s, and a key figure in the land reforms of that took place (more on this below), said this of Bhupal Panda, “[h]e led that movement. He developed that movement, and as a result, the area has always been a red [CPM dominated] area.”⁵

⁵ Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

The literature of Chhibber, Kohli, and Sen is important to this study in that it highlights the importance of opposition parties in democratic politics in India. Indeed, as I show in Chapter 6, opposition parties have been intimately tied with the village resistances at the grassroots, and absolutely critical in many ways, including magnifying the resistance to SEZs across the country, and played a key role in the gains made at the policy level on behalf of the movement against SEZs. The story would not be complete without a detailed account of the role of opposition parties in the resistance.

In some respects, opposition parties *have* dominated the resistance. Content analysis of *The Telegraph*, the most popular state level English newspaper in West Bengal revealed that opposition parties, and especially the Trinamool Congress (TMC) were mentioned in over half of all articles that covered the Singur or Nandigram movements over the course of one year (N=686). TMC leader Mamata Banerjee, and other party officials, visited Singur and Nandigram countless times, helping to mobilize the movement. Mamata, (as she is affectionately known to the villagers), also nearly died while on a 23 day hunger strike in the middle of downtown Calcutta in January of 2007, in protest over land acquisition for the Singur car project. Her hunger strike made local and national headlines daily. Equally as graphically, Nandigram is overwhelmingly littered with party paraphernalia. On the three mile approach to Nandigram, all trees are painted with party insignias, and many have party flags nailed to the trunks. In the Nandigram block itself, party paraphernalia pretty much takes over every square inch of space throughout the villages.

Of course, the ruling CPM party in West Bengal has exploited the clear opposition party presence in both movements, arguing in its weekly newsletter, *Peoples Democracy*⁶, that these

⁶ This weekly publication is available online at <http://pd.cpim.org/>, accessed 2 October 2008.

parties are driving the resistances in both village blocks. This has especially been the attack on the BUPC, with the CPM relentlessly attacking the committee as being created and driven by the TMC (and various shady political parties as well, that have Maoist roots).

However, the deep involvement of political parties in a grassroots social cause is certainly not enough to argue that parties are overwhelmingly dominating the political arena, to the detriment of autonomous civic participation. Indeed, this should be taken as a sign that multi-party politics is actually functioning in a democracy, so long as it can be shown that opposition parties are reacting to, but not constituting a social cause. I take up this issue in Chapter 6. The question then, is not whether opposition parties are heavily involved (a critical aspect of a functioning democracy), but whether they are fundamentally driving the resistance (a sign of democratic weakness). If it proves to be the latter, my argument that the village resistances are a sign of mature democratic expression at the grassroots is significantly eroded.

Considering an Alternative Explanation: Opposition Party Presence in West Bengal Opposition Party Presence in the Singur Movement

It is difficult to separate out the actual role of opposition parties in the Singur movement, especially given that two key leaders in the movement are in fact also local leaders of opposition parties. This has given the state government ammunition to argue that the SALC is simply a phenomenon of opposition parties (and other outside interest groups). The argument takes on even more merit given that elections at the local level were set to take place across the state in May 2008 (as such the ruling CPM continually argued that opposition parties kept trying to stoke the resistance fires to keep the issue alive until the elections). At the very least however, my interviews revealed that it cannot be argued that opposition parties created the resistance, over and above the heads of activist villagers. It was pointed out to me repeatedly that the village resistance began weeks before the SALC came into existence. Even so however, perhaps

opposition parties moved in quickly to capitalize on the resistance, and propel it forward. I address this next.

I was able to interview two of the key leaders of the SALC during my fieldwork in Singur. During these interviews, it became clearer to me why there is a perception that the village movement in Singur is overrun by political parties, given that these leaders were also in fact leading members of political parties. It is misleading to assume however, as I did prior to interviewing these two activists, that they were acting as party members, trying to advance the political interests of their respective parties, and not as common villagers, and members of their village community. In fact, both leaders were also prominent, active and long standing members of their respective villages, and their families had lived there for many generations, (each was in a separate but adjoining village). They directly earned their living within the village economy, and both stood to lose significantly if the car factory project was set up in Singur. Also, the villagers who stood to lose land to the project were often members of their extended family, or were their friends and neighbors. Thus it is important to delineate their roles as villager and party member (even though these roles are also interspersed in many respects).

One of the critical leaders of the SALC was a villager named Dudh Kumar. Dudh is also not coincidentally, an elected local government official, and a member of the opposition TMC party.⁷ As mentioned above, Dudh Kumar is a highly popular and active member of the village community. When I met him for the first time in August 2007, he was helping villagers prepare for the imminent arrival of a team of volunteer doctors who were coming to help villagers deal with the trauma of violence that those in the resistance had experienced, as well as the

⁷ He was dressed quite nicely on the day that I interviewed him and I was told that he was waiting the arrival of volunteer doctors who now visit the villages on a weekly basis to help the many villagers who had developed mental health problems due to the trauma of losing their land and their livelihood. In fact, this became a source of embarrassment as villagers flocked to the 'clubhouse' where I was conducting the interview on the assumption that I was in fact the doctor.

psychological devastation caused by the loss of livelihood from the forced land acquisition for the car factory. He also seemed to serve as a part time pharmacist, dispensing medication from a cabinet at the village club house to one villager who approached him during our interview. In fact, it was quite difficult to interview him, given the continuous interruptions from other villagers. It was clear to me that Dudh Kumar was a highly popular figure in the village.

It is a mistake to assume that Dudh Kumar was undertaking such leadership roles as means to advance the interests of his political party. This became strikingly clear to me as he explained how his 1.5 acres of land, was among those forcibly acquired by the government for the car factory.⁸ He grew up cultivating this land, and it was his only source of income. Thus prior to losing his land, he kept the busy farming schedule that many other villagers also kept, especially given that he was able to cultivate 5 to 6 crops a year from his land. I asked him how he found time to conduct his duties as an elected local village official. He explained to me that his political work as an elected village representative is entirely voluntary. As such, he is only able to conduct his political duties in the evening, and even then, only on rare occasion. I asked him why he was helping lead the village movement, and anticipating what I really wanted to ask him, he angrily condemned the view that he was undertaking this role solely on behalf of party politics. The dozen or so villagers listening in on our interview echoed this sentiment.

Another activist named Shankar Jana, who was considered a key leader of the SALC was also an (unelected) village leader of the Socialist Unity Centre of India party (SUCI). SUCI is a small socialist party in West Bengal, and they don't even field a candidate in Singur. Similar to Dudh Kumar, it quickly became clear to me that one should not assume that Shankar is undertaking his activist role simply to advance the interests of his party. Like Dudh Kumar, his

⁸ Respondent #7 (Please see Table A-2 in appendix for respondent information)

livelihood directly depended on Singur villagers remaining prosperous. His only source of income came from his plaster shop where he fashioned large clay replicas of Hindu deities for various Hindu celebrations, (one of the most important is the yearly celebration of the day life was breathed into the Hindu lord. Part of the celebration is to float large plaster replicas of the Hindu god into rivers and lakes. I interviewed him a month before this celebration and his shop was very busy).⁹ He told me that the villages in Singur provided him with most of his business, and that if the villagers lost the land to the car factory, he would probably lose much of his livelihood as well. He also spoke of how many members of his extended family and friends directly lost land to the car factory project. This is not to deny the fact that his prior involvement in politics probably contributed to him becoming a key leader of SALC. After all, he was already well known in the village because of his political affiliations (as was Dudh Kumar). Indeed his involvement in opposition party politics positioned him well to become a natural leader of the village resistance. However it is equally important to acknowledge that this person is also a villager, living a simple existence similar to the other villagers in Singur, and like the others, he stood to lose his livelihood due to land acquisition for the Tata car project.

These two leaders did have clear party affiliations however, so I asked all the common villagers that I interviewed about the role of opposition parties in the movement. Not surprisingly, some expressed distaste for the role of party politics in the movement. I interviewed one woman, whose family had lost 2.4 acres of multi-crop farmland (which supported 20 family members), and she became visibly upset when I told her about the perception that the village movement was party driven.¹⁰ She told me that senior members of the opposition parties only really came for bigger or more important SALC meetings, but that the

⁹ Respondent #6 (Please see Table A-2 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁰ Respondent #32 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

everyday workings of the resistance is villager driven. Most however spoke favorably of opposition parties (I detail this further in Chapter 6), but were quick to note the autonomous role village citizens also played. Another member of the family who took part in countless demonstrations against the car project, and attended regular SALC meetings, told me that when party members did show up for committee meetings, they tried to limit themselves as much as possible, and that villagers knew that outside party members come for self interest, and it is up to the common villagers to struggle on their own.

I also learned that many common villagers with no direct party affiliation undertook leadership roles in the resistance. One of the most popular organizers of the committee was a 60 year old retired village teacher who had lost 1.25 of his 2 acre plot to the factory.¹¹ I asked him whether opposition parties were overrunning the committee and the village movement, and he was adamant that villagers were united together in the resistance and that many key leaders of the resistance were common people, and not party activists. Other villagers spoke of the various leadership roles that they themselves played in the movement. One woman proudly told me how she played a lead role in the village movement by organizing the women in the villages to blow conch shells to alert villagers when police, government officials, or business leaders were seen arriving in the villages, (to which peasants from all villages were to amass at the village square for a demonstration). Another member of the same family told me that he would go door to door to the homes of the villages, informing family members of upcoming demonstrations etc. When I asked him whether members of the opposition parties encouraged him to do this, he became angry, telling me that he was participating to save his families land, and for no other reason. Another family I interviewed told me that they were playing lead roles in helping to organize the court case against the government for the unlawful acquisition of the land. Indeed many of those

¹¹ Respondent #5 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

I interviewed in Singur claimed to engage in some type of leadership role in terms of helping to organize the resistance. Thus, although it is clear that there was significant opposition party presence in the Singur movement and it was also clear that such party presence played an important role, it is incorrect to assume that these opposition parties actually created and drove the resistance. In other words, I did not find the unhealthy and direct channels between citizens and opposition parties as Chhibber, Kohli and Sen have argued about. Instead, opposition parties were simply reacting to a movement that was organized by common villagers (as functioning opposition parties should). Indeed, it was pointed out to me several times that opposition parties have not financed any part of the resistance, and that the SALC's only means of funding was through the passing around of a collection basket during village demonstrations.

Opposition Party Presence in Nandigram

Even more so than the SALC, the BUPC committee in Nandigram has been relentlessly attacked as being overwhelmingly dominated by opposition parties, some even suggesting that common villagers are helplessly caught in the middle of a violent game of party competition. This is not to say that opposition parties have not been critical to this movement, but one village leader pointed out that the village movement was already a month old and the BUPC well established before Mamata Banerjee, the national leader of the opposition TMC, and a key political figure in the village resistances, made her first appearance in Nandigram. Indeed, for all her media coverage (more on this in Chapter 7), most of the villagers feel that the TMC leader has played a limited role.

During several interviews, it was pointed out to me that the BUPC was not in existence when the 4000 strong protest occurred on January 3rd, and that as such, the BUPC was initially created in response to a movement that was started by villagers. Thus, at the very least, one cannot argue that opposition parties catalyzed the movement. Once up and running however, the

BUPC did take over the day to day operations of the movement. As such, I asked all villagers that I interviewed about the role of opposition parties compared to common villagers in the committee. Hakaan, a landowner in Nandigram explained to me:

Without common people, there is no movement. Common people faced bullets on 3rd January. They are the ones who resisted the police. The common people are at the heart of the movement.¹²

This sentiment was echoed by Sa'ib, another Nandigram landowner:

The BUPC doesn't belong to any party! It belongs to anyone who wants to save their land. The mosque, the Burial Grounds, the temples, the cremation grounds, the agricultural land, schools, dispensaries. Everything we have grown up with would have been lost. Had the political parties been important, this agitation would not have happened, because many who support the current resistance are former CPM supporters. If party politics were so important, this movement would not have happened. Land is the defining factor, not parties!¹³

Dagduh, a 45 year old landless villager, I interviewed had participated in many BUPC demonstrations since the inception of the resistance in January of 2007 and was shot in the head on November 10, but survived. I asked him about the role of the BUPC:

I want to save the land. If the BUPC was not there, the resistance would not have happened. This resistance is all due to BUPC. Without BUPC there would have been no resistance. BUPC gave us a hope of organized resistance. *Everyone in the village is part of the BUPC.*¹⁴

During our interview we were surrounded by about 100 other villagers who were listening closely to our discussion (a common scenario during my interviews). At this point in the interview, I asked the rest of the villagers if they also supported the BUPC, which was met with an enthusiastic course of 'YES!', coupled with a hearty round of cheering. When I asked them if they were all members of the BUPC I received another course of 'YES!' and cheers. During another interview, Faaiza, a female activist and housewife told me, "[t]his committee doesn't

¹² Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹³ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁴ Respondent #47 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

belong to leaders, but everyone in Nandigram. Every farmer is part of BUPC. Whoever is resisting land acquisition is part of the committee.”¹⁵ The BUPC does not have any official membership, and I was told by repeatedly by villagers I interviewed that the BUPC belongs to the people of Nandigram. Anyone who was against the forced land acquisition was a member of the committee. As Sa’ib explained to me, “Religion wasn’t important. Political affiliation was not important. What was important was land, and whether it was going to be taken away.”¹⁶

Similar to Singur, many of the leadership roles within the BUPC were undertaken by common villagers. Sa’ib, whose son died in the violence on March 14 told me:

I was involved in much of the decision making process. After the leadership met and arrived at decisions, they would come to each village and tell them their decision. If we were disagreeing with it, we would raise our points and a more agreeable solution would be hashed out.¹⁷

Later in the interview he explained to me:

How can I differentiate the BUPC from the people here? Everyone is a member of the BUPC. Singur was another example of how political parties wanted to profit from the resistance but failed. The primary motive here was to save the land, which we did.

Indeed, I quickly found it very difficult to ask about the role of opposition parties in the resistances in Singur and Nandigram. Although most villagers noted the importance of opposition parties in the movement, all villagers I spoke to quickly became angry when I told them that some suggest that the SALC, and the BUPC is driven by political parties. One interviewee demanded to know where I heard this. Indeed, Sa’ib expressed appreciation for me coming to interview him. He told me that I was the first foreigner to do so, even though he is considered important to the resistance, given that his son was one of 14 who died during the

¹⁵ Respondent #48 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁶ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁷ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

violence on March 14. He said “It is great that you have come to hear of this from the horses mouth”, and expressed hope that I would have a role in dispelling the myth that the BUPC is driven by member of opposition parties”.¹⁸ Table 4-1 shows my findings in terms of asking the question: are opposition parties driving or supporting this resistance?” during interviews.

Thus, it was clear to me that the village resistances against the export industrialization projects were fundamentally driven by autonomous grassroots organizations and village activists. Many of the leaders, while also members of opposition parties, were also partaking in the resistance as member of their community, and individuals who stood to lose their livelihoods if the projects came to fruition. This is not to discount the importance of their role as opposition party leaders. Indeed, as I discuss further in Chapter 6, localized opposition party presence in Singur and Nandigram attributed legitimacy to the role of opposition parties in helping to advance the village cause.

The Maturing of Grassroots Democracy in West Bengal

If opposition parties did not drive the village resistance in Nandigram and Singur, how were villagers able to come together and foster a unified voice for social change? What gave villagers the incentive to form the SALC and the BUPC? What caused villagers to stick their neck out? As detailed above, doing so cost many of them life and limb. In collective action terminology, many of these villagers paid a high cost in an attempt to secure a collective good (the stopping of the industrial projects). What accounts for this seemingly irrational behavior?

In many direct and indirect ways, the politicized rural history of West Bengal provided the roots for the democratic elements in the current struggles, in Singur and Nandigram.

Throughout the last 60 years of West Bengal’s history, peasants have engaged in political

¹⁸ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)). NGOs even financed the travel of many BUPC leaders to Delhi to deliver statements to the government to try to prove that the resistance was driven by the common villager.

struggles, and these struggles have yielded tangible results both economically and politically. As such, peasants in West Bengal have come to learn that political participation through various elements, such as protest, engaging the courts, and voting can elicit pro peasant change. Indeed, this proved to be the case in the current resistances. In Nandigram, the government promised in writing not to acquire the village land for the chemical SEZ. In Singur, the automobile project was completely shut down, and at this writing, negotiations are occurring to give villagers land back.

In making this argument, I am not putting forth some romantic claim that when West Bengal's peasantry speaks, the government listens and reacts accordingly. Nor am I suggesting that the peasantry in West Bengal follow blindly along the paths forged by their predecessors. In fact, some peasants I interviewed knew very little about the rural political history of the state. Nonetheless, as I show below, the history of peasant resistance provided the spark for the current agitations in many ways.

The Politicized History of Rural West Bengal: As is the case in most developing countries, the political history of rural West Bengal is intimately tied to land. In 1793, the British legally entrenched a method of taxation in West Bengal known as the Zamindari system. In this system, the British allocated intermediate tax collectors (who were native Indians) to operate in rural West Bengal. In exchange for the collection of taxes from the peasantry, the British allocated property rights to the tax collector, turning them into landowners (or zamindars). In return for their service, the zamindars received 10% of all taxes collected from peasants cultivating their land, the other 90% going to the British (Moore 1966, 345). Under this system, peasants had virtually no rights to the land and were in effect landless laborers. Barrington Moore cites this as one variable behind the famous Mutiny against the East India Company in 1857, and in 1859, the

British enacted a series of laws to provide some tenancy rights to farmers. But, as Moore notes, the laws were riddled with holes, and those who directly worked the land continued to be exploited by the Zamindari middle strata and the ruling British (Moore 1966, 362). Thus while on paper, landless laborers had gained some sharecropping rights, in reality this was really a smokescreen.

The situation in rural West Bengal remained status quo until the late 1940's. Taking advantage of eroding British power and rising anti Colonial sentiment in India after World War II, and still reeling from the effects of the depression in the 1930's, millions of sharecropping peasants in the West Bengal countryside rose up in the 1940's in a sharecroppers rights movement known as the 'Tebhaga struggle'. The Bengal word 'Tebhaga' means division and the central goal of the struggle was to boost the existing crop sharing ratio between sharecropper and landowner from 50:50 to 75:25. Sharecroppers had other demands as well however. For example, under the existing legal framework at the time of the movement, sharecroppers could be removed from their land and livelihood at the pleasure of the landlord. One of the demands of the movement was therefore to give sharecroppers tenancy rights, making their removal more difficult than was currently the case.

By the late 1940's, the movement had spread to 19 districts in Bengal, and was particularly intense in the village block of Nandigram and nearby areas (Sen 1982, 109). On par with the political history of India and bearing a striking resemblance to the current resistance in Nandigram, the Tebhaga movement was often violent and repeated government crackdowns led to dozens of peasant deaths. This was at least partly due to the fact that the ruling Congress party in West Bengal had its support base in the wealthy peasantry and landed gentry, stakeholders who had much to lose if the movement succeeded.

As the movement grew both in size and intensity, the Congress government could not continue to blatantly ignore the demands of the movement outright. As such the party passed the Bargardars (sharecroppers) act of 1950, which contained various concessions to sharecroppers. Sharecroppers gained the coveted 75:25 ratio for example, (or a 50:50 ratio if the landowner supplied all the agricultural inputs). Sharecropping families were also granted hereditary rights. If a sharecropper died, their heirs had the legal right to continue to sharecrop the land. The concessions were actually quite weak on paper however, and even weaker in terms of implementation. For example, although sharecroppers were granted certain tenancy rights, they could quickly be put off the land if the landlord made the claim that they were not cultivating the land ‘properly’. As the act was vague on what was meant by the term ‘properly’, this loophole gave landowners the freedom to remove the sharecropper at will. More importantly however, to avail themselves of the protections offered in the act, sharecroppers had to be formally registered with the government, and formal registration in turn required the prior consent of the landlord. This loophole seriously limited the scope of the law. When the Congress party fell from power in West Bengal in 1977, only 12% of all sharecroppers were ‘recorded’ (registered with the government).

The Rise of the CPM: India’s congress party was starting to show a nationwide decline in popular support in the 1960’s, due in part to the fact that the first wave of nationalist and charismatic leaders of the party had died. This decline in popularity was further exacerbated in West Bengal due to two large droughts, and subsequent food shortages and inflation (Kohli 1990, 276). The political plight of the congress party became markedly worse during Indira Gandhi’s two years of emergency rule, where democratic rights were suspended.¹⁹ Leftist

¹⁹ For a good account of this time period, please see Kohli (1990).

parties in West Bengal quickly moved in to fill this political power vacuum and in 1977, West Bengal's main opposition party, the CPM, came to power.²⁰ The CPM who had, for decades before, been a revolutionary opposition party involved in peasant uprisings, such as the Tebhaga movement of the 1940's, now found itself at the head of the state's parliament. As table 4-2 illustrates, the CPM has managed to stay in power in West Bengal ever since, and can now claim over 30 years of democratic rule in the state. Indeed, during the last two state assembly elections in 2001, and 2006, the CPM has overwhelmingly dominated the election scene, (raising questions of one party rule in the state).

How did the CPM manage to consolidate power in West Bengal? Upon coming to power in the late 1970's, the party quickly realized that political popularity could not indefinitely be sustained from anti Congress sentiment, and as such, worked quickly to fortify its vote base amongst Bengal's peasantry.²¹ To build further support amongst rural constituents, the party adopted a core socialist ideology based on the concept of 'development with redistribution', and implemented a pro peasant platform within months of gaining office (Kohli 1987, 99). The party's most aggressive and famous programs revolved around the concept of 'land to the tiller' and centered on rural land reforms that were aimed directly at improving the livelihood of Bengal's peasantry through the furthering of property rights.

The first thing that the party accomplished in terms of shoring up rural support was to close loopholes in the 1955 Bargadar act. Under the amendments put forth by the CPM, sharecropper eviction could be punishable by law unless the landowner was to undertake the cultivation of the land personally (it was even forbidden for landowners to hire external help if

²⁰ At this time the party was known as the 'Communist Party, India' or CPI

²¹ Based on discussions with land reform commissioner Debarata Bhattacharya – Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

they went this route). As well, the government enacted into law a provision that the land tiller was to be presumed a sharecropper unless proven otherwise by the landowner (Lieten 1992, 153).

Soon after the CPM took office, they also undertook a massive grassroots program of sharecropper registration, known as *Operation Bargadar*. Under this program, party officials traversed the countryside, holding workshops and information sessions in villages to avail sharecroppers of information about the new policy in the hopes that sharecroppers would register themselves with the government, and as such be protected by government regulations (Lieten 1992, 156). Table 4-3 shows the results of Operation Bargadar in terms of sharecropper registration.

As of 2006, 1.53 million sharecroppers have been registered under CPM rule in West Bengal. This number is impressive for two reasons. First, given an estimated 1.8 – 2 million sharecroppers in West Bengal,²² 75% of all sharecroppers are now recorded, and are thus protected by legally binding sharecroppers' rights. Second, 84% of sharecropper registration has occurred under CPM rule during operation Bargadar. This feat becomes even more significant, (especially in the context of voter support) given that, approximately 34% of rural households in West Bengal are supported by sharecroppers (Lieten 1992, 147). Although it is difficult to compare the success of the program with other states in India as sharecroppers constitute a much lower proportion of the agrarian population in other states, as Kohli points out, when comparing the success of the former Congress party, who tried to implement similar reforms, the operation must be considered a marked success (Kohli 1987).

²² Interview with land reform commissioner, Debabrata Bandyopadhyay. Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information).

In addition to the response to the Tebhaga movement in the form of policy change and operation Bargadar, the CPM undertook a program of confiscating 'above ceiling' land and redistributing this land to landless and marginal farmers. This program was really the implementation of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, in which it became illegal to own more than 25 acres of agricultural land, and anything in excess of 25 acres was considered government property. In the 1970's, the CPM underwent an intensive period of seizing surplus land, and, a decade later, the West Bengal government occupied first place in terms of land vested with a state government among all Indian states, and had a 20% share of all vested land across India (Lieten 1992, 128).

The government then undertook an effort at redistributing the above ceiling land to landless laborers and marginal farmers. The policy was to distribute land to as many landless as possible, and thus most recipients received less than an acre of land (Lieten 1992, 136). As figure 4-1 shows, the government redistributed the most land in the first 5 years after the inception of the program (as is to be expected). However, it is notable that the government has continued to redistribute well over 61,000 acres of land in most of the 5 year periods measured. As table 4-4 shows, when compared to other major rice producing states in India, the CPM's land redistribution scheme is impressive:

The success of the land redistribution effort is the source of much debate. It is clear that the government could have done much more with this program. However, of note, is the reality that the government again, implemented a program and there were measurable results. As of 2001, over 2 million families in West Bengal had received land under the program.

Although the scheme to redistribute above ceiling land was not the direct result of a social movement, like the sharecropper land reforms, it is important to note this program as well.

Between the reforms to sharecroppers rights, operation Bargadar, and the above ceiling land distribution program, peasants in West Bengal learned that through social mobilization, and through the vote, they could receive tangible gains. Of course, it might be argued that the CPM implemented such reforms for entirely different reasons. I was able to confirm the relationship between rural activism over the recent decades, and the government reforms during an interview with a former government official who was the land reform commissioner during the peak of Operation Bargadar (1978-1981), and he explained to me that the concessions to sharecroppers were entirely inspired by the demands of the Tebhaga movement.

Institutionalized Democracy at the Local Level: Panchayat Governance

West Bengal is seen by many as a model for local governance. Under CPM rule, the state has succeeded in implementing democratically elected government bodies at the local level in the rural sector, and this is quite unique to the rest of India. A central Bulwark of Mahatma Gandhi's idealized philosophy of politics in India was democratic governance at the village level. Nehru echoed this sentiment, but despite numerous attempts, failed at implementing any policy of democratic governance below the level of the state. The idea was shelved with Nehru's death, and not revived again until Rajiv Gandhi took office in 1985. A constitutional amendment was passed in 1992, giving formal recognition to the Panchayat as a formal part of India's federal structure (Mitra 2001, 108).

In contrast to the rest of the country however, West Bengal formally integrated Panchayat democracy much earlier, by reviving the West Bengal Panchayat Act which was initially penned by the Congress party in 1973, but never implemented. Once in power however, the CPM moved quickly to give teeth to the act by holding the first Panchayat elections in India's history in 1978. West Bengal has had Panchayat elections every five years since; the most recent elections were held in May 2008 (which is significant given the widely reported resistances in

Singur and Nandigram). The panchayat system consists of three levels of elected government bodies. The lowest level is called the Gram Panchayat which has governing jurisdiction at the village level. The next level, the Panchayat Samiti has jurisdiction over a block of villages. The highest level, the Zilla Parishad has jurisdiction over a series of districts in the state.

Since their inception, panchayats have played uniquely important governance roles at the local level in West Bengal. The panchayat system got off to a quick and unexpected start when mass flooding occurred in West Bengal in 1978. The CPM gave panchayats immense regulatory power in dealing with the aftermaths of the devastating flooding. Soon after, the CPM started transferring more and more responsibility to the panchayats, including overseeing various state and national rural development programs (Venkatesan 2002, 108). Panchayats also played a pivotal role in Operation Bargadar, and the distribution of ceiling surplus lands.

The implementation of the panchayat is widely seen as a decentralization of democratic power to the grassroots. However, as Atul Kohli notes, the holding of multiparty elections at the local level was not an act of altruism on the part of the CPM, but another aspect of the party's strategy to solidify support in rural West Bengal. However, based on extensive fieldwork of panchayats in the state, Atul Kohli argued, "[t]he panchayat membership in West Bengal, and in most parts of India...has never been so free of landlord and rich-peasant domination as in contemporary West Bengal" (Kohli 1987, 113).

In sum, in the later half of the 20th century, peasants in West Bengal learned that political agitation could yield results. They voted the CPM into power, who in turn responded with various pro peasant reforms such as Operation Bargadar, the redistribution of above ceiling land, and the implementation of the Panchayat system of local government. With these reforms, the

party became known as a ‘pro people’s government’. I turn next to how this history of political participation has factored into the current resistances in Singur and Nandigram.

The Role of the Past in the Present

Much is made of rural West Bengal’s unique history of political resistance. During interviews with opposition parties, NGOs, intellectuals, writers, and government officials past and present, reference was often made to the Tebhaga and other similar struggles that Bengali peasants have participated in, and the importance of such struggles in the current resistance. Debarata Bandyopadhyay, the state’s land reform commissioner in the late 1970’s, who witnessed the Tebhaga movement first hand in West Bengal, and now is actively involved in the resistance to SEZs across the country made parallels between the past struggle and the current resistances:

These are all history repeating itself. There is something called history in your subconscious. It happens. You react according to the situation. It happened in 1942 [referring to the Tebhaga movement]. It happened in 2007. It will happen in 2035.²³

I elaborate on this significant observation: the implications of outside stakeholders helping to frame peasant resistances in certain ways in the Chapter 5. Fieldwork in the affected villages revealed a more complex connection between past and present however. To derive a link between the Tebhaga and other movements and the current resistance in Singur and Nandigram, I posed the following question to all those I interviewed:

Have you heard of the Tebhaga movement? If so, what does this movement mean to you?

I found that village leaders of the current struggles in both Singur and Nandigram did have an in depth knowledge of the past rural struggles in the state. These same leaders told me that they drew significant inspiration from these struggles. Dudh Kumar, for example, the elected government official in Singur, and an important leader of the SALC explained to me:

²³ Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

The CPM has been in power for 30 years, mobilizing the peasantry. They taught the peasants how to struggle. They taught the peasants what land is, what it means, and how to snatch land from landlords. But now that they are in power, they have changed their view. Now people have learned to struggle against them. There is a long history of the left in West Bengal to struggle for their dignity.²⁴

Ma'ku, a prominent village activist and TMC party senior said:

This is a continuation of the Tebhaga movement. Singur was very famous at that time due to the Tebhaga movement. The impact of the Tebhaga movement is still going on.²⁵

The same sentiment was echoed by Taal, a landowner and one of the three key peasant leaders of the Nandigram struggle. He told me:

Protest and dissent runs in the blood of Nandigram. Nandigram has had a glorious history of struggle and resistance. And people are inspired by tales that they heard from their grandfathers and great grandfathers... Nandigram history goes back 400 years. We have been doing it for 400 years. First it was Portuguese pirates. Then the British. The same strain has trickled down to now.²⁶

Some common villagers echoed similar sentiments. Prabhat, the son of a Singur sharecropper, proudly sporting a burn on his arm from a tear gas attack by the police during a demonstration the night before, told me, “[t]here has been a long history of freedom struggles here. It is in Bengali’s mentality to protest.”²⁷ Tarun, a landowner and sharecropper explained to me, “We hadn’t thought much of these past movements. But now, we think often of these movements as we struggle against this factory. We remember the movements in the past”.²⁸ Waheed, a sharecropper from Singur, who was beaten along with his children during a demonstration on December 2nd, 2006, told me, “[m]y father was part of the Tebhaga movement, so I have also

²⁴ Respondent #7 (Please see Table A-2 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁵ Respondent #35 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁶ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁷ Respondent #9 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁸ Respondent #15 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

followed this path.”²⁹ Aadarsh, an elder, landowner, who had lost an acre of land to the car factory, and lived through the struggles of the 1940’s, called the current agitation in Singur “our second freedom struggle”.³⁰ Indeed, some villagers I interviewed spoke of family members who actively participated in the Tebhaga struggle, and are still alive today.

Other interviews revealed a less robust connection between history and the current agitation however. The family of one woman I interviewed owned one acre of land, and were registered sharecroppers for another two acres of land. She told me about her active involvement in the struggle, and how she went door to door to mobilize villagers to come out and participate in demonstrations. When I asked her about the role of the Tebhaga struggle in inspiring this current struggle, she responded “I have never heard of these movements. It doesn’t mean anything to me”.³¹ Many other villagers echoed a similar sentiment, either not knowing at all about the various social movements that have defined West Bengal’s political history, or telling me that they had heard of these past struggles, but that they know very little about the stories. For example, when I asked one villager about her knowledge of Operation Bargadar, she told me that she heard about it, but had very little knowledge of it. Her response becomes more significant given that she participated in many demonstrations, and also helped to mobilize villagers to also participate. In other words, she fully participated without the knowledge of history.³² Another, who lost 2.4 acres of land to the car factory, and was an active member of the SALC, told me, “I have learned something about the Tebhaga movement from my parents.

²⁹ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁰ Respondent #16 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³¹ Respondent #8 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³² Respondent #17 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

But this does not have a big impact in our current struggle. I was only small during Operation Bargadar”.³³

The sentiments were similar amongst common villagers in Nandigram. I asked about the relationship between the memory of past resistances and the current struggle during my interview Badaar, the landowning villager in Nandigram who had lost his son during the March 14th violence. He explained to me:

Yes we knew about them because we have heard stories from our grandfathers and fathers about their trysts while they were in Nandigram. But that was a lesser factor than the sheer feeling of the fact that we had to save our land, save our family and save ourselves from the cadres of the CPM and the government.³⁴

Others in Nandigram simply shook their heads, or responded a simply ‘no’ when I asked about the importance of the Tebhaga movement to them.

Thus, some common villagers had limited, or no knowledge of the states most famous social resistance, but participated just as fully in the current resistance. It is not that the struggling villagers had no knowledge whatsoever of the rural political history of West Bengal. Most had heard of the various important peasant movements that had occurred in the state. However, this factored only minimally in their decision to agitate.

Although some did not have a direct memory of West Bengal’s politicized history, it is important to note however that a tradition of protest can be passed from generation to generation. All activist villagers need not have an intimate knowledge of the past to be influenced by it. Of course such political culture is inherently difficult to capture. A similar parallel can be drawn between the French revolution and the current culture of protest in France – difficult to capture, but compelling nonetheless.

³³ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information).

³⁴ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

This does not mean that the political history of the state was not important however. Indeed, village leaders and elders knew of and drew inspiration from past peasant resistances. They knew that democratic social movements can work, and have worked in the past. This was passed on to common activist villagers, perhaps not in the form of knowledge sharing, but in the form of organizational and logistical support for the mass movement. In fact the parallels between the Tebhaga struggle in the 1940's and the SEZ struggle today in Nandigram are quite uncanny.³⁵ As well, interviews revealed that most villagers perceived that the CPM was put in power due to the support of rural West Bengal. When asked about this, one villager expressed to me, "the CPM has always come to power because of our vote!"³⁶ Another proclaimed, "the CPM only wins elections because of rural people".³⁷ Indeed, the role of the past in the present resistance has been the subject of other empirical work in the region, most examining historically high levels of political democratic participation amongst villagers (see for example, Roy 2006; Banerjee and Roy 2007; Roy 2007) Table 4-5 shows the results of the two questions that I asked to gauge the role of the past in the present agitations.

Thus, although most thought the Tebhaga movement and other similar struggles did factor into to the current resistance, some did not. The fact that villagers are engaging in democratic political participation without the full knowledge of past peasant struggles in the state bodes well for future generations in West Bengal. Villagers in Singur and Nandigram are not as coupled to their political history as many (and especially the activists in Calcutta) claim, yet this history is helping guide the current resistance in many ways. In this sense, as the memories of these past

³⁵ Sunil Sen (1982) provides some interesting details about the Tebhaga movement, and easy parallels can be draw between his account of the Tebhaga movement in the 1970s, and the struggle in Nandigram.

³⁶ Respondent #15 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁷ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

resistances inevitably fade, the legacy will remain, and democratic political participation will hopefully continue.

As well, it is important to note that the CPM understands the power of elections, and acts accordingly. It was commonplace during my interviews villagers, activists, and even journalists to call the CPM a ‘fascist’ government and many referred to the chief minister as a ‘dictator’. However, what I saw during my time in the villages revealed a different story. I saw various instances of democracy in action. For example, Singur villagers had set up a protest stage, where villagers could gather around to hear speeches or engage in other forms of political protest. The stage was about 30 feet long and was constructed right in the middle of the village block square. On the day that I visited the stage, village leaders were participating in a 48 hour hunger strike (one of multiple hunger strikes that I witnessed during my fieldwork in West Bengal). There were numerous journalists present during the protest, freely interviewing those involved in the hunger strike. I conducted some interviews right on the stage. There were also many police officers present. But instead of tearing down the stage, or arresting dissenting villagers, officers were simply milling around the crowds, clearly there to keep peace. I attended the rally for several hours, and police did not react at all to the lively demonstrations, which included loud speeches and music. While there, members of various opposition parties stepped up to express solidarity with the striking villagers as well. I saw a similar scene play out over and over in downtown Calcutta, (I detail these demonstrations in Chapter 5).

This scene was not unique to my experiences in the villages of Singur and Nandigram. I spoke earlier in the chapter of how police raised their weapons at me when I was taken to the factory gates in Singur. What I also noted however was that these same police did not interfere

with me during my time in Singur or Nandigram. I was able to move freely, and was told by my interpreter “don’t worry they can’t touch you, this is a free country you know!”

I did not witness any actual demonstrations or other forms of political dissent while in Nandigram, but I was shown by village leaders the many sites of protest during the past year. Again there was heavy police (and army) presence in Nandigram, but I was never questioned. My interpreter is also a local well known, left leaning journalist, who has relentlessly critiqued the government in his articles. We were both allowed free access to any villagers we chose, including those whose family members were killed or raped during past violence.

These might seem like small points, but I think they are significant. The protests in Nandigram often turned violent at the hands of government. This is not disputed. But villagers in Singur and Nandigram also understood that in most cases, they would be given significant space for political participation. The SALC and BUPC meetings were not conducted in secret. Villagers were free to engage in door to door mobilization campaigns. Although some protests were violent, many weren’t, and I heard of countless demonstrations that were conducted peacefully and without police interference. The villages have been overrun with opposition parties, NGOs, human rights groups, and journalists who have carefully documented the agitations, and government violence. Indeed, academic researchers have been given complete freedom to conduct research in the villages. India is fundamentally a democratic state, and this reality was visible to me during my fieldwork in rural West Bengal. I elaborate on this argument in more depth in the chapters following when I examine in detail the role of opposition parties, the Media, and NGOs in the resistance.

Panchayat Democracy

The implementation of the Panchayat system of government in West Bengal has also helped to create a critical political space for grassroots democracy to mature over the past several

decades, and this factored directly into the current resistances in Singur and Nandigram. Indeed, the unique system of local governance in the state has been the subject of much study, (see for example, Dasgupta 1995; Ghatak and Ghatak. 1999)

West Bengalis vote, and have done so in large numbers and at all levels of government. Since 1977, coinciding with the rise of the CPM, Bengali citizens have had participation rates in national elections well above the all India average, and in 2004, 78% of Bengal citizens participated in National elections. Figure 4-2 shows participation rates in national elections; West Bengal verses the national average.

West Bengal held state assembly elections in 2004, and 81% participated in those elections as well. Although it is difficult to delineate rural verses urban voter participation in the national and state elections, it is notable that 72% of West Bengal's population is rural, and thus logically, rural voters make up a large portion of the voter participation percentages.

What about at the panchayat level? Barrington Moore wrote in 1966 that “[t]he Indian peasant has not yet acquired the material and intellectual prerequisites for democratic society”, calling panchayat democracy “romantic rhetoric”. He goes on to write:

Fundamentally, the notion of village democracy is a piece of romantic Gandhian nostalgia that has no relevance to modern conditions . . . the real sources of change, the factors that determine the fate of the peasantry, lie outside the boundaries of the village. Through the ballot box and through their pressure for state and national politics, the peasants can do something about those questions, but not within the framework of village politics (Moore 1966, 394).

Perhaps India's rural citizenry were not ready for democracy in the late 1960's (the time of Moore's writing). However more recent statistics indicate that rural West Bengal takes panchayat elections quite seriously. Perhaps the most telling illustration of the importance of Panchayats is the high level of electoral participation in the local elections in the state. While in Calcutta for fieldwork, I was able to obtain data on the panchayat elections of 2003. In the 2003

elections, villagers across the state were able to choose candidates from multiple established political parties and the elections saw a 78% participation rate. I compiled the voter data from local elections whose jurisdiction contained Singur and Nandigram to get a sense of voter participation rates in these regions specifically. This data displayed in table 4-6 shows impressive voter turnout in these regions.

High levels of voter participation rates were substantiated during my interviews in the villages. Only one villager (N=28) told me that they did not participate in panchayat elections. Most actually had a high level of excitement and determination to oust the ruling CPM from power at the local level anyway via the May 2008 Panchayat elections (something they succeeded in doing, as I discuss in Chapter 6). This is an important point in terms of the main argument of this chapter. In addition to the passionate and sometimes violent demonstrations in Singur and Nandigram, anger at the current ruling government is also being channeled through elections. Peasants Singur and Nandigram feel a sense of empowerment through the localized electoral system in the state, and realize that they hold the power to oust the party that wronged them via the industrial projects.

Atul Kohli has written about how the CPM moved from a “revolutionary to a reformist orientation” once the party won office in 1977, and learned to operate “within the constraints of a democratic-capitalist framework” (Kohli 1987, 98). In other words, a revolutionary left wing party, participating in politics that is in some respects outside the purview of democratic institutions, saw democratic government as a viable means in which to gain power.³⁸ A similar scenario is currently being played out at the local level in Nandigram. While there, I was privy to a hushed conversation amongst BUPC village leaders about the possibility of fielding a BUPC candidate in the upcoming gram panchayat elections in Nandigram in May 2008. In other words,

³⁸ Similar sentiment has been expressed in terms of the evolution of the BJP party.

the BUPC, a grassroots, village run organization that sometimes skirted the law, and was revolutionary in many respects, was considering channeling its political energy into West Bengal's electoral system. In a clear sign of democratic solidarity at the village level, one villager who was participating in the discussion told me

In principle we have all agreed in Nandigram to fight the May panchayat elections not as political parties but to fight the elections from BUPC. That way everybody will vote for BUPC.³⁹

They didn't end up doing so, coming out in support of the TMC instead. However this is a sign of democratic deepening in rural West Bengal.⁴⁰ That a grassroots resistance organization sees West Bengal's local government structure as a legitimate means in which to pursue their agenda and advance their cause speaks to the efficacy of the panchayat system in the state.

Panchayats have legitimacy in Singur and Nandigram beyond electoral cycles however. The positive role that panchayats have played was initially difficult to tease out during interviews in the villages. In Singur, many villagers expressed an understandable disillusionment with panchayats given that, at the time of my fieldwork, the perception was that the villagers had lost their battle for their land. As such, many questioned the power of panchayats to get things done for them. However, I was able to glean the importance of panchayats to villagers in Singur though watching the village's gram panchayat representative Dudh Kumar, interact with villagers. As discussed above, Dudh Kumar is a highly popular political figure in Singur. Every

³⁹ Respondent #53 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁰ An opportunity for further research presented itself to me during this fieldwork in terms of democratic deepening. Some villagers in Nandigram spoke to me about the state government trying to fragment the resistance along religious lines. For example, one journalist I spoke with told me about interviews he did with Muslim Nandigram villagers. They told him that when they returned home from their work day, Hindu members of the state party militia would often strip search them, which they took as an attempt to fragment their movement along religious lines. These villagers told the journalist that such actions only strengthened their commitment to the resistance however. This sentiment was illustrated during the March 14th uprisings, when, in an attempt to stay police violence, both Muslim and Hindu villagers alike engaged in their respective worship as the police advanced. The cross cutting cleavages of this movement is in need of further research.

time I visited him, in the village, he was surrounded by at least a dozen villagers, and was trying to sort out the variety of issues that have effected the villages since the land acquisition process begun. And while many villagers in Singur spoke of disillusionment with the Gram Panchayat office over its inability to stop the car project, most spoke very highly of Dudh Kumar; how they go to him for help on an ongoing basis, and how he is really trying his best to make headway with the government in terms of the project. As one villager explained to me, “[h]ere our panchayat member is very good. He helps us and we get things from him...we get many things from Dudh Kumar.”⁴¹ Another explained to me, “Dudh Kumar is a very important leader for us here in the villages”.⁴² Due to logistical challenges and safety issues, I was not able to meet any of the panchayat representatives in Nandigram. However one of the Gram Panchayat leaders was brought up multiple times as being a key leader in the resistance during my interviews in Nandigram.

The vibrant panchayat system in West Bengal illustrates the level of grassroots political participation in the state. Participation rates during elections are very high and villagers interact regularly with their panchayat members. Further, villagers were considering forming a new party to fight elections at the panchayat level due to the violence in Nandigram. As such, panchayats have become an important first means of democratic political expression for the villagers in West Bengal.

Conclusion

I have attempted to establish in this chapter that the village resistance to both the automobile factory in Singur, and the proposed chemical SEZ in Nandigram were the result of a

⁴¹ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴² Respondent #17 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

history of well established rural political participation at the grassroots. A political history of democracy provided villagers with the tools with which to form a unified resistance against the projects. Although opposition parties played an important role in the resistance, (as further discussed in Chapter 6), this chapter has established that villagers engaged in political participation as members of their communities, and individuals who were at risk of losing their land and livelihood.

Grassroots democratic expression in rural West Bengal is only one important part of the anti SEZ story in India however. Taken alone, the village movements do not provide enough evidence that various democratic institutions in the country are helping the poor mitigate the negative effects of the SEZ policy, especially in terms of land encroachment. In the next chapters I illustrate how civil society, opposition parties, and the media helped to magnify the Singur and Nandigram resistances across the country, and in doing so, how they helped facilitate a wave of opposition across the whole of India. There are now village resistances going on all over the country, largely due to the framing of the resistance by these variables. In Chapter 5, I discuss the role of outside civic actors in the resistance.

Table 4-1. Interview responses: Role of opposition parties in Singur and Nandigram

Question	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Opposition parties driving or supporting this resistance? ^a		
Driving	0	0
Supporting	100%	16
N		16

^aThe full question asked is as follows: “Some people say that opposition parties are ‘driving’ the resistance against the [car factory/SEZ]. Others say that opposition parties are only playing a supportive role. Which of these is closest to your opinion?”

Table 4-2. West Bengal election results: 1952-2006

Year	Leading party	Seats won	Main rival	Seats won
1952	Congress	24	CPI	5
1957	Congress	23	CPI	6
1962	Congress	22	CPI	9
1967	Congress	14	CPM	5
1971	CPM	20	Congress	13
1977	CPM	17	BLD	15
1980	CPM	28	Congress	4
1984	CPM	18	Congress	16
1989	CPM	27	Congress	4
1991	CPM	27	Congress	5
1996	CPM	23	Congress	9
1998	CPM	24	Trinamool	7
1999	CPM	21	Trinamool	8
2001	CPM	143	Trinamool	60
2006	CPM	176	Trinamool	30

Source: Election data for India is compiled by the Election Commission of India. Official election data is available at the commissions official website: <http://www.indian-elections.com/>, accessed August 31, 2008

Table 4-3. Sharecroppers registered as a result of Operation Barga

Year	Number registered
Up to 1978	0.25 million
1981	1.2 million
1985	1.31 million
1990	1.43 million
1995	1.47 million
2000	1.5 million
2006	1.53 million

Note: for data up to 1985 see Raychaudhuri (2005). For data after 1985, see Government of West Bengal, Economic Review (various years)

Table 4-4. Share of West Bengal in implementation of land-ceilings among all major rice producing states in India as in March, 2001

States	Area			
	Distributed (in acres)	Percentage to all-India total	Number of Beneficiaries	Percentage to All-India total
West Bengal	1048005	19.74	2564931	47.14
Andhra Pradesh	581568	10.95	534603	9.83
Uttar Pradesh	258698	4.87	294062	5.40
Tamil Nadu	179683	3.38	142347	2.62
Total INDIA	5309035	100	5440676	100

Source: Chakraborti (2002) and Raychaudhuri (2005). *Received permission from author to reproduce this table

Table 4-5. Interview responses: Role of the past in current struggles

Question	% of Respondents	Number of respondents
What does do the past [Tebhaga/Freedom] movements mean to the current struggles		
• It means a lot	69	9
• It does not mean much (or not at all)	31	4
	N	13
Some people say that the CPM gained power in the 1970s and remain in power due to the support of peasants. Do you feel this is true?		
Yes	83	10
No	17	2
	N	12

Table 4-6. Panchayat elections: Voter participation rates in relevant areas in West Bengal

Level	Region	Voter Participation Rate
Gram	Singur	87.5%
	Nandigram	90%
Samiti	Singur	81.56%
	Nandigram	90.02%
Zilla	Hooghly District (Singur)	86%
	Purba Mednipur District	89%
	(Nandigram)	

Source: These data are available in three separate government documents: WBSE Commission Panchayat General Elections, 2003. *Results of Gram Panchayat Elections, Results of Panchayat Samiti Elections, and Results of Zilla Parishad Elections*, (Date of Poll: May 11, 2003). These data are available at the Institute for Social Sciences – Calcutta.

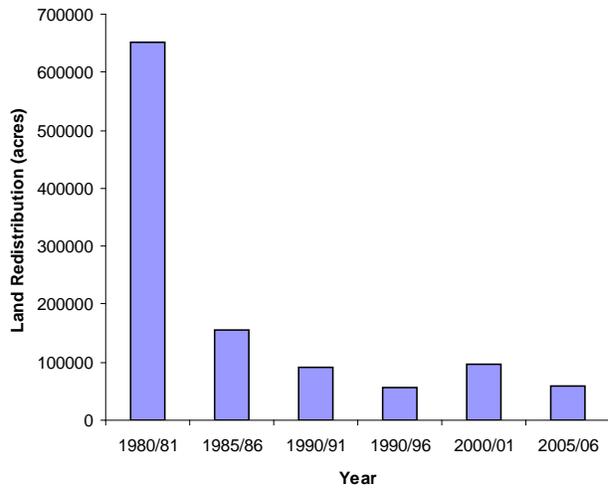


Figure 4-1. Above ceiling land redistributed under CPM rule (measured in 5 year increments).
Source: Government of West Bengal, *Economic Review*, various years

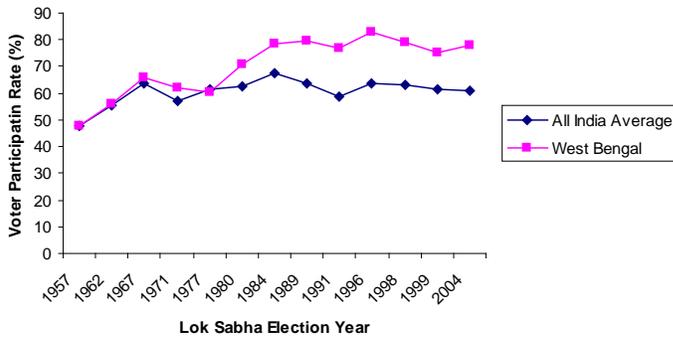


Figure 4-2. Participation rate in national elections, 1957-2004: West Bengal vs. National Average [Source: Data compiled from national election statistics. These data are available electronically from the official website of the Election Commission of India, at, <http://www.eci.gov.in/>, accessed August 31, 2008.]

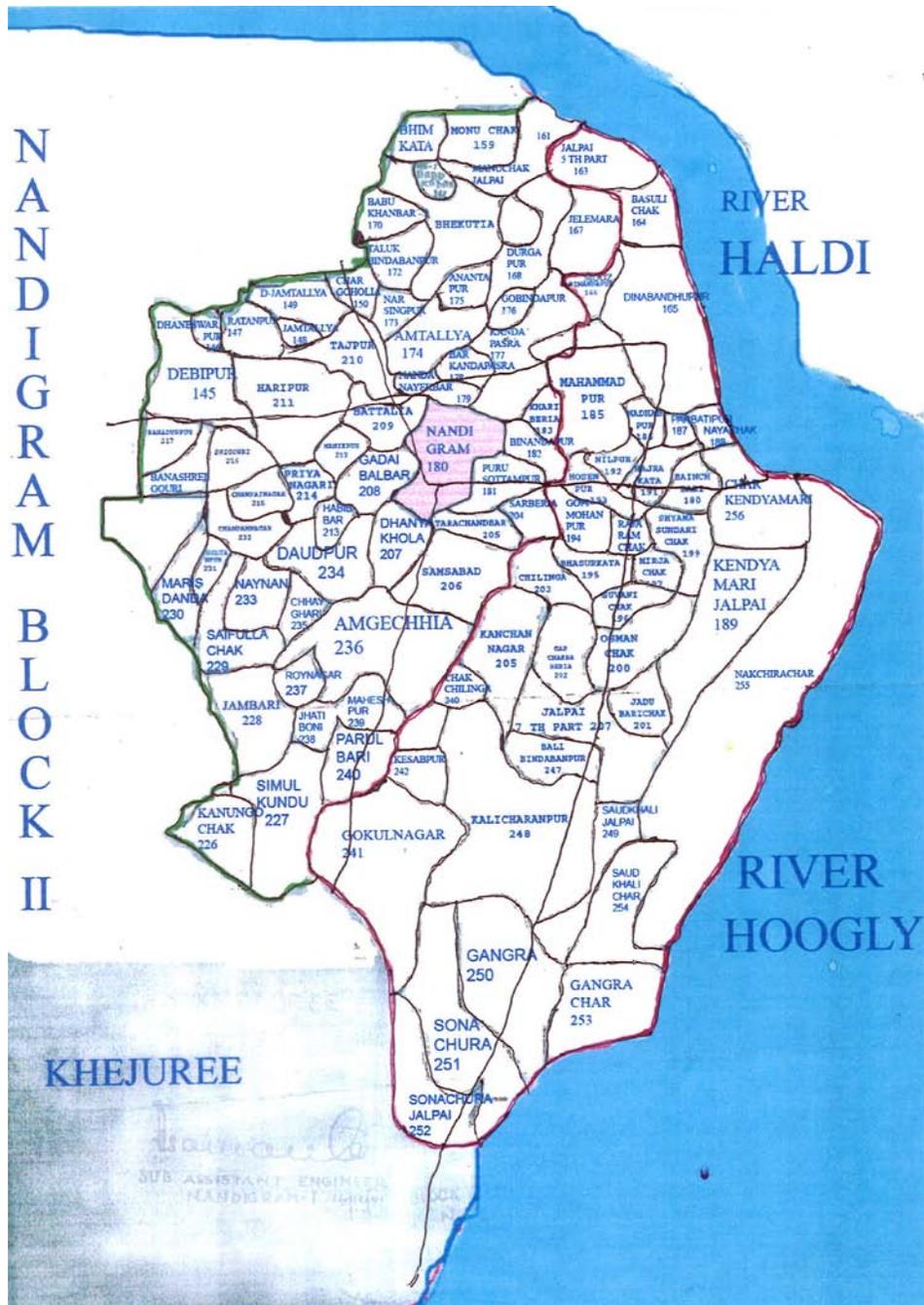


Figure 4-3. Map of Nandigram. The area marked in red demarcates the proposed site of the Special Economic Zone [Source: This map was provided to me by the village activists in Nandigram during my fieldwork in 2008.]

CHAPTER 5
THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ANTI SEZ RESISTANCE

Introduction

Chapter 4 laid out the role of village activism in terms of the resistance to the export oriented industrial projects in the village blocks of Singur and Nandigram, West Bengal. Focus was placed on how the history of democratic social movements, and favorable government response propelled the activism against the industrial projects. India's backdrop of democracy was a key factor in the resistances. This chapter takes a step away from an examination of the protests at the village level, and looks at the more distant, yet no less important role of outside social actors and non political elites, such as intellectuals, non government organizations, and prominent social activists. For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term civil society to characterize these actors.¹ I argue in this chapter that civil society undertook a number of important functions that helped moved the resistance forward.

The concept of civil society is a fluid one, and can embrace a variety of actors that operate in the social and political arenas. With the anti SEZ resistance in India for example, prominent writers and intellectuals, nationally renowned social activists, various non-government organizations, and with respect to an anti SEZ resistance in Goa, the church even came to play a key leadership role. A commonality that runs through such civic actors however is autonomy from the state, in that they are not connected to official political mechanisms such as political parties, or other such state institutions (Frantz 1987; Wapner 1995; Ewig 1999). In other words, to be effective, civil society must be free to pursue goals and agendas, outside of state oversight and control.

¹ The concept of civil society typically would include the peasants themselves as well. I have separated out the role of the peasants in the preceding chapter however, and as such, I utilize the term civil society to mean social actors who had a role in the resistance, but were not peasants.

Civil society can thus be considered to be a middle layer, a buffer of sorts, between citizens and the state, above the individual citizen, but below the state (Wapner 1995). This middle layer has both a downward and upward reach. In terms of downward influence, civil society often facilitates citizen action by disseminating information about an issue to citizens, as well as generally raising the consciousness of citizens about a given issue. Civil society can also empower local communities by providing resources to them (helping finance local activism for example), by helping citizens articulate their concerns and demands, and also by bringing otherwise disparate communities together under a common cause thereby helping to release a collective energy (Clark 1995; Wapner 1995). Civil society can also exert upwards influence, pressuring the state for social change, and influencing state policy.

Although by definition, civil society is autonomous from the state; its efficacy depends squarely on state receptiveness to civic engagement, the backdrop to which is a democratic political framework. There are examples of civic activism under authoritarian regimes; however such activism is often subject to extreme state control (see for example, Ho 2001). In a functioning democracy by contrast, the state exerts limited, or no control over civil society's functioning. For example, civil society must have the ability to receive funds from anyone they choose. Further, a democratic polity fosters a political environment conducive to freedom of expression and association, as well as the mindset that participation has the possibility of facilitating policy change (Landim 1987; Clark 1995, 594).

India has a famously vibrant NGO sector. It has been estimated for example that there are as many as 100,000 NGOs operating in India (Katzenstein, Kothari, and Mehta 2001, 249). In fact, NGOs are so prominent in the country, that one researcher, who focuses on the topic calls India "the NGO capital of the world" (Kudva 1996). It wasn't always this way however. On

Indira Gandhi's return to power in the early 1980's the Kudal Commission was established to clamp down on 'corrupt' NGOs. However, many saw the establishment of this commission as a means in which to silence several NGOs that had been critical of her (including the Gandhi Peace Foundation – and NGO that has now become quite prominent in the anti SEZ resistance) (Katzenstein, Kothari, and Mehta 2001, 251). However, once Rajiv Gandhi (Indira Gandhi's son) came to power in 1984 after his mother's assassination, he facilitated text in the seventh five year plan that acknowledged that the NGO sector was a crucial part of India's development and allocated many more times the money previously given for NGO work (Katzenstein, Kothari, and Mehta 2001, 250)

As I document below, India's civil society has been active in the anti SEZ resistance across the country. Civic actors have played important downward roles, disseminating information to villagers about SEZs, as well as bringing otherwise disparate movements against SEZs (and related issues) together under common umbrellas of social change. Civil society also played an upward oriented role as well, meeting national political figures and directly influencing policy at the national level with regards to SEZs. Greasing the wheels of the civic response to SEZs was the political backdrop of India's democratic structure.

Civil Society and the Anti-SEZ Resistance in India

Anti SEZ sentiment had been rumbling across India for some time before the infamous March 14 2007 police firing on villagers protesting the proposed SEZ in Nandigram. However, for various reasons that I discuss below, the Nandigram violence became the spark that led to an explosion of resistance to SEZs across the country. In Nandagudi, Karnataka, for example, peasants from 36 villages began actively resisting a 12,000+ acre SEZ. In Raigad Maharashtra, protesting farmers from at least 24 villages started fighting an SEZ due to be set up there. In Managalore (also Karnataka), farmers fought a proposed 2000 acre SEZ that would engulf four

villages. All over the state of Goa, a multitude of rural activists from a multitude of villages began to resist all 15 SEZs that were due to be set up in the state.² Indeed, hardly a state was spared from rural resistance to SEZs.³

Various actors of India's civil society played key roles in facilitating and advancing the grassroots resistance to SEZs. In doing so, civil society enabled the disparate village movements, primarily concerned with land acquisition, to be transformed into a national opposition against various aspects of SEZs. Countless NGOs, as well as popular national social activists, and political actors from the 'creative sector' (writers, intellectuals, documentary film makers, singers, etc . . .) stepped into the fray, directly and indirectly helping villagers across the country fight SEZs on the ground. These actors played a critical role in physically bringing village movements across the country together, as well as facilitating interaction between villagers and government, both at the state and central level. They also played a direct role in lobbying the central government, sometimes gaining access to high level government officials, for discussions of proposed policy changes, and in some cases directly influencing policy with regards to SEZs. These same actors have also played a key role in framing the overall issue of SEZs. For example, villagers in West Bengal are primarily resisting SEZs due to potential loss of land (and hence livelihood). External civil society actors are building on this core resistance, while re-framing it in many ways, questioning various aspects of SEZ policy, as well as government behavior in terms of implementing SEZs (such as what occurred in Nandigram). Other actors are drawing parallels between the SEZ resistance, and other seemingly unrelated

² All 15 zones were cancelled by the Congress led state government in Goa on December 31, 2007. This was considered a landmark event for the anti SEZ resistance across the country. I discuss this further in the chapter following.

³ This list is not exhaustive and represents a fraction of the number of anti SEZ resistances taking place in the country.

resistances occurring in the country. Importantly, the Nandigram resistance was continually propped up as the symbolic heart of the national anti SEZ resistance, thereby giving the civil society resistance a social base in the villages of India.

The civil society resistance also turned Delhi, India's national capital into a key arena for the movement. Massive demonstrations were organized. Impromptu street theatre also cropped up all over Delhi, where activists and villagers alike acted out the injustices inherent in SEZs. As I detail below, a 'people's parliament' was held on the streets of Delhi in August 2007 for 20 days, where villagers and activists from across the country voiced their concerns over SEZs (and other related issues).

What is critical to understand is that these civil society actors are not operating in separate, isolated boxes. As McAdam et al., have eloquently argued in their account of the mechanisms that drive contentious politics, the relations between political actors are at least as important as the actors themselves, (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). In other words, we must account for the "fluid, strategic, and interactive operation of actors, identities, and forms of collective action" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 73). This holistic notion of contentious politics certainly rang true in the anti SEZ resistance in India. Through the relations between these political actors, the SEZ issue was in a continual process of re-definition. As discussed in Chapter 1, McAdam et al., define this as 'framing', or "...the interactive construction of disputes among challengers, their opponents" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 62).⁴

Indeed, the SEZ issue was reframed in countless ways, from a variety of stakeholders. For example, villagers in Nandigram largely saw the SEZ issue in terms of loss of farm land.

⁴ Keck and Sikkink (1998) make a similar point, arguing that the activists they studied brought issues to public attention by wrapping them in new language, or linking them with past issues, thus drawing connections between them.

Villagers in Singur had a similar sentiment. The urban poor in Calcutta then began to worry about what SEZs meant to coveted space in overpopulated urban environments. If the government could take away farmland so easily for development, could they also remove urban street vendors with similar ease? Environmental groups questioned the environmental consequences of SEZs. Other groups saw SEZs as an example of corporate ‘terrorism’; and still others were deep into the intricacies of the policy, questioning aspects of the regulation, such as lax labor laws. The framing and reframing was cyclical. Issues such as environment, or labor, were, at first, quite foreign to villagers who were resisting SEZs in terms of land loss, but they learned more about them through continued participation in the anti SEZ resistance. As well, through the relations between actors, various stakeholders became even more emboldened in their resistance against SEZs. For example, when resisting villagers interacted with other villagers in other parts of the country, (often with an NGO, or opposition party member as a facilitator), they became even more inspired to continue their fight, while learning about different other SEZ issues (beyond that of land).

The Backdrop of India’s Democracy: Critical to the functioning of civil society with regards to the anti SEZ resistance was the political context in which civic activism occurred. In the case of India, the political actors mentioned above, together defining and re-defining the SEZ issue, were operating within the democratic political framework of the country. Although an indirect role, India’s formal and informal institutions of democracy provided the context in which the resistance could occur. As such, an important, and perhaps *the* most important, aspect of the resistance overall is India’s well established democracy. For example, members of civil society were able to access the various villages without interference (save for a few days in November, when all outsiders were banned from Nandigram). They traversed the country freely, and

interacted continuously with media. Writers wrote about the resistance, and documentary movies that were highly critical of the government, quickly surfaced. Massive demonstrations were mounted across the country, with little police interference (Nandigram aside). In fact, the resistances I witnessed often had significant police presence, there however to facilitate the resistance, not restrict it. For example, I saw many instances of police shutting down roads and providing protection that allowed demonstrations to occur smoothly. Further, NGOs gained access to high level government officials, often bringing villagers in tow. Policy positions were presented, and in some cases, had a direct impact on policy outcome.⁵

I will continue to stress the argument developed in the Chapter 4 – that these various external political actors have not directly created or driven the grassroots village movements. If the latter were the case, one must question the efficacy of India’s grassroots democracy. However I show that these outside political actors have simply capitalized on what started as grassroots village movements, and in doing so must be understood as being reactive, and not directly constitutive in terms of the grassroots movement that took place across the country. I take a similar stance when I discuss the role of opposition parties in Chapter 6.

India’s Civil Society in Action

Given the prominence of civil society activism (including NGOs) in India, it is no surprise that the ‘non government’ sector waded full freight into the SEZ debate soon after the March 14 violence in Nandigram. The important role of civil society for the SEZ issue became clear when this sector quickly turned Calcutta (the capital city of West Bengal) into a central arena for contention over the issue. The use of Calcutta as a key setting for political contention

⁵ For example, the *National Alliance of People’s Movements* (NAPM) had direct contact with a variety of high level government officials during the crafting of the 2007 Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy. The NAPM even helped write some of the wording of the policy.

came as no surprise, as the city is well known for its highly politicized atmosphere. In August 2007, I arrived in Calcutta, armed with only a basic knowledge of the politicized history of the city. It was during my first hour in Calcutta however, that I gained a first hand appreciation of the heightened level of political activity that has defined Calcutta, and indeed the state of West Bengal overall. Thousands of the city's sex workers marched past my hotel which was situated on one of the city's busiest streets. The goal of the march was to push for the legalization of the sex trade in India. The march virtually shut down one of Calcutta's many bustling markets for several hours and paralyzed traffic in the downtown core of the city. Days later I witnessed a large agitation of some sort, where all participants were undertaking a march while on 3 wheeled bicycles. Another demonstration, this one taken up in support of street hawkers rights, gnarled traffic again sometime later. These were a few of the dozens of demonstrations that I would be privy to both in the streets of Calcutta and in the surrounding villages in West Bengal where I conducted fieldwork. I learned that these seemingly daily agitations were not anomalous when the former land reform commissioner of the state remarked to me during an interview, "West Bengal is highly politicized. All the time. There is no time that it is not".⁶

The politicized atmosphere of the state became even more heightened with regards to the anti SEZ village movement in Nandigram. Downtown Calcutta became a key venue for a variety of protests, marches, and demonstrations, and the city was literally shut down numerous times during city wide 'bandhs' (a Hindu word meaning 'closed'). A calling of a bandh is a call to citizens to literally close the city down, staying home from work for example. This became a frequent tactic of the TMC during the height of the Singur and Nandigram resistances, (I go into more detail about the role of opposition parties in Chapter 6).

⁶ Respondent #36 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

A large protest stage was set up in the middle of the city within two days of the November 2007 crackdown in Nandigram, (when armed members of the ruling party cadre in West Bengal entered the village block and violently regained control of the region). The stage was initially set up for famed social and political activist Medha Patkar to engage in a 2 day hunger strike in support of the Nandigram villagers. Medha Patkar is a nationally recognized activist, often campaigning on behalf of those citizens in India who have been, or are in the process of being disenfranchised due to industrialization. I talk more in depth about her direct role in the anti SEZ resistance later in the chapter.

A multitude of organizations quickly stepped in to maintain the protest stage beyond the initial 48 hours it was put up for. It was decided that the stage would provide the setting for a continuous hunger strike, and would remain in place as long as possible. The stage was surrounded by large posters of victims that had been injured or killed in the violence, and the pictures had politically provocative statements, such as “It’s West Bengal, not Gujarat” (referring to the anti Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002, that resulted in approximately 3000 Muslim deaths. Many blame the Hindu led state government for the massacre). Another picture showed a severely injured villager with infamous the statement made by the Chief Minister of West Bengal at the bottom “They have been paid back on their own coin”, this referring to a controversial statement made by the him a few days earlier in reference to the state violence against the resisting villagers, (see figure 5-1 below).

A large area was cordoned off surrounding the stage where people could sit and listen to speeches that were taking place almost around the clock on the stage. The audience area for the stage took up an entire lane of one of the central roads going though the city, and as such, police barricades were used to keep people and cars separate. Police were constantly on hand to

monitor both the ongoing protests and to make sure traffic flowed safely around the area. One side of the stage, a large covered area was devoted to the collection of relief supplies for Nandigram villagers. (I visited the stage within days of the November 11 crackdown and relief supplies and monetary donations were coming in fast and furious). A truck would come to the stage daily to pick up collected supplies and then activists would make the four hour trip to Nandigram to deliver them. There was also a makeshift office set up beside the stage where money was collected for the Nandigram villagers.

Once Medha Patkar ended her hunger strike (in front of a cheering audience of thousands), activists decided that rotating hunger strikes would continue around the clock for at least several weeks, in support of the Nandigram villagers. Different organizations would ‘sponsor’ a 48 hour time block, in which members of their organization would go on a hunger strike for this period. When I first visited the protest stage, the hunger strike was being sponsored by the ‘Torture Victim Support Forum’, a non profit group that worked to provide legal recourse and fund medical assistance to victims of torture in West Bengal (although the group had plans to go national). The group categorized the violence against villagers in Nandigram as torture, and as such had spent several days in the region collecting official depositions from villagers regarding the violence in the region. The proceedings were overseen by a retired chief justice and all depositions were put on the internet for public access. The organization was participating in the hunger strike as a show of solidarity, and to show Nandigram villagers that it “was not their struggle only”.⁷ Although the bulk of the hunger strikers on the stage were from the Torture Victim Support Forum, other people would randomly come up onto the stage and join the strikers in a show of solidarity. For example, I spoke to a

⁷ Respondent #25 (Please see Table A-4 in appendix for respondent information)

physics professor who was on lunch break, and decided to spend a few hours on the stage with the hunger strikers. Another on the stage was a poet, and was looking to express the injustices of the violence through poetry. He participated in the strike to gain inspiration that he hoped would drive his writing. Indeed, at any given time there were at least 25 people on the stage participating in the activism.

During one of the several days that I spent at the protest stage, I was able to watch a changeover of hunger strikers take place, where the participating organization left the stage and a new organization stepped up to continue the hunger strike protest for another 48 hour cycle. The changeover took place in an atmosphere of solidarity with the new participants congratulating the old participants with hugs and handshakes. Social activist Medha Patkar joined the stage during the changeover, shaking hands with all new hunger strikers, who bowed to her in return. (She then quickly left with a relief truck for Nandigram). As 23 new participants took to the stage, their names were read out over a microphone and they began their strike amidst animated cheers and applause.

This time the hunger strike was being sponsored by the *National Street Hawkers Federation*, a national umbrella organization of over 500 Street Hawkers Rights Associations across the country. Due to years long lobbying, the National Street Hawkers Federation had finally managed to convince the central government to make street hawking a legally recognized profession in India. In 2004, the government passed ‘The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors’, which affords street hawkers with an array of legal rights, and limits the government’s ability to evict hawkers at will.⁸ The policy however relies on the respective states in India for implementation, something that very few states have done - hence the federation’s ongoing

⁸ A copy of the policy can be found on the Government of India, Ministry of Employment and Poverty Alleviation’s website, <http://muepa.nic.in/policies/index2.htm>, accessed 4 February, 2009.

activism. Street hawkers pay one rupee a day (approximately two cents), to be a card carrying member of the federation, and the umbrella group has over half a million members nationwide. The national federation is also a member of the *International Association of Hawkers and Urban Poor*.

I was able to meet many at the demonstration and was told that all hunger strikers and most in the audience were Calcutta street hawkers and were participating to express solidarity with the Nandigram villagers. In an example of how the SEZ issue is continually re-framed by civil society actors who are protesting against it, the participating street hawkers saw important parallels between the challenges of their profession and the issues facing Nandigram villagers. First, the federation felt that if the government could forcefully take land away from farmers, the precious land that street hawkers needed to sell their wares might also be at risk. In that regard, the federation saw a direct parallel between the attempted forced eviction of Nandigram farmers and a 1996 government crackdown on street hawkers called ‘operation sunshine’ in which the CPM demolished the stalls of over one hundred thousand street hawkers on the streets of Calcutta, (interestingly, prior to coming to power, the CPM had helped to mobilize street hawkers, similar to their activism in the 1970’s in Nandigram in support of sharecroppers rights). As is pictured in figure 5-1, the street hawkers visually portrayed this link by displaying two black coffins on the Nandigram protest stage, one labeled ‘1996’ and one labeled ‘2007’ (to represent the 1996 violence against street hawkers and the 2007 violence against Nandigram farmers). Second, street hawkers drew a parallel between their profession and that of a Nandigram farmer as being entrepreneurial, and the federation felt strongly that self employed people in the country must stick together. Finally, many street hawkers expressed to me the need to form solidarity with others who are also poor in the country.

Interestingly, participants of the street hawker's federation expressed a similar level of self confidence regarding the people's role in electing the CPM into government over the last 30 years. Similar to the Nandigram villagers, street hawkers understood their democratic power, and were acting accordingly. As Chandan, a Calcutta street hawker who sells small plastic children's toys on a street corner near a hotel explained to me:

West Bengal has a legacy of progressive democratic governments. In many other states there is no such legacy. But in West Bengal, for more than 30 years, we have had a people's government. We have a working class party. It is by the vote of the people that this government came into existence.⁹

I returned to the stage towards the end of the second day of the National Street Hawkers Federation hunger strike. Over the course of a few hours, the audience in front of the stage swelled to several thousand street hawkers, who were all listening intently to impassioned speeches taking place on the stage. In the evening, Medha Patkar returned to the stage and was greet by a two minute long standing ovation, during which audience members had an almost rapturous like aura about them. After the ovation, she gave a highly energetic speech, drawing further parallels between street hawker's rights and the rights of villagers in Nandigram. Behind her on the stage sat about 20 villagers from Nandigram. I learned later that between 40 and 50 villagers had been brought to Calcutta from Nandigram by various NGOs and activists to attend the protest rallies. During her speech, I asked a street hawker sitting beside me about her importance to the movement, and he said, "She has extended our hand. She is a national personality. She knows the right path. What to do and what not to do." I present similar data from interviews in Singur, and Nandigram below. In terms of the Calcutta resistance, her presence is an important point to consider. Medha Patkar had not only spent significant time in Singur and Nandigram, she had also traversed the country to sites of other anti SEZ village

⁹ Respondent #29 (Please see Table A-4 in appendix for respondent information)

resistances. As such, she had become a key broker between those resistance SEZs, and between anti SEZ resistances, and those participating in activism for other causes. Figure 5-2 shows Medha Patkar giving a speech during the Street Hawkers Federation portion of the ongoing Nandigram hunger strike demonstration.

Bengal's Creative Sector

Along with various organizations, Calcutta's 'creative sector' stepped into the debate. Calcutta is dubbed by some as the 'intellectual and cultural capital of the country'.¹⁰ The city boasts a variety of highly popular intellectuals, writers, poets, documentary filmmakers, playwrights, and musicians, and this element of Bengal society is a large source of pride amongst the citizens of West Bengal. The city is host to a variety of creative sector festivals, including the internationally famous, annual Calcutta film festival, and a variety of large book fairs. Importantly, this sector of Bengali society, (hereafter called 'the creative sector') is also highly political, and has a history of political activism in the state. Thus it was only fitting that this element of Bengal's society also participated in the anti SEZ resistance.

Within a few days of the protest stage being set up, a large protest march was organized by a group in Calcutta called *The Intellectuals Forum*, an umbrella organization in support of the rights of intellectual freedom in the state. I was told by a journalist that accompanied me to the march that many prominent intellectuals, as well as writers, filmmakers, actors, etc... were present for the demonstration.¹¹ The march started in the downtown core of the city and ended at

¹⁰ A large tourist website portal describes the city this way, [Indialine](http://www.indialine.com/travel/westbengal/calcutta/), <http://www.indialine.com/travel/westbengal/calcutta/>, accessed 4 February 2009.

¹¹ The making of political documentary films is very popular in West Bengal. I obtained three of the many films that were subsequently made on the Singur and Nandigram resistances. The films contained graphic footage of the resistance. One film had surprisingly close up footage of the actual police violence on March 14 in Nandigram. That cameras were allowed to roll during this violent day is a testament to the freedom of journalism in the country. The documentary films that I obtained are called *Nandigram*, *This land is Mine*, *Right to Land*, and *Whose Land is it anyway?*. All are blisteringly critical of the government action in Singur and Nandigram.

the central protest stage discussed above. The route was capped at two miles to accommodate the many elderly that were to participate in the march. All participants had a small black piece of cloth pinned to their clothes that contained the simple word ‘shame’. Prior to the start of the march, animated speeches were given by various intellectuals, denouncing the government violence in Nandigram. The logistics of the march were then called out over a loudspeaker, with specific instructions that the march remain peaceful and be conducted in strict silence.

The march was very well organized, and over 50,000 participated. Most were involved in some aspects of West Bengal’s creative sector. Marchers formed two single file lines that stretched back farther and I could see, and as per the initial instructions, protesters walked in total and complete silence. What was even more compelling however, were the tens of thousands of spectators who also maintained complete silence as the march traversed the busy market streets of Calcutta. In a city overwhelmed by the deafening roar of millions of cars, car horns, bustling people, and hundreds of thousands of street hawkers, the impact of complete silence in the downtown core of Calcutta was powerful. Figure 5-3 shows pictures of this march.

The march filed past an elderly woman who was sitting on a makeshift platform on the side of the road. The woman was surrounded by people, and as the march went by her, some protesters stopped to bow in front of her or place a flower at her feet. I later learned that this woman is a nationally famous Bengali writer and social activist. Her name is Mahasweta Devi.¹² She is an award winning writer and author of twelve Bengali books. I also learned that her son, Nabarun Bhattacharya is also a famous writer in West Bengal, having penned ten books, and countless articles. A few days after the march, I interviewed both writers and was able to more specifically discern the role of writers in the Singur and Nandigram resistances. Both spoke of

¹² For a brief account of her dual roles as writer and activist in West Bengal, please see Bhattacharya (1997).

their duty as writers to help provide a voice for common people. Nabarun for example explained to me:

You see, Bengali writers and cultural workers have a long tradition, going back to the days of the freedom struggle, of siding with the people. We are not doing anything new. This is quite normal with us...to side with the people when they have been oppressed, when they have been silenced.¹³

Mahasweta echoed a similar sentiment, “Even before independence, the role of writers was critical. Even before independence, we have had great writers. So many writers, artists, and others...”.¹⁴ She went on to say, “[w]hat I am doing, I am not doing it the first time. For years I have been with people. I have been in many places. I have written plenty about my experiences.” Both have written extensively on the Singur and Nandigram resistance. Mahasweta Devi for example, has contributed hundreds of articles (newspapers and magazines) to the cause and Nabarun Bhattacharya edits a weekly publication that has devoted many articles to the Singur and Nandigram issues. I conducted part of my interview with Nabarun at his busy office, and people were constantly coming in and out of his office, providing him with minute by minute updates of the resistance in Nandigram.

Similar to others I interviewed, including common villagers, and the variety of social activists participating at the protest stage, the writers spoke of a level of confidence with regards to the state’s democracy. Nabarun explained to me:

Inevitably there will be elections. There will be a broad electoral battle in which the CPM can be ousted. I am a firm believer in democracy. Because of democracy, they do not have absolute power. Otherwise, Nandigram would have spread everywhere. Nandigram has strengthened democracy. Because it has alerted everyone who is opposed to

¹³ Respondent #1 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁴ Respondent #2 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

totalitarianism that the supreme need now is to unite. How can I unite without democracy? Here my will can prevail. We have to find a common way.¹⁵

Perhaps though the best evidence I came across regarding the importance of the creative sector came during my interview with Mahasweta Devi. I had learned prior of her importance in advocating on behalf of the Nandigram villagers during my observation of the Street Hawkers demonstration a few weeks earlier. However, I saw first hand during my interview at her residence that she had also become a key figure in directly organizing the relief effort for Nandigram villagers. Indeed, in keeping with her policy of open door activism some newspapers had published her street address as a dropping point for relief supplies. Her apartment was piled to the ceiling with supplies set to be delivered to Nandigram. Her phone rang incessantly and I heard her repeatedly giving out the bank number of an account set up to collect donations for Nandigram villagers. A multitude of people were in her small apartment coordinating various relief activities, and people were constantly coming to her door, interrupting our interview to donate money or supplies. It was clear that her residence had become one of the key command centers for the entire relief effort. As we conducted our interview haphazardly, with continuous interruptions, she told me, almost apologetically: “I am very close to Nandigram. I am very busy, morning to night. All the time these relief groups are coming. My room is full of things and trucks will take it to Nandigram.” Her activism becomes more significant given that she is 83 years old in frail health.

The Impact on the Villagers: I wondered whether social activists such as Medha Patkar, as well as writers such as Mahasweta Devi were having a direct impact on the villagers themselves. It was clear that West Bengal’s civil society had not fomented the resistance. The first finding of

¹⁵ Respondent #1 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

note is that all villagers I interviewed told me that social activists such as Medha Patkar and Mahasweta Devi had never before visited the village blocks of Nandigram and Singur, and that their arrival to the scene occurred many weeks after the initial village resistances had begun. Thus it can be argued that the village resistance caused the civil society response, which is important in terms of the autonomy of rural grassroots expression.

Although not an initial driver of the resistance, the importance of social activists and NGOs was apparent during my interviews (N=15). During my village interviews, I asked: *What do the names [Mahasweta Devi/Medha Patkar] mean to you?* It is important to note that all villagers revealed in the attention that the writer and social activists were giving to their movement. Here are some of the responses I received:

She [Medha] is important because she is not a political person. She did not come here to garner votes. She came for a cause. That is why she found a widespread acceptability.¹⁶

She [Medha] came to my house and hugged me. It was very emotional.¹⁷

Mahasweta Devi is a writer, columnist and advocator of entire movement. She gives the movement legitimacy for the state and nationally.¹⁸

It has been a huge moral boost to all of us, these prominent people coming and providing legitimacy. These people are not political. They are philanthropists. They don't represent any political party.¹⁹

¹⁶ Respondent #16 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁷ Respondent #54 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁸ Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

¹⁹ Respondent #17, (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information). A notable number of interviewees also expressed similar sentiments regarding the desire to distance their movement from political parties. As I discuss further in Chapter four and six, one reason for this is that the ruling government in West Bengal has accused the village movement as being driven by opposition parties. As such, villagers feel a need to maintain their autonomy from parties in the resistance. Although my initial impression was that the party system is quite healthy in West Bengal, this rejection of political parties in the political process, and the overall negative attitude towards opposition parties might be dangerous for West Bengal's democracy however and is in need of further study. Indeed popular rejection of parties has occurred in India's history before. The institutional decline of India's once dominant Congress Party, and its subsequent eroded capacity to govern led to a marked increase in political violence as citizens sought social change outside of the democratic process. For a detailed account of this history, please see Kohli (1990). For a similar story outside of the Indian context, please see Coppedge (1994). In

I then asked respondents how important they thought these social activists have been for their current struggles. It is important to note that all I interviewed responded positively to the role of these activists in the struggles. Thus if a respondent told me that they thought their role was not important, it was not in a negative sense. I detail the results in table 5-1. As the table shows, 80% of respondents felt that the participation of these activists were important to their struggles.

Civil Society on the National Front

The role of civil society in the anti SEZ resistance quickly spread beyond West Bengal, and civic organizations began to play a key role in terms of brokering otherwise disparate movements across the country. These actors have helped to bring villagers being adversely affected by land acquisition for SEZs and other projects together to forge feelings of solidarity, and map out national plans for resistance. Civil society has also helped to frame the issue, bringing together villagers concerned about land acquisition for industrialization in general, with those facing loss of land due to SEZs, with those fighting other consequences due to SEZs (such as adverse environmental affects). In doing so, knowledge was shared and connections were formed.

I interviewed several villagers in Singur who had traveled to Delhi to participate in political activism related to their local cause. In one such trip, Singur villagers were joined by Nandigram villagers to travel to Delhi and participate in street theater that was to occur in the capital of the country.²⁰ I was told that activist delegates from all regions in the country that were facing land acquisition issues were in attendance at the play. Thus, by participating in the

this book, Coppedge details the popular rejection of Venezuela's two major democratic parties, and the ensuing erosion of Venezuelan democracy as citizens looked to channels outside the political process to facilitate social change.

²⁰ Street theatre is often used as a tool for social activism in India. For an interesting description of the use of street theatre as a means of grassroots activism in India, please see Nagar (2000).

trip, Singur and Nandigram villagers were able to meet villagers from across the country who were facing similar issues as they were. In fact, for many it was the first time that Singur and Nandigram village activists had met each other. The trip occurred in July 2007, and was organized by activist Medha Patkar, and funded by various NGOs. The villagers were taken to Delhi to participate in a satirical play that mocked the CPM party in West Bengal. In the play, actors played the roles of the West Bengal chief minister, along with other high level CPM party figureheads. CPM party members were satirically portrayed as having done a good job for West Bengal and the country through their actions in Singur and Nandigram. The actual Singur and Nandigram villagers, playing themselves in the production, approached the CPM members, mockingly bowing at them and offering them rewards for a 'job well done'. After the play the Singur and Nandigram villagers were asked to speak to the audience about what was happening in their villages and what message they wanted to portray to the central government. I asked participating Singur villagers how they felt after attending such events. Here are some responses I received:

When all the peasants come to one place and feel integrated, the movement is strengthened. We know that it is not only us fighting. Other people are also protesting.²¹

We became enthused. We got to see the experiences of all the people who are going through similar things across the country. I got a good scope to be acquainted. I got to know others personally. I was able to talk to many people from other states.²²

When people came to know that someone from Singur was at the meeting, everyone became excited and tried to talk with me, respected me, and I became very much enthused.

I felt a spirit against land acquisition. We felt dignity among ourselves. We got assurance that others were with us. We were inspired.²³

²¹ Respondent #55 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²² Respondent #34 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²³ Respondent #32 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

*After the play, we all introduced ourselves to each other. It was invigorating to meet representatives from other similar movements across the country.*²⁴

One, speaking directly about the role of social activist Medha Patkar said:

She and her organization [NAPM] organized [the play in Delhi]. She is trying to make a network, coordination between movements which are going on in different states against land acquisition or forcible eviction from lives and livelihood. Her organization has played a big role to organize an entire people in one place.²⁵

Such solidarity between has extended beyond direct issues of SEZs and land acquisition.

Other social movements are finding common ground with the Singur and Nandigram movements. I interviewed Shalini Sharma, who is a leading member of an activist organization called ‘Students for Bhopal’, (which is the student arm of the bigger organization, ‘International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal’). The student organization is based in Delhi but facilitates activism in Bhopal. The immediate goal of the student organization is to help victims of the 1984 chemical disaster in Bhopal India. I provided an overview of this issue and the grassroots response in Chapter 2 of this study. Shalini explained the long term vision of the organization:

We are fighting a larger fight against corporate terror. And the whole issue of corporate accountability, and why we need corporates at all and how much do we need them? And if we do not need them, why are we asking them to come here? And for those that are coming, then what are we doing to ensure they don’t take lives and make a mockery of our law and justice. They should be made accountable.²⁶

The connection between the Bhopal disaster and the Nandigram anti SEZ resistance is immediately clear. Dow Chemical, the huge multinational chemical company with operations in over 175 countries, and total 2005 sales of 46.3 billion, was supposed to be one of the key multinational chemical companies to build a factory within the Nandigram SEZ. Dow Chemical purchased Union Carbide for 10.3 billion dollars in 2001, and as such, the Bhopali victims

²⁴ Respondent #33 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁵ Respondent #34 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁶ Respondent #31 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

believe that Dow Chemical also bought the responsibility to bring justice to the Bhopal disaster victims. As Shalini explained to me:

Why will Bhopal fight for Nandigram? Here the government is inviting not just Dow Chemical, but also other corporates. It is completely indiscriminate entry. They knowingly are inviting back the same ones, knowing very well that Dow Chemical has legal liability in other states.²⁷

She went on to explain to me that people now feel a sense of betrayal because a so called leftist government (the CPM in West Bengal), have betrayed a left movement. The national CPM party was a key supporter of the Bhopal movement against Union Carbide, and was one of the first and few parties to visit the Bhopal disaster site. The Bhopali activists feel a sense of betrayal now that the same party is inviting Dow Chemical, while knowing full well about the company's unmet responsibilities in Bhopal. Thus, while Nandigram villagers saw the issue in terms of loss of farmland, Bhopali activists and villagers re-framed the SEZ issue in terms of corporate environmental accountability, and were able to draw connections between the two issues.

Shalini told me that when the violence occurred in Nandigram on March 14, some Bhopali victims were a week into a hunger strike in Bhopal, in yet another of the countless demonstrations that they have undertaken in support of their cause. Despite being weak from hunger, the victims decided to hold a protest rally in support of the Nandigram villagers. Approximately 600 Bhopal victims participated in the rally. After the strike, the Bhopal victims, along with *The Student's for Bhopal* decided that it would be a good idea to build a solidarity movement with victims of 'corporate terrorism' across the country. With that in mind, and with the support of *The Students for Bhopal*, fifteen activist victims of the Bhopal disaster traveled to Nandigram. While there, Bhopal victims and Nandigram victims met one another, and shared

²⁷ Respondent #31 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

lessons and strategies on how to best fight corporates and the government. Shalini told me that the meetings were very moving. Upon return to Bhopal, the Bhopali activist victims decided to initiate more such visits, and when I interviewed Shalini in December 2007, there were plans in the works for the Bhopal victims to visit the Indian state of Chennai on a similar mission.

I asked Shalini if she thought the Nandigram movement has been successful despite all the violence. She explained me:

...it is now easier for people to understand the injustice in Bhopal, because they are seeing a similar barbaric act in Nandigram. We can now say, if you think that Bhopal won't happen again, just look at the killings in Nandigram. You don't have a gas leak, but the enemies are the same. Nandigram and SEZs show that the government has not learned from the lessons of the Bhopali disaster. The government should have learned to minimize the entry of corporates, and to regulate the entry of corporates. But instead, the government is giving huge tracts of land to the corporates to operate as they want, all at the cost of Indian taxpayer's money. This is a reversal of what they should have learned from Bhopal. Let's say an environmental disaster happens in Nandigram. The government has already proven that it could not do anything in Bhopal. How do you even guarantee that you could help Nandigram?²⁸

This is an important quote to consider for many reasons. This activist was drawing distinct parallels between different resistances – Nandigram is primarily about land, and Bhopal about a chemical disaster. But Shalini saw intimate similarities. This quote also underscores a potential distrust of multinational corporations amongst civic activists and a similar suspicion of the ability of India's government to monitor and regulate them.

Action 2007: A compelling example of the linking up of disparate social movements was a large event organized in Delhi beginning on March 17, 2007, (coincidentally 3 days after the violence in Nandigram that placed SEZs in the resistance map), and lasting for 20 days. Action 2007 was organized by several umbrella NGOs operating out of Delhi, and spearheaded by a long established NGO called *Delhi Forum*, an organization that helps various regional groups in terms

²⁸ Respondent #31 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

of coordination and logistics for activism in Delhi. The event was preceded by a national march through many major cities across the country, and tens of thousands of activists joined the march and made the trip to Delhi for the event. The event was funded by ongoing street level fundraising that continued through the duration of the event, and various religious organizations provided two meals a day for all participants.

The goal of the event was to bring together individual people's movements from across the country onto one platform and build a comprehensive charter combining their diversity of demands. The 97 demands that comprised 'The People's Charter' came out of 7 separate sittings during Action 2007, and involved over 200 different people's movements from across the country, and multiple rounds of negotiations between social, economic, and political experts, and movement representatives. In the end, the charter encompassed a range of issues, such as land acquisition, farming, and fishery and oceanic rights. In addition to developing the people's charter, tens of thousands of people participated in a daily 'people's parliament' that was held in the street in downtown Delhi. During these sessions people stepped up to the microphone where they made their arguments about various social issues, such as people oriented industrialization, gender issues etc... One whole session of the people's parliament was devoted entirely to the issue of SEZs.

The main organizer of Action 2007, and leader of *Delhi Forum*, explained to me the primary goal of developing the charter and holding the daily people's parliament:

This was a substantial achievement in the history of people's movements across the country. For the first time we managed to bridge issue gaps. All of these issues were brought together. So that made sure that the individual social movements were helped to come out of their pigeon holes of just arguing on one issue and to comprehensively put up a social, political, and economic front, whereby they were also talking about issues regarding budget, common property resources, community strength, Panchayat institutions,

so they were also talking about article 19, 21 [right to life]. This really was an experimental bringing together of different movements across the country.²⁹

Action 2007 also importantly provided a direct link between people's movements and government officials. During the event, there were 7 different meetings held with the national group of ministers, and included commerce secretary Gopal Pillai (who has final signing authority on all SEZ proposals). Some of these meetings were directly dealing with the SEZ issue. Organizers would often bring 20-30 representatives from people's movements and negotiations sometimes lasted upwards of 7 hours.

I asked Vijayan (a key activist leader from *Delhi Forum*) whether he thought the ongoing people's activism had had any impact:

Look we know we are not getting through everything we are demanding. The national rehabilitation and resettlement policy 2007 is not an outcome of World Bank recommendations or any other pressure on India to have a safeguard policy. It is not an outcome of just another government pressure to have a policy, some goodwill sitting in the government who wanted a rehabilitation policy. The people's movements in this country for the past 35 years have been consistently demanding a policy for rehabilitation before any project is even conceived. So the whole debate about free and informed consent from people who are risking their land and livelihood for a project did not arrive from somebody's brain one fine day. It came from a process of over 30 years of deliberations and different kinds of interactions between people's movements and the government. So there are things including the global employment guarantee act, the RTI, the [rehabilitation] policy, there are several things that have been brought to the fore, the state was forced to bring in these safety mechanisms because people have been fighting these battles.³⁰

I asked him specifically about the impact the resistance is having on SEZs. He responded, “[i]n terms of the impact of people on politicians yes. Otherwise things would have been different today. For example, the SEZ policy – they have been forced to scrap it in Nandigram. It is not because of any goodwill politician taking this decision.”

²⁹ Respondent #44 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁰ Respondent #44 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information).

I then asked Vijayan about the role of the Nandigram resistance in the overall national opposition to SEZs. Highlighting the inspirational role of Nandigram, he explained to me:

Calcutta was the first city to be captured by the East India Company. From there began the first mode of resistance also. The first seeds of resistance have been sown in Calcutta. In the case of SEZs again, the first and foremost SEZ, where the state had a huge stake behind it was Nandigram. The first ever biggest resistance against SEZs also happens there. We are linking history up. The same way before, movements spread from Calcutta. Here you have anti SEZ struggles, where Nandigram has become the icon of anti SEZ struggles. There is no negating this fact. That the people of Nandigram have shown the way to the rest of India, in terms of resisting this mode of capitalist development. There is absolutely no doubt about this.³¹

He went on to explain to me that the NGO that he represents was in the process of planning two protest marches that would begin in Nandigram, to other regions of the country where similar movements are being waged. One is to Narmada, the site of a historic struggle against a dam project.

Various aspects of Action 2007 are worth highlighting. First is the diversity of organizations involved in the event, highlights a level of social solidarity that transcends the oft cited cleavages, such as ethnicity and language, inherent amongst India's citizens. Second, the confidence expressed by Vijayan, one of the event's key organizers and a prominent social activist in Delhi, in terms of the role of activism in fostering policy change, underscores the positive relationship between India's civil society and the government. Third, Vijayan's discussion of the role of history is indicative of the realization that democracy functions as a process of ongoing struggle.

The National Alliance of People's Movements: One of the key organizers of Action 2007 was a large and famous umbrella NGO called *National Alliance of People's Movements* (NAPM). NAPM is an old and established organization that came into existence 15 years ago. It is currently the organizational entity behind nationally renowned social activist Medha Patkar.

³¹ Respondent #44 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

NAPM has what one national convener told me, “good relations with senior members of every political party in the country”.³² The organization has had direct negotiations over issues of SEZs with national cabinet ministers, the prime minister as well as party chiefs, such as Sonia Gandhi. I expressed surprise at this level of intimate interaction with senior government officials. One of the national conveners of NAPM, Rajendra Ravi explained to me “this is bound to happen because our national leaders are very prominent and have a good track record fighting for over three decades”. He went on to explain to me how the NAPM helped villagers shut down a Pepsi plant in Maharashtra.

This intimate connection between the organization and the government was evidenced in the NAPM’s role in revamping of the *National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy*, which outlines various rights for people who are resettled from their land due to industrial projects, (Chapter 1 provides an overview of this policy). Rajendra explained to me that the central government put together an advisory board, which in turn invited various social movement organizations to put forward a draft policy. The NAPM participated directly in 10 meetings with the board, after which the board finalized a draft to be tabled to parliament, this all occurring after March 14 government violence in Nandigram. Rajendra called it ‘a good strong policy’ which incorporated many of the demands of various social groups. Not surprisingly, the bill that was tabled in parliament was a significantly watered down version of the draft prepared with the help of various social movement groups, and Rajendra expressed disillusionment with the process overall. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to note India’s Commerce Secretary; Gopal Pillai directly credits the pressure of groups such as NAPM, for the formulation of the policy in the first place.

³² Respondent #30 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

Extending the Analysis: Civil Society and the Anti SEZ Resistance in Goa

To further draw parallels between anti SEZ resistances occurring across the country and buttress my claim that civil society (including NGOs, and villagers themselves) are re-framing the SEZ issue, as well as brokering relations between activist villagers, I briefly delve into the anti SEZ resistance that occurred in Goa during 2007. In the midst of my fieldwork in West Bengal and Delhi, I had learned that the resistance against SEZs in Goa was becoming stronger, and as such, I decided to make a trip the state. Coincidentally, due to ongoing agitations, the Goan government cancelled all 15 proposed zones in the state while I was there. Thus, I deem it important to quickly include the story of the Goan resistance and government response.

Goa is by far Indian's smallest state, occupying less than 4000 square kilometers, on India's Southwest seaboard. Ruled by the Portuguese for three and a half centuries, Goa attained independence in 1961 (over a decade after India's national independence from England), after the Indian army entered Goa and forced the Portuguese to turn over the territory. The state is a highly popular tourist destination, and accounts for 12% of all tourist arrivals across India, most coming to enjoy, Goa's 105 kilometers of picturesque beaches.³³ While tourism defines the state's economy, Goa also boasts a thriving mining industry, as well as cultivates lucrative crops such as cashew and coconut. The state is doing well, boasting a GDP per capita more than 2.5 times the all India average.

As I discuss further below, the civil society activism in Goa supports this study in two ways. First, it buttresses the evidence I laid out with regards to civil society in West Bengal, as well as in Delhi, in that Goan civil society also played important roles in the village movements, especially in terms of brokering (more below). Second, it furthers my claim set out in the

³³ This data is available on the Government of Goa, official website: <http://goagovt.nic.in/gag/platou.htm>, accessed 3 February, 2009.

introduction to this study that grassroots activism did not only stem from rationalist calculations of political participation. Rationalist motivation was key amongst many of the villagers who were participating in the anti SEZ resistances in West Bengal and Goa, however civil society activism did not always follow such rationalist logic. This became clear during interviews with Goan civil society activists, where it was established that resistance to SEZs was taking place in Goa primarily due to concerns of environmental impacts, and a related concern of the loss of the pristine aura of life in Goa. Many Goan activists were resisting the establishment of SEZs in Goa on the grounds of environmental aesthetics and the related desire to maintain the state's environmental integrity for future generations.³⁴

Despite the state's reliance on its pristine beaches and jungle like topography to draw tourists, the Congress led Goan government decided to jump on the SEZ bandwagon and sought approval for 15 SEZs. When I visited the state in December 2007 and January 2008, eight zones were still early in the approvals process. Seven had been already approved, four of which had been notified (meaning that it had been confirmed that land was in possession of the proper stakeholders and construction could commence). I visited the sites of two of the four notified zones, and factories were already being constructed at both locations which were enclosed by metal and concrete fenced walls. Both sites were designated as pharmaceutical SEZs. One was to be situated beside a Goan village called Verna, and the other a village called Keri.

The resistance to SEZs in Goa began in earnest soon after the notification of the four zones, and picked up steam once construction started on the factories to be situated in the zones. In contrast to the projects in Singur and Nandigram however, the two zones were actually being

³⁴ The premise that Goan activists were resisting SEZs on environmental grounds engages Ronald Inglehart's (1977) oft cited post materialist claim that activists will only mobilize for post material issues (such as the environment) once their material needs have been met. Please also see Fox (1994). Others have found that the poor participate in political activism for noneconomic reasons as well. For a similar account outside of the Indian context, please see Anderson (1990).

constructed on government property. As such, the resistance against these two SEZ was not about direct and forced loss of private land to the government. Instead, villagers were worried about the environmental impacts of SEZs, as well as the impacts to Goa's lucrative tourist trade.

As one activist villager told me:

We are saving our land for our future generations. We want it to be like this for our future generations. We don't want our grandchildren to be born into a concrete jungle, not knowing what Goa looked like. It was a tourism spot once upon a time it will be said to them. Today Goa is supposed to be generating revenue through tourism. If these things come up there will be no tourism. So do we Goans need it? Goa is known for its land, its natural beauty. What will happen if these SEZs come?³⁵

Indeed, it became quite clear why Goans were worried about the environmental impacts of SEZs when I visited the site of the proposed Keri SEZ. The pharmaceutical SEZ was to be placed directly on a large plateau on top of a range of four small mountains. The first picture of figure 5-4 shows the fencing around the perimeter of the Keri SEZ. We had traveled up the mountain side to see the SEZ. The second picture is the site of the Verna SEZ.

Although the Keri SEZ was quite a distance from the actual village of Keri, the villagers were deeply concerned about the effect that the pharmaceutical factories would have on the intensive groundwater system that came off the mountain. Much of Keri's cultivatable land was at the bottom of the three mountains, and the area was thick with cashew and coconut trees, as well as various crops, including rice and spices. I asked the leader of the Keri village resistance why they were fighting the project:

Why are we opposing? A lot of water resources are in this land. This plateau is the highest part of the land around here. The water source from here is supplied to all villages. There is horticulture and agriculture here. And there will be chemicals coming from this hub? This is very bad for the water.³⁶

³⁵ Respondent #39 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁶ Respondent #41 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

Thus because of concerns of environmental impacts, as well as the impact on the state's precious tourist industry, Goan villagers began to form a resistance movement against SEZs. The movement was spearheaded by a Christian church affiliated NGO called *The Council for Social Justice and Peace*, and operated in one of the main churches in Panaji, Goa's capital. The church's active involvement in the SEZ issue makes sense, given the Christian heritage of the former Portuguese colony, as well as the long history of social activism undertaken by the Goan church. Religious institutions such as the church can provide important social arenas in which to foster community ties, and help shape political participation, in the form of community faith based community organizing for example (Wood 2002). Further religion can provide important rhetoric, (such as 'equality under God', justice, sacredness of humanity, and dignity for all), which provide a theological foundation for social issues such as human rights (Borges 2000, 236).

The Church has historically been an important aspect of Goan life. Goans were quite free to 'adapt' the Christian religion to suit Indian traditions and customs. Christianity had become so enmeshed in Goan culture that, upon independence in 1961, there was a desire to reform, but not reject this colonial imposition (Borges 2000, 445). One key reform undertaken was a more pronounced focus on grassroots activism. The Goan church engaged in various activist causes, including fighting against child labor and prostitution, various development projects, and especially environmental issues.

A popular priest named Father Maverick leads the *Council for Social Justice and Peace*, which in many respects coordinated the entire anti SEZ resistance in the state. The Council's headquarters abut one of Goa's large and picturesque churches. When I visited the headquarters, the offices were a bustle of activity, with several volunteers working on a variety of social

initiatives that the council was involved in. Desks were piled high with documents and newspaper clippings, and phones rang incessantly. I asked Father Maverick why a church was so heavily involved in social issues in the state, and especially, the anti SEZ resistance and, in keeping with the utilization of faith based principles of social activism; he told me “anything that affects human dignity is simply a violation against God”.³⁷ Indeed, Father Maverick recounted various examples of social activism that the church has partaken in under his guidance; most importantly according to the priest was the church’s activism in defeating the Goan Government’s 2001 Regional plan, one that called for the development of new urban centers and a variety of other real estate ventures.

The Council played a critical role in the anti SEZ resistance, spearheading the movement from the state’s capital, Panaji. A key activist function of the council was to help broker local anti SEZ resistances taking place across the state. Father Maverick played an important catalyzing role in this regard by providing village activist leaders with a CD that contained footage of the Singur and Nandigram movements, as well as a recorded speech from Medha Patkar on the SEZ issue.³⁸ The CD quickly was quickly circulated throughout Goan villages that would potentially be affected by SEZs. An activist villager from Keri named Ram Krishna Jalmi (who went on to be a key statewide leader in the anti SEZ fight) was one of the Goans who received the CD from father Maverick:

We had received a CD that had a movie about Singur and Nandigram and their agitation. We had meetings in all villages and showed them this movie. The villagers were inspired after this. At first they thought that the anti SEZ resistance was only political. But after

³⁷ Respondent #58 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁸ I asked villagers I interviewed in Goa if they felt it was important that activist Medha Patkar was supporting the movement. Similar to the villagers in Singur and Nandigram, and the NGOs in Delhi, Goans expressed admiration and appreciation for her support. One villager called her a ‘great leader’ and a ‘great social worker’.

seeing this movie, they saw the threat. If these things can happen there, they might here. If they were fighting we realized that we must also fight.³⁹

Another village activist leader in a different village also spoke of the CD, and how they utilized it to inspire villagers. Soon after the CD made its rounds throughout Goan villages, villagers came together and formed a Goa wide committee called SEZ Virodi Mach (SVM), which, translated to English means ‘People’s movement against SEZs’. The committee formed out of a large meeting that occurred with various educated village activists across Goa. Eighty village leaders attended the meeting, and the CD was handed out at the meeting for all to go back and show to their respective villages. It was soon after this meeting, that villagers approached the *Council for Social Justice and Peace* in Panaji to help support the movement. Key leaders of the SVM, including Father Maverick, met every 3 days during the height of the resistance (which was between October and December 2007). The SVM was broken down into village sub committees. For example, in the village of Keri, activist villagers formed an anti SEZ committee called *Nagrik Kruti Samiti*. This committee met nightly during the height of the resistance, where logistical decisions took place, and demonstrations were organized. The committee also however undertook letter writing campaigns to the government. Appendix B contains letters to various government officials from both the SVM, and the Nagarik Kruti Samitee, protesting SEZ in Goa.

Elements of Democracy in Goa: The SEZ issue is framed around issues of environmental impacts and aesthetics in Goa which is quite different than the factors that are driving the anti SEZ resistances in West Bengal. Yet, Goans drew parallels with their movement and the movement in Bengal. One villager told me, “Nandigram has been very important. They stopped the SEZ. Nandigram showed the rest of the country that an SEZ could be stopped. They are the

³⁹ Respondent #40 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

foundation.”⁴⁰ Thus it was heartening for the Goan resistance when villagers from Nandigram made the trip from West Bengal by train and were present in person to show their support during one of the large demonstrations organized in Goa’s capital Panaji in December of 2007.⁴¹

Also similar to West Bengal, Goan villagers expressed confidence with regards to local, state, and national democracy in India:

*We don’t care about the Goa government, the central government. We care about what people want – this is a democracy! We are living in a democratic country. So when people say that they don’t want [an SEZ], they must listen! The government must account for this.*⁴²

*Here in Goa, the government thinks a hundred times before doing something!*⁴³

*This is a democracy. We have governments of the people. They must listen to us. They are not dictators. If they do not listen, we will not give them votes.*⁴⁴

It is not only through the threat of withdrawing their vote that Goans expressed their voice. One villager spoke with me in detail about how he utilized India’s *Right to Information (RTI)* Act to procure various documents related to the Goan SEZs (documents that he happily passed on to me). Indeed, this village leader went on to file some 1800 applications for information under the act. He explained to me:

One thing in Goa is the RTI act. So we have procured all the documents A-Z, how this land was given, when it was given. We were able to see if they were abiding by the law,

⁴⁰ Respondent #56 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴¹ Others have examined the relationship between past successful protest movements as providing the inspiration for future movements. Michael Fox (1994) provides an example out of the Indian context. Fox argues that small political openings in Mexico in the 1970’s provided the space for various movements, (note continued on next page) whose success in turn facilitated the consolidation of social organizations in contemporary Mexico. In other words, social organizations in Mexico have drawn on past movements.

⁴² Respondent #39 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴³ Respondent #41 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁴ Respondent #40 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

and were able to question whether the land really was for emergency public purpose, or for private purpose.⁴⁵

It is quite astounding actually, the level of detailed information that the Goan villagers were able to extract from the government. Documents included minutes from high level meetings government meetings, applications from various companies seeking to lease land inside the SEZs, memos, etc..., all of which had been carefully gone through by villagers, who had highlighted every inconsistency, or area that seemed to contravene various local, state, or national laws, no matter how minute.

Goa Panchayats: Putting the resistance further into the context of India's democratic framework, Goan villagers that I interviewed expressed notable confidence in and support of local panchayat governments. One villager explained to me, "Panchayats here are 100% very good. They are neutral. They are helping us fight. Every member is very good. They are behind us". Another said, "Yes! They are supporting us. They are passing resolutions against SEZs!" I was able to obtain copies of some of the anti SEZ resolutions. The local panchayat in Verna formally adopted a simple resolution that "the proposed SEZ in Verna by the Government...be scraped immediately".⁴⁶ Another resolution, adopted by a local panchayat in the village of Loutulim (another area that was fighting a notified SEZ), stated:

It is seen that all such projects implemented elsewhere in India, bring disasters in form of sanitation, garbage, etc. to the residents of the area without absolutely any benefits to the village in the form of revenue, jobs, etc, but on the contrary, usurp the power, water and disturb the peace and tranquility of the village. Such projects are declared as autonomous bodies, governed by their own rules, own labor laws, and own land...Therefore this Gram Sabha unanimously resolved to reject SEZ projects on Loutolim village.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Respondent #56 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁶ Proceedings of Verna Special Gram Sabha meeting, held on January 26, 2007

⁴⁷ Gram Sabha meeting, held on July 22, 2007

I interviewed one of the elected members of the Keri local Panchayat and he expressed his support of the movement:

We are supporting this movement. All panchayat members are supporting the movement. We are opposing SEZs because panchayats have no rights in this act. We got the official gazette [that contains the act] of the government and distributed to all the villages. We also translated the whole [SEZ] act into local languages, so all could read.⁴⁸

As discussed in Chapter 1, land that falls within an SEZ is formally outside the jurisdiction of panchayat government. Given the confidence that Goans have in their local governments, it was no surprise that one of the central goals of the anti SEZ resistance is to have the government land that would have potentially housed the SEZs in Keri and Verna transferred to the authority of the Panchayats. As one activist told me, “[w]e now want the land to be given back to the panchayats. Rights need to go to the panchayat, so we can decide what we want to do with the land.”⁴⁹

On Monday December 31, 2007 (days after the Goa anti SEZ resistance threatened to disrupt New Years celebrations across the country), Goa’s Chief Minister announced that the state would scrap all SEZs slated to be constructed in the state. The Chief Minister stated to the media, “[t]he government took the decision to do away with the SEZs in existing form after a long-drawn consultations process, which involved discussions, deliberations and consultations with different stakeholders that lasted many days”⁵⁰ At first, the Goan government said it was powerless to stop the SEZs that were already notified, however within days of their initial announcement, decided to scrap the notified SEZs as well. Goa has taken its place with Nandigram as providing inspiration for others protesting SEZs across the country.

⁴⁸ Respondent #57 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁹ Respondent #40 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

⁵⁰ “Goa scraps all SEZ projects” The Hindu, 1 January 2008, front page, <http://www.hindu.com/2008/01/01/stories/2008010150150100.htm>, accessed 4 February 2009.

History of Resistance: Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Goans seem confident in both their democratic voice, as well as the quick state response to their resistance. Goan villagers had undertaken a similar resistance, in 1995 against a proposed DuPont chemical factory. In 1995, DuPont, a multinational chemical corporation with operations in over 70 countries, and revenues of more than US\$29 billion in 2007, partnered with an Indian company to build a chemical factory in Goa. The purpose of the factory was to produce nylon 6,6 a key chemical ingredient in the manufacture of tires. The proposed factory was to be constructed on the same plot of land beside the Keri village block that was supposed to house the current pharmaceutical SEZ. Goans began a movement against the DuPont factory on October 2, 1994. As one villager explained to me, the timing of this date was relevant, “[w]e started the agitation on Gandhi’s birthday. Because he says that village people should be first satisfied. Then the country will develop. We began with meetings, village level, street level.”⁵¹ Then, within days of the movement beginning, social activist Medha Patkar came to express her support of the movement. Many of the agitators in the ‘Nylon 66’ movement were the same ones who were resisting the SEZs in Goa today. Ram Krishna Jalmi, the local village activist in Keri, who became a statewide activist leader in the village movement against SEZs also took part in the Nylon 66 movement.

In contrast to the anti SEZ resistance in Goa, which was entirely peaceful, the Nylon 66 movement became violent. In January 1995, protesters were attempting to stop a busload of DuPont workers from entering the factory site. Police opened fire and a villager named Nilesh Naik was killed. Villagers held his funeral at the factory site, soon after his death. Months later, the state government relented to pressure from the activists and the project was completely stopped. A monument was built for Nilesh Naik, and he has since become a martyr for rural Goans. I asked villagers about his role in the current resistance. One villager explained to me:

⁵¹ Respondent #41 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

“[h]e is a martyr for us! There is even a monument constructed for him. Now villagers saw we will have our tombs set up beside his. We will not allow SEZs here!”.⁵²

Thus, in Goa, the SEZ issue was framed differently amongst the activists and NGOs involved in the resistance. Of course, this makes logical sense. In Nandigram, villagers stood to lose their land to an SEZ, and were fighting for their very livelihood. In Goa however, the two SEZs I visited were to be constructed on government land. However villagers were concerned about impacts to Goa’s natural environmental, as well as to its thriving tourist industry. Despite this, villagers in Goa were able to draw inspiration from the Nandigram resistance, thereby showing how solidarity was in the process of being built across the country against SEZs. The Goa resistance also exemplifies how NGOs and social activists helped broker relations between villagers across the country. As discussed above, an NGO distributed material that contained information on the Singur and Nandigram resistances, as well as speeches given by Medha Patkar.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the SEZ issue was bolstered by the inclusion of India’s civil society in the resistance. Civic actors that I focused on included various Indian artists, social activists, NGOs, as well as villagers themselves. Civil society also played an important role in terms of brokering relations between stakeholders. In doing so, village activists were able to interact with one another, and gain inspiration from each other. It was through brokering that the *National Hawkers Association* in Calcutta threw its support behind the Nandigram movement for example. It was also through brokering by NGOs that activist

⁵²Respondent #40 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)). In another important movement, Goans resisted the Goa Government’s *Regional Plan 2011*, which was released to the public in August 2006. The plan called for large residential and industrial developments, some of which would directly impact Goa’s coastline. Due to intense pressure from Goa’s citizens, the entire plan was scrapped soon after its release.

villagers gathered from across the country to discuss the SEZ issue and engage in activism against SEZs in Delhi and elsewhere. This same process occurred in Goa, where Goan villagers were exposed to details about the Nandigram movement by the church group, *The Council for Social Justice and Peace*, and drew inspiration from the Bengali anti SEZ resistance.

The backdrop to these various movements of course is India's established democracy. Police largely remained at the sidelines (Nandigram aside), and most often played an important role in facilitating the logistics of the large demonstrations. Documentary films were freely made and distributed. Street theatre took place without interference. Activists, both rural villagers and NGOs, met with high level government officials to voice concerns.

I was personally privy to just how established India's institutions of democracy are. While in Goa, I conducted my interviews directly beside the proposed SEZ to be constructed near the village of Verna. While there, various security officials, as well as police officers had gathered to watch my meeting with the village activists. The activists were laughing at the attention we were receiving, while comforting me that our presence would not provoke any issues. While we conducted our interview, the activists animatedly pointed at the site, or its security guards while talking to me. At one point, the developer of the zone (at the time I conducted my interviews, the zone was still a go) even came over to our group to listen to our meeting, and the village activists welcomed him. Indian citizens understand their democratic rights, and exercise them accordingly. Figure 5-5 is a picture taken of the Verna village activists beside the Verna SEZ, right after our interview.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the equally important roles of opposition parties and the media. These two democratic institutions also played key roles in magnifying the anti SEZ resistance

across the country, and are signs that various facets of India’s democratic structure are functioning, channeling the SEZ resistance in a democratic manner.

Table 5-1. Interview Responses: Importance of social activists in current struggles

Question	% of respondents	Number of respondents
How important have Mahasweta Devi and Medha Patkar been to the agitations (in Singur and Nandigram)		
• Important	80	12
• Not Important	20	3
	N	15



A



B

Figure 5-1. National Street Hawkers Federation demonstration taking place at the Nandigram protest stage on November 13, 2007. A) The speaker is the national president of the federation. Note the two coffins at the left of the first picture. B) Showing one of many provocative posters that were displayed around the stage.



Figure 5-2. Medha Patkar giving speech at Street Hawkers Federation portion of the ongoing Nandigram hunger strike demonstrations. The people sitting to her right are Nandigram villagers.

A

B



Figure 5-3. The Intellectuals March, Calcutta: November 16, 2007. A) The march. B) Taken at the end of the march, which finished at the Nandigram protest stage.



Figure 5-4. Notified Pharmaceutical SEZ sites in Goa:



Figure 5-5. Goan activist members of the Peoples Movement Against SEZs, standing beside the Verna SEZ. This is where we sat and conducted our interview. Police and security officers were standing just to the right of this picture

CHAPTER 6 MULTIPARTY POLITICS AND THE ANTI SEZ RESISTANCE IN INDIA

Introduction

India's political parties at all levels of government have played a critical role in the anti SEZ resistances across the country. Members of opposition parties can usually be found at the forefront of village agitations, in some instances even directly organizing resistances against SEZs, or similar projects in affected villages across the country. Opposition parties have also taken the anti SEZ issue to their respective state assemblies, and the National Lok Sabha (parliament), even shutting down parliament in some cases until ruling governments agreed to debate the SEZ issue and the violence that had been associated with their implementation. Further, the SEZ issue became a major electoral platform in the May 2008 local elections in West Bengal, and promises to be an important issue in future national elections as well.

India's political parties and the country's party system have been problematized on a number of fronts. Some point to the susceptibility of India's parties to factionalism, due in part to politicians who put parochial interests above party discipline (e.g. Weiner 1962; Kohli 1990). Others have argued that the Congress Party, the dominant party in India for a number of decades, pursued a policy of 'accommodation and absorption', catering to the interests of as many interest groups as possible (Weiner 1962). The catchall aspect of the Congress party was a layover from India's Independence movement in which Gandhi transformed the party into a mass based social movement. Catchall parties in turn are hamstrung in many respects as parties have little room to move for fear of upsetting elements of their massive, diverse base. The political power of India's catchall Congress party has declined over the last few decades however, leading to concerns that this left the political space for a party system that became increasingly rooted in social, religious, ethnic, and regional cleavages, this due largely to immense diversity within India, coupled with

weak associational life that might cut across such diversity (e.g. Chhibber 1999; Varshney 2002). Some have argued that India is increasingly becoming dominated by religious divisions, this evidenced by the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in the 1990's (and its current status as India's central opposition party), a historically militant Hindu Nationalist organization (e.g. Singh 1994). Evidence also however points to the party's increasingly moderate and secularist party platforms, a factor many say resulted in the party coming to power after the 1996 national elections in India (Hansen and Jaffrelot 1998). As well, India's brush with populist leadership, with the tenure of Indira Gandhi at the helm of the Congress party for several decades has been used to argue that India's political parties are institutionally weak, resulting in problems of governability, and stagnating development (e.g. Kohli 1990; Kohli 2004).

With respect to this study specifically, the intense involvement of political parties in the anti SEZ resistance in India has also led many stakeholders in the resistance to suggest that opposition parties are completely driving and fomenting the resistance as a political power grab, and that this is a sign of democratic decay in the country.¹ As I discussed in Chapter 4, this perspective fits well with a respected body scholarly work which argues that opposition parties play an overly dominant role in Indian politics overall (see for example, Kohli 1990; Chhibber 1999). I have already established in Chapters 3 and 4, that this argument is not correct with regards to party involvement in the anti SEZ resistance. Initially, the resistance in Singur, Nandigram, and Goa was driven by local villagers. Political parties stepped in however to play an important role soon after, and went on to play a key leadership role in the resistance.

¹ This was especially the position of the ruling CPM in West Bengal. In their online weekly organ, *People's Democracy*, www.peoplesdemocracy.org –accessed October 2008, the ruling party relentlessly attacked the opposition TMC as fomenting the resistance, at the expense of 'innocent' villagers who were simply caught in the middle of party battles. During an interview, national commerce secretary Gopal Pillai, expressed a similar sentiment to me. Finally, Ratan Tata, CEO of Tata Motors, the company that was to establish the automobile factory in Singur, singularly blamed the opposition TMC for their decision to cancel the project in the state.

In this chapter, I revisit the role that opposition parties have played in the village movements against SEZs in West Bengal, and elsewhere. I argue in this chapter that the relatively quick and powerful reaction of the main opposition party in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), as well as the important role that the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has had at the national level (as well as at the state level in various other Indian states) bodes well for India's democracy in some respects. First, it provides evidence for an increasing institutionalization of multi party politics in the country. India has only recently emerged from one party rule, with the decline of the political power of the Congress party at the national level, and in most states over the last few decades. In West Bengal, a different party has dominated the political landscape however. The CPM has remained power, uninterrupted since 1977. Nationally then, and in some states, opposition parties are relatively new actors in the political scene. The fact that opposition parties in India react swiftly to politics on the ground means that political parties understand that they can potentially gain electoral vote share from ruling parties.

A caveat is necessary here. It is important to note, that in a consolidated party system, opposition parties would have voiced dissent over the SEZ act during original legislative debates, to either stop, or at least moderate the regulation. As I set out in below, opposition parties hardly raised issues at all with the original act. Instead, it was left to India's rural citizenry to step up and resist various aspects of the act, and in many ways, steer the dissent of the opposition parties. In this respect, the raising of the issue initially took place through grassroots politics instead of through political institutions. As such, I am not arguing in this chapter that India's party system is fully institutionalized. Indeed, the party system in the country has a long way to go. India's party system has been weakened by the reality that the country has only recently emerged from

colonial occupation, and had been governed by the predominant Congress Party for many decades after Independence. However, the rapid response of the country's opposition parties, once the grassroots resistance took shape is indeed a sign of ongoing party institutionalization and a positive signal in terms of India's continuing democratization.

Second, their involvement in the anti SEZ resistance reflects a reality that opposition parties in India are in a process of continually adjusting their party ideologies, and political platforms in an attempt to chip away at the support of ruling parties. As I argue below, this is a sign of deepening democracy in India. The strengthening of opposition parties in the country in turn means that villagers have a conduit in which to express their voice in India's political system. I show how political parties magnified the localized resistance in Nandigram to the national level, inciting rigorous debate, not only about the violence in the villages, but also about the SEZ policy in general.

Third, it must be noted that opposition parties have been accorded ample political room by the ruling government to maneuver with regards to the SEZ issue. Many of India's opposition parties have taken advantage of this by reacting forcefully and effectively with regards to the grassroots dissent surrounding the car factory in West Bengal, and SEZs across the country. They have relentlessly attacked the ruling CPM in West Bengal over the SEZ issue and the government's role in the violence associated with the Nandigram chemical hub, and have similarly attacked the ruling coalition led by the Congress party at the National front, over the sustainability of the country's entire SEZ project.

Fourth, activist villagers and India's civil society have accorded legitimacy to members of opposition parties for their role in the anti SEZ resistance. As I discuss below, this was best illustrated by the May 2008 local elections in West Bengal, where the opposition TMC made

significant electoral headway in both Singur and Nandigram, ousting the ruling CPM from power in those regions.

Fifth, as a sign of the continued strengthening of multi party politics in the country, once gaining power in Singur and Nandigram during local elections in May 2008, the TMC continued to support the resistance in Singur, by having a heavy and ongoing presence in most demonstrations that were occurring against the automobile project in the region. During the waning days of the resistance in late September of 2008, Mamata Banerjee, national leader of the TMC was at the forefront of daily demonstrations in Singur, and Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata Motors (which owned the Singur plant), indicated that her continued presence was one reason that the company decided to pull the plug on the project. The party thus came to power during 2008 local elections in May on a platform of popular mobilization, and continues to set down roots by their continued involvement in the issues that aggrieve their electorate.

Finally, I show that India's political parties are more reactive than generative with respect to the SEZ issue. I show this by reviewing the lackluster parliamentary debate that occurred during the passing of the 2005 SEZ act, which illustrates that, at the time, India's opposition parties did not take issue with the act. However, once the grassroots movement against SEZs came to the fore, political parties picked up the cause with zest. I specifically discuss the role of Mamata Banerjee, national leader of the opposition TMC party (which is the main opposition party in West Bengal) in the Singur and Nandigram movements. The role of the TMC in the movement provides an illustration of the efficacy of India's political party's in many respects.

It is important to note at the outset that party institutionalization is a complicated and multi faceted aspect of democratic politics, and I am not arguing in this chapter that the positive role that opposition parties have played in the anti SEZ resistance points directly to the

institutionalization of the party system in India. Indeed, as discussed above, India's political parties have been rightly problematized on a number of fronts. However the rapid responsiveness of India's opposition parties to the citizen resistance in West Bengal (and elsewhere), coupled with the channeling of the citizen voice to the policy level in the form of parliamentary debate does provide evidence that India's party system is increasingly institutionalized in these respects, which is a positive signal for India's democracy overall.

This chapter begins with a theoretical overview of the importance of a pluralist party system in a democracy. I go on to lay the groundwork for the argument that the role of opposition parties in the anti SEZ resistance provides evidence that multi party politics continues to gain a foothold in India, a country that is considered a relatively new democracy that has been historically dominated by one party.

Multiparty Politics: Competition and the Advancement of Democracy

It has been well established in the literature on the subject that political parties play an important role in democratic politics.² An overview of the role of parties in the political process is beyond the scope of this study. What is important to remember however is that to have a positive role in politics, parties need to operate in a pluralist political framework, or one in which there is at least the possibility of pluralist party politics in the near future. A functional multi party political framework points increases the quality of democracy for several reasons.

First, the presence of more than one viable political party in a political system is an explicit recognition by the ruling party (or government) that political dissent is a legitimate part of the political process, and that conflict (within limits) is an acceptable part of politics (Sartori 1976, 13-17). As such the fact that conflict between opposition and ruling parties over the SEZ

² For a seminal work on the subject, please see Sartori (1976). Another good work on this subject is Mainwaring and Scully (1995).

issue is accepted by the ruling government, and indeed the citizenry of India, is a sign of the deepening legitimacy of multiparty politics in India.

Second, in a pluralist democratic system, a central means in which citizens are able to communicate to the state is through political parties (Sartori 1976, 57). In this sense, parties are instruments of expression for the populace. Indeed, party conflict is critical to democracy as dissent is directed towards democratic channels, instead of the ever present danger of conflict that takes place outside of the political system. As Mainwaring and Scully note, without an institutionalized party system, a myriad of “social forces confront each other nakedly” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 26). If a party that comes to power continues to express the issues it did when not in power, (as the CPM did in West Bengal in the 1970’s, and as the TMC is currently doing now in Singur and Nandigram), further evidence is provided for the electorate that expressing dissent through the party system is an effective means in which to facilitate change. There is then incentive for resistance to occur within the democratic system, and not outside of it.

Third parties play an important role in channeling and prioritizing the myriad of issues that face a country. As Sartori notes, parties become more than simple upward oriented transmission belts of political expression. By supporting an issue, they “transmit demands, *backed by pressure*. The party throws its own weight into the demands it feels compelled to respond to” (Sartori 1976, 28). The immense involvement of opposition parties in the SEZ issue indicates that various opposition parties made the decision to ‘throw their weight’ behind the anti SEZ resistance in India. In doing so, they added institutional pressure to the demands being placed on government by those in the anti SEZ resistance. This process was illustrated when the leader of the opposition BJP party L.K Advani visited Nandigram in November of 2007 and

promised villagers affected by the violence over SEZs in the region to raise their issue in national parliamentary debates, a promise he kept, forcing the shut down of parliament for two days until the ruling coalition agreed to discuss the Nandigram violence in the Lok Sabha.³ Thus parties can help set agendas and frame debates (Mair 1997, 9). In turn, helping to shape and orient an issue and then fighting for its cause can help boost the power and legitimacy of opposition parties, because such a process gives them tools in which to threaten the power of ruling parties. This in turn strengthens the overall position of opposition parties in a democratic system. Thus the reality that the opposition TMC was heavily involved in the resistance against the automobile factory in Singur, and the anti SEZ resistance in Nandigram, often playing leadership roles in organizing committees, and being at the forefront of mass demonstrations is a sign of ongoing democratization and perhaps democratic consolidation in West Bengal, in terms of party politics.⁴ This does not mean however that, in a healthy multi party political system, parties directly drive the political orientation of the electorate, manipulating citizens as such. As Sartori notes, the very nature of multi party politics stipulates that there is far more room for upward oriented manipulation (citizens to the government), than downward (parties to citizens) (Sartori 1976, 29). Thus the leadership roles that opposition parties have played in the resistances, and the conflict that has resulted between opposition and ruling parties, can not simply be regarded as intra party political battles. These party conflicts have been fueled by citizen expression, in terms of grassroots resistance from below. Parties have been more reactive than generative to the SEZ issue.

³ Such interaction with citizens is especially important in a largely rural country such as India, where geographical, financial, and time limitations might otherwise prevent rural citizens from accessing the policy process.

⁴ Michael Holt (1978) provides an interesting account of how democracy can break down if political parties aren't responsive to the electorate. Holt argues that the American civil war was caused in part by the fact that the electorate lost faith in the party system and as such no longer felt that they had real access to government. He argued that the civil war was caused in part by "...a lost of popular faith in the normal party political process to meet the needs of voters, to redress personal, group, and sectional grievances".

Fourth, by raising issues they deem important to the level of parliamentary debate, opposition parties help keep the actions of the ruling party under surveillance. This indirectly fits with O'Donnell's notion of 'horizontal accountability', in an institutionalized democracy (O'Donnell 1994, 61). O'Donnell argues that such accountability runs, "horizontally, across a network of relatively autonomous powers (i.e., other institutions) that can call into question, and eventually punish, improper ways of discharging the responsibilities of a given official" (O'Donnell 1994, 61). Thus in an institutionalized democracy, one role of opposition parties is to continuously watch the actions of the ruling government, raising red flags through parliamentary debate, or other avenues (such as the media) if necessary.

Of course the backdrop to any party system is legitimacy. As Mainwaring and Scully argue, political parties accord a sense of legitimacy to the democratic system; "[p]arties give people a channel for political participation, establishing a linkage between citizens and government. By giving citizens choices about who will govern them, elections help create a sense that democracy is in fact government by the people." (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). As I discuss below, that activist villagers saw the role of opposition parties as legitimate, was best illustrated by their election of the opposition TMC in Singur and Nandigram blocks during local elections in May 2008. Although Nandigram villagers are understandably guarded when asked about this, (given that their political agency has been removed by many who feel that opposition parties are driving their resistance), it is clear that they reacted to the opposition TMC's involvement (as well as the involvement of other less prominent parties) with appreciation and enthusiasm. This shows that the villagers see that channeling their voice through an opposition party is a legitimate way in which to be heard.

In sum, the presence of a grounded pluralist democracy in terms of party politics bodes well for democracy. Parties involved in such a system lend legitimacy to the democratic process as it is accepted that issues must be brought through democratic channels such as elections and parliamentary debate. Parties also help channel and prioritize issues, and in doing so, helps direct conflict around a given issue through democratic processes. Finally, opposition parties help keep ruling parties accountable in between election cycles. For all this to occur of course, multi party politics must have taken root in a political system. I provide evidence that illustrates that this is the case in India in the following section.

Burgeoning Multiparty Democracy in India

The most obvious sign of a multi party democratic political system is that citizens have at least 2 *viable* parties to choose from during an election. For most of India's post independence life, citizens did not have such a luxury, with the dominant Congress dynasty governing the country for the first four decades after independence at the national level, and in most of the states. Founded in 1885, with an elitist orientation, the Congress party became a broad based nationalist movement under the direction of Mahatma Gandhi. Largely accredited with negotiating India's successful independence from Britain, the party was able to ride a wave of nationalist sentiment and legitimacy, handily winning the country's first post independence elections in 1951. The party remained in power until 1977, winning five more national elections during this period. The long lasting one party system in India, as well as the reality that the Congress party was sometimes governed by populist leaders has been justifiably problematized on a variety of fronts by many experts on Indian politics (see for example, Kohli 1990; Chhibber 1999; Kohli 2004). The party was defeated however in 1977, its loss largely attributed to Indira Gandhi's highly unpopular suspension of democracy in the country for 2 years prior. The party quickly recovered from Indira's major political misstep and took power again in 1980, and

holding it (albeit as party of a coalition government), for another 16 years, until its defeat in 1996 at the hands of the right wing BJP. The Congress party has only recently regained power in the country with a coalition government after the 2004 national elections.

Although the Congress party's historical power hold on Indian politics would fit some descriptions of one party politics, three factors in the history of India's democracy planted the seeds for what has recently become more of an institutionalized multiparty political system in the country. The first is largely historical and structural. The long legacy of British rule in the country in many respects laid the foundation for institutionalized democracy once India achieved independence in 1947. Many aspects of India's democratic institutions have been subject to analysis in this regard (see for example, Weiner 1989; Kohli 2004). With respect to India's party system specifically, the Congress party had dabbled in democratic rule (under the watchful eye of the British) in various parts of the country since the 1880's. Thus, as Varshney argued, the congress party had "years of invaluable seasoning under its belt..." (Varshney 1998, 38).

As has been pointed out by many however, this isn't sufficient to explain the rise of institutionalized democracy in India.⁵ After all, Pakistan (and others) also inherited a British political legacy, but went the authoritarian route. The second factor explaining the eventual rise in multiparty politics in India can be attributed to country's first leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. Although Nehru could have easily gone the route of populist leadership (given that he and his party was singularly credited with achieving Indian independence), he instead showed a deep and ongoing respect for India's democratic institutions, including the party system. For example, Ashutosh Varshney has noted how Nehru did not dispel dissenters within his party, how he respected court decisions that went against his various programs, and how he allowed state level

⁵ See for example Weiner (1989).

Congress leaders to be elected in each state, as opposed to appointing them. In effect, Nehru set a precedent for institutionalized multiparty politics in the future. In 1964, Kothari echoed a similar sentiment, arguing that the Congress Party was committed to democracy right from the get go arguing that “freedom of speech and tolerance of opposition (indeed the necessity of opposition) were cardinal principals of the movement’s ideology of political modernization” (Kothari 1964, 1167). Speaking of the role of opposition parties, he went on to argue, “[t]hanks to the heritage of parliamentary traditions, which are further reinforced by the conventions established by the leaders of the national movement in the Indian Parliament, the Opposition is given an importance which is out of proportion to its size. This, in turn helps sustain the morale and activity of the Opposition....” (Kothari 1964, 1165). Sartori’s (1976) distinction between *hegemonic parties* and *predominant parties* is helpful here. In the former, opposition parties can exist, but are fallacies, not permitted real access to the political process.⁶ In contrast, a predominant party is significantly more powerful than the opposition, but opposition parties do have full legal access to the political process. Thus although India’s party history is sometimes regarded as constituting dominant party politics, Sartori’s notion of ‘predominant’ parties is more fitting. The seeds for multiparty politics were thus sown, even as the Congress presided over India’s political landscape.

Third, in many respects, the Congress party didn’t actually fit the bill of one party rule even when opposition parties were weak. Writing in 1964, Rajni Kothari called India’s party system as constituting *one party dominance* as opposed to *one party rule*. The distinction is important. In India’s system, the Congress party represented a party of consensus, enjoying

⁶ The contributors to Pempel’s (1990) edited volume, *Uncommon Democracies* are helpful in understanding the dangers of dominant parties. Among other dangers, it has been suggested that dominant parties tend to be associated with increasing levels of corruption and mismanagement resulting from unchecked power that in turn risks undermining the democratic process.

widespread popular support and legitimacy.⁷ However, even within such a system, opposition parties play a critical role, that they:

constantly pressurize, criticize, censure and influence [the government] by influencing opinion and interests inside the margin and above all, exert a latent threat that if the ruling group strays away too far from the balance of effective public opinion and if the factional system within it is not mobilized to restore the balance, it will be displaced from power by the opposition groups (Kothari 1964, 1162).

Kothari acknowledged the inherent weakness of opposition parties in India's early post independence history, largely due to the reality that they were a regional, as opposed to a national phenomenon. However democratic parliamentary rules, as well as India's initial leaders' commitment to democratic ideals, traditionally left room for opposition in the system.

The Decline of the Congress Party: In the late 1960's with Nerhu's daughter, Indira Gandhi at the helm, the Congress party began a slow process of organizational decline.⁸ As Kohli argued, "Congress became increasingly a top down, leader-dominated force that depended for electoral success on the Gandhi family's charisma and populist appeal" (Kohli 1998, 9). Reacting to increasing pressures from a variety of political actors, Indira Gandhi suspended elections for a period of 18 months, and governed the country via the doctrine of populism. During these critical years, Indira's method of populist rule had the potential to undermine the entire party system of the country. Indeed, Atul Kohli argued that Indira was able to govern through populism because of an overall weak party system at the time of her rule.

Even outside of the two year emergency, India fit Guillermo O'Donnell's concept of delegative democracy, under Indira's rule. As is well known, this is a mode of politics in which a political leader rises above democratic institutions and governs directly to the populace.

⁸ For a good account of this, see Kohli (1990). The Congress party started its period of decline as early as the 1960's. However the 1980's marked the party's true decline from power at the national level. Since 1980, the party has lost almost half of all elections at the national level.

O'Donnell argues that in delegative democracies, “institutions – courts and legislatures...are nuisances that come attached to the domestic and international advantages of being a democratically elected president” (O'Donnell 1994, 60). Importantly, O'Donnell notes that in delegative democracies, horizontal accountability is eroded because key democratic institutions are not powerful enough to subject the political leader to checks and balances. This fits Indira's reign quite well. She made direct, but inconsistent appeals to the lower classes in order to retain broad electoral support, appointed loyal party members to positions of power, and undermined the authority of opposition parties in the regions by overseeing the abuse of the power of India's *President's Rule*, a power that allows the central executive to take over governance in the regions in emergency situations (Kohli 1990, 15). In doing so, she dangerously undermined the accountability and stability that had characterized Indian politics since Independence.

However, India was able to effectively move beyond Indira Gandhi's populist and authoritarian leadership. Bowing to increasing pressure, she held elections in 1977. Indian citizens across the country signaled their disapproval of authoritarian governance by handing the Congress party a resounding defeat. As Weiner succinctly argued, “[e]lections were held and, in what proved to be an historic occasion, the electorate overthrew Mrs. Gandhi's government in a dramatic demonstration that a largely rural, illiterate population was capable of rejecting a party that it held responsible for acts committed during a period of authoritarian rule” (Weiner, 1999). The verdict of these elections was clear given that the party went from holding 352 seats in the Lok Sabha to 154 seats, a 198 seat loss.

At the national level, the political vacuum created by the decline of the congress party was filled by the BJP. The BJP was formed from dissident members of the Congress Party in the 1950's who disapproved of the Congress's commitment to religious secularism. Initially, the

party positioned itself on the political spectrum using religion as its central ideology, by claiming that it represented the interests of Hindus in the country. At the time, the party's position on the economy was quite similar to that of the Congress (Chhibber 1999, 166). Thus, historically, a vote for the BJP was a vote for Hinduism. Over time however, the party moderated its extremist ideology in order to gain electoral support and seek coalition allies (Kohli 2001b, 12). The party is now considered a viable right wing party, outside of its Hindu orientation.

In recent years, the BJP has risen to power in many Indian regions and become a viable opposition party to the INC, thereby furthering India's democratic consolidation (Basu 2001, 163). Figure 6-1 tracks the decline of the Congress party and the subsequent rise of the BJP, thereby providing evidence for the establishment of multiparty politics in the country at the national level.

It could be hypothesized that the rise in the BJP's power signals a rise in Hindu fundamentalism in India. Pradeep Chhibber has conducted extensive research in this regard, and has illustrated that the rise in popularity of the BJP was in fact due to their changing economic stance, and not its Hindu orientation.⁹ As Chhibber found:

The BJP, then, had a definite position on the role of the state in the economy – one that is not reducible to its religious orientation. Its advocacy of less state intervention gives the party an identity on economic matters that differs from that of other political parties. This distinct economic position is new to the BJP; earlier the party did not have a clear and distinct position on economic matters. The origins of the Jana Sangh [the precursor to the BJP] lay, instead in the opposition of religions groups to the secular policies of the developmental state (Chhibber 1999, 164).

Nationally, one party rule seems to be history in India. The Congress party has lost many elections both at the national and state levels. As table 6-1 shows, since the country's brief

⁹ For a similar supporting argument, please see Ganguly (1999).

suspension of democracy in the late 1970's (which I discuss below), the INC has lost 5 national elections.

The INC regained power in the 2004 elections after almost a decade out of office. Currently however, the INC is presiding over a coalition of parties, who together have a thin margin of power over the BJP led opposition coalition. Indeed, coalition governments have been the norm in India for several decades. As well, many states in India have seen multiple turnovers of power between political parties, and since 1967, the party that has governed at the center has not been in power in almost half of the states (Varshney 1998, 36). The Congress party remains a major player and arguably is the most powerful party in India. The political space for other parties however has been opened. This in turn has led to an opening up of political space for grassroots issues such as land acquisition for SEZs and other similar projects. Under a one party system, such issues can quite easily be swept under the rug as citizens find they have no political vehicle in which to represent them. However, in a multiparty system, where opposition parties understand that there is a potential of gaining office, grassroots issues can often become the mainstay of their political platform, as they try to gain popular support.

The TMC in West Bengal: The rise of the BJP in India was a signal that India was in the process of transitioning to institutionalized multi party politics at the national level. The same process was occurring at the regional and local levels as well however, leading Charles Tilly to conclude that India continues on a path of deepening democracy due in part to “the combination of intensely combative and fissiparous politics at the local and regional scales” (Tilly 2007, 57). In West Bengal, it was the CPM who engaged in combative fissiparous politics to topple the Congress party's stronghold on the state in 1977. Ironically, the CPM can now be considered a predominant party, having been in continuous power in the state since 1977, winning all seven

assembly elections, the latest being in 2006. The main opposition party, the TMC, is quite a young party (2 decades old), and not very powerful in the opposition. In 2006, the party won only 29 of 294 seats in the assembly elections (The CPM won 175), a significant erosion from its position after the 2001 elections. Table 6-2 breaks down the current electoral situation in the state. Although the TMC is a relatively weak opposition party in the West Bengal assembly, and lost significant seats in the latest assembly elections, it still remains the state's primary opposition party. As well, it does retain a notable number of seats at the Panchayat level.

Indicative of the health of the party system in West Bengal, even under a predominant party, TMC national leader and federal MP, Mamata Banerjee has been heavily involved in the anti SEZ resistance, in essence at the forefront of what became a broad based political movement in India. The TMC has become the token party for the anti SEZ resistance across the country (even in regions where it is not represented). As discussed above, although some caution against the over involvement of political parties in social resistance, the leadership role the TMC has played in West Bengal (and on the national front) with regards to the SEZ issue, is a healthy means in which a young party can gain political power. Parties that gain political power at the hands of mass social movements often become a stronger party if and when they gain office. First and foremost, they have legitimacy amongst the populace, having an established track record of being reactive to a citizen issue, and showing leadership skills in doing so. They also tend to be stronger and more cohesive, and hence less subject to patronage politics (Shefter 1994).

In the sections below, I discuss the involvement of the TMC and the BJP in the anti SEZ resistance providing evidence that opposition parties in India are a viable means in which citizens can channel dissent and conflict. The importance of opposition parties in the SEZ issue

is further illustrated by the legitimacy that activist villagers attribute to them as a meaningful citizen voice in the political process. I begin however by showing that India's opposition parties did not initially drive the resistance; they were reactive and not generative in this regard.

India's Parties: Reactive, not Constitutive

The first empirical task of this chapter is to establish that opposition parties reacted to the social unrest surrounding SEZs, instead of driving it, thus fitting with Sartori's (1976, 29) notion that parties are fundamentally conduits of expression from below as opposed to manipulators from above. This section therefore provides further evidence to the discussion in Chapter 4. A good way to gauge the initial role of opposition parties with regards to the SEZ issue is to look at the parliamentary debates that occurred over the original SEZ bill, which took place on May 11 2005, (and hence far in advance of any social unrest). Although opposition parties of every vein and at every level in India began fighting vehemently against all aspects of SEZs after the Nandigram uprising, it certainly was not this way when the original act was put up for parliamentary debate. The SEZ bill was tabled in the Lok Sabha by Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, and was subsequently passed in *under two hours* of debate on the same day. Of the 545 elected members of the 14th Lok Sabha, a total of eight spoke about the bill. Of the eight, only four were members of opposition parties. The small number of members of the opposition that raised issues with the bill is very significant, given that 322 members of the 14th Lok Sabha can be considered to be in the opposition. No member of the main opposition alliance, the NDA (spearheaded by the main opposition party, the BJP) spoke out against any aspect of the bill. As well, Mamata Banerjee, national leader of the TMC, and currently the most vocal critic of SEZs, did not speak about the bill. This is an important point to make, given that after the Singur and Nandigram resistances, she, and her party, became the most outspoken critic, and in many respects, a national spokesperson for the entire national anti SEZ resistance across the country.

What little debate that did take place was quite cordial with members of parliament even joking with one another at times.¹⁰ Of course, members of the ruling coalition gave broad brush support of the bill. One Congress party member K.S. Rao, even suggested that the government be aggressive in terms of approving SEZs, once the act was passed:

So, the need for [SEZs] is very much there... We are 16 per cent of the world population. As far as SEZs are concerned, we are not even one per cent of it. Naturally, we have to start more and more SEZs so that we can produce to suit the international competition. I wish, he [commerce minister Kamal Nath] must encourage as many private sector corporations as possible, and even State Governments to start more and more SEZs in their own area. Whatever incentives that can be given to them must also be given.¹¹

He went on to suggest that the SEZ bill even didn't go far enough in terms of the ongoing economic liberalization of India, complaining that the bill still contained provisions for too much government red tape, thereby carrying on the Indian tradition of overbearing government oversight over the economy.

The short and cordial debate that did ensue over the SEZ bill primarily revolved around a few clauses that, if left in place, would have grossly undermined India's existing labor laws. Even then however, several of the participating members accepted that some flexibility in terms of labor regulation inside zones was necessary. Rupchand Pal, member of the communist party, the CPI(M) started his speech saying, "Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me candidly express that barring a few areas of reservation, broadly I support the Bill." He did express concern about the loosening of labor restrictions inside zones, but even then, conceded that "[f]lexibility is alright." His concern was over some clauses, which to him, represented a "gross violation of the labour rights", and cited labor loopholes in the act, such as the potential refusal of maternity

¹⁰ Lok Sabha Debates, No. 27, May 11, 2005. The debates can be accessed from the home page of the Lok Sabha: <http://loksabha.nic.in/>, accessed 4 February, 2009.

¹¹ Lok Sabha Debates, No. 27, May 11, 2005. The debates can be accessed from the home page of the Lok Sabha: <http://loksabha.nic.in/>, accessed 4 February, 2009.

benefits for workers within the zones.¹² Rupchand Pal's acceptance of certain flexibility of labor laws inside the zones was then immediately echoed by Congress party member K.S. Rao, who said "I am also partly with him in securing the interest of the labour, although there can be flexibility". Opposition member Gurudas Dasgupta of the opposition Communist Party of India (CPI) was a little more pointed with regard to the bill's loosening of the country's labor laws, saying that the CPI would withdraw support unless clauses relaxing labour laws in the zones were removed. This is a key point to highlight. A member of one of the opposition communist parties, indicated support of the bill as long as changes were made to clauses that blatantly undermined labor laws. He concluded his speech by saying, "[w]ith a note of caution, I give my qualified support to the bill that has been proposed". As I discussed in Chapter 1, the final act actually contained adequate provisions for foreign investors to subvert many of the labor laws of the country, thus calling the sincerity of those MPs who were concerned about labor laws into question.

In the end, the opposition did manage to get some of the more aggressive clauses in terms of the relaxation of labor laws removed from the bill. However it is important to note that the major issue that arose in Nandigram, that of acquisition of land for SEZs was not discussed at all during the debate. As well, what are now key hot button issues over SEZs, such as their potential environmental impact (an issue that became the mainstay of the Goan anti SEZ resistance) and the reality that zones would potentially engulf entire villages (causing many to question the governing authority of Panchayats within zones) was not debated.¹³ In the

¹² Lok Sabha Debates, No. 27, May 11, 2005. The debates can be accessed from the home page of the Lok Sabha: <http://loksabha.nic.in/>, accessed 4 February, 2009.

¹³ West Bengal Assembly debates were not available publicly at the time of this research. Therefore it was not possible to conduct any analysis of the role of parties in the Bengali assembly.

beginning, opposition parties were not concerned about SEZs, and their potential detrimental affects for the country.

Picking Up Steam: The Initial Role of the Opposition in West Bengal and Goa

Initially, the TMC in West Bengal did not oppose the car project in Singur, or the SEZ project in Nandigram. This was established during an interview with an important Bengali social activist and researcher of Bengal politics. The interviewee explained to me how village members of the Save Agricultural Land Committee (SALC) from Singur actually traveled to Mamata Banerjee's home to discuss the issue with her and ask her to take up the issue on their behalf. During this meeting, it was clear that the party leader was undecided as to where her party stood on the issue.¹⁴ Interviews with activist villagers in Singur also revealed that opposition parties did not come to support the resistance until quite some time after the resistance was initiated. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. I provide further evidence in this regard in Chapter 7, where I show that the media reported on the role of political parties far less during the initial stages of the resistance. The media coverage of opposition parties picked up significant steam however, as the village movement became more predominant.

Once the groundswell of grassroots resistance against the car project in Singur and the proposed SEZ in Nandigram began to take shape in West Bengal however, the TMC, and other opposition parties picked up the cause with vengeance. Indeed, over the course of the 15 months that bracketed the main timeframe of the resistances, opposition parties were mentioned in 52% of all articles published in the Telegraph (West Bengal's most popular English language newspaper) on either the Singur or Nandigram resistances (N=680). This of course, can be interpreted in a number of ways. In the Chapter 7 I go into detail about the role of the media in

¹⁴ Respondent #10 (Please see Table A-4 in appendix for respondent information)

the resistances, however at this point it is notable that opposition parties factored heavily into reporting on the village resistances, and thus provides an initial window into their role.

Although the TMC has 29 elected representatives in the West Bengal state assembly, it was the party's national leader, Mamata Banerjee, who became the key political figure for the resistances in Singur and Nandigram. Mamata Banerjee (affectionately known as 'Mamata' to the villagers I interviewed) is a nationally elected member of parliament, whose constituency is in Calcutta (the capital city of West Bengal). Perhaps her overwhelming presence in the resistances, as opposed to the presence of any of the party's state assembly leaders speaks to the weakness of the party at the state level. As such, it is important to approach the democratic viability of the TMC with caution. Many of Mamata Banerjee's actions border on populism, thus potentially raising a red flag in West Bengal state politics. This presents an interesting area for further research once the anti SEZ resistances pan out a bit more. Regardless, Mamata Banerjee and the TMC party has become a key political voice for the villagers.

The TMC in Singur: Mamata Banerjee had never before visited Singur prior to the village resistance to the car project.¹⁵ However, during the 15 months of the Singur resistance, she personally visited the village block more than 30 times.¹⁶ She led countless passionate rallies that often attracted tens of thousands of villagers, and, perhaps displaying undemocratic tendencies, was at the helm of many demonstrations in which protesters were armed with a variety of primitive weapons (including brooms and sticks).¹⁷ Mamata secured her status as a key political figure in opposition to the car project in Singur on September 26, 2006 when she was forcibly evicted from Singur and arrested by police on September 27, 2006, the day before

¹⁵ Based on an interview with respondent 15 (please see appendix A, table 1 for respondent data).

¹⁶ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1071219/asp/bengal/story_8686219.asp

¹⁷ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060926/asp/frontpage/story_6794463.asp

the forced land acquisition process was set to begin.¹⁸ The CPM chief minister expressed regret for Mamata's arrest days later.

Interestingly, soon after, state and national members of opposition parties started coming out in support of Mamata's actions in Singur, and expressing solidarity with the TMC party. Most notable was Sonia Gandhi, the charismatic national leader of the Congress party. She expressed support for Mamata, going so far as to suggest that a TMC/Congress alliance in West Bengal might just defeat the CPM, saying that this was an "opportune moment to put the alliance with Trinamul. . . and the Congress should not dither".¹⁹ The BJP leader echoed a similar sentiment as Sonia Gandhi, saying that "She is not only our ally but also an icon of people's struggle against oppressive communist rule in West Bengal".²⁰ Opposition parties at all levels were moving in to capitalize on this increasingly important grassroots movement. As discussed above, conflict is an important means in which parties can establish their position on important issues, allowing the party system to grow and consolidate in the meantime.

Mamata Banerjee embarked on her most dramatic and popular display of support for the Singur resistance by staging a hunger strike on December 4, 2006 in the middle of downtown Calcutta. She fasted for 25 days and almost died in the process. Her strike received intense media coverage and garnered significant reactions for many state and national party officials. Speaking of her hunger strike, Dinesh Trivedi, a national TMC elected member of the Indian senate explained to me:

That perhaps was a big, huge turning point. That is where people just realized that a person can't just go on a hunger strike for such a long time. It gave an opportunity for a lot

¹⁸ On September 28, 2006, the land department began to transfer the proposed factory land to the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation – the first step in handing the land to the Tata Car Company.

¹⁹ Sonia Gandhi is the wife of the late Rajiv Gandhi who was Indira Gandhi's son and prime minister of the country from 1984 until 1989. She was quoted in the Telegraph. "Before puja, Cong bows to devi Mamata, Alva demands CM apology" *The Telegraph*, 27 September 2006, Bengal Section.

²⁰ "BJP wakes up, forms Panel", *The Telegraph*, 27 September 2006, Bengal Section.

of people to come on the platform where she was protesting and come and talk about Singur and Nandigram.²¹

Mamata Banerjee and the TMC's role extended beyond that of demonstrations, and hunger strikes. The party also played an important brokering role between those resisting SEZs across the country. For example, several villagers in Singur told me about a two state trip, organized and paid for by the opposition TMC party in June 2007. This was similar to a trip financed by NGOs (I discussed this in Chapter 5). During the trip organized by the TMC, about 40 Singur villagers were joined by about 20 Nandigram villagers to spend two days in Delhi and two days in the communist state of Kerala. For many, it was the first time that villagers from Singur and Nandigram had met each other. Together they traveled to Delhi, where they participated in a national 'solidarity' meeting, along with various political rallies and impromptu street corner protests. The villagers were also able to meet both the Prime Minister and the President of India, and had face time with both politicians to talk openly about the issues in Singur and Nandigram. The villagers also spoke of attending rallies in Delhi, ones not directly related to their localized causes, but ones speaking to the broader issues of SEZs and land acquisition for them. In doing so, they were able to draw immediate parallels between their localized issue of forced land acquisition for the car factory, and similar issues being faced by villagers standing to lose their land and livelihood due to land acquisition for SEZs. After spending two days in Delhi, the group traveled by train to Kerala to participate in two more days of protest rallies and campaign meetings. I was able to speak to a few villagers who participated in these events. One villager talked to me about the motives behind the TMC's involvement in the West Bengal movements:

²¹ Respondent #38 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

Mamata Banerjee was trying to make this a national issue, so she was trying to mobilize the people in favor of a national movement. She went to Uttar Pradesh also, and Karnataka [other states in India] to try to show some solidarity among the states. She also tried to mobilize the people from Singur and Nandigram. So the people in different states in the meeting saw that they are being affected like us.²²

I asked all villagers I interviewed about their overall impressions of Mamata Banerjee and the TMC party. All spoke of her and/or her party in a favorable manner (not surprisingly some questioned her intentions given that she was a politician, but they desired her support nonetheless). Many also freely told me that they planned to vote TMC in the upcoming May 2008 Panchayat elections, and that they had switched allegiance from the CPM party. Here are some answers I received in Singur about Mamata Banerjee and the TMC party:

*Only one person is still raising the peasant's voice, and that is Mamata Banerjee. No other party has consistency, but Mamata still has spirit.*²³

*If every woman was like Mamata, then we would win our battle.*²⁴

*Mamata tries to raise our issue to the national level.*²⁵

*Opposition parties have been key to our resistance here. The villagers started this movement, but after that, the TMC came here and helped lead it.*²⁶

*Mamata Banerjee has a big role. The role of opposition parties is key to our resistance.*²⁷

*Opposition parties are doing something for us. Mamata Banerjee is unparalleled.*²⁸

An important point to consider here is that these interviews were conducted over a year after the resistance began in Singur. This shows, that opposition parties were responsive to the

²² Respondent #32 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²³ Respondent #33 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁴ Respondent #17 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁵ Respondent #34 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁶ Respondent #16 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁷ Respondent #17 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

²⁸ Respondent #19 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

resistance, and that their involvement was sustained over a prolonged period of time. Further these interviews showed that activist villagers accorded legitimacy to the role of opposition parties, and considered their involvement key to the resistance, even a year into it. The prolonged role of opposition parties in the Singur resistance is further evidenced by the fact that coverage of the Singur and Nandigram resistance in the Telegraph included mention of opposition parties almost 50% of the time in September 2007, well over a year into the Singur resistance, and almost a year into the Nandigram resistance. Please see Chapter 7 for this data.

The TMC Nandigram: It was quite difficult during my field work to obtain the perspective that villagers in Nandigram had of opposition parties. This is because the ruling CPM incessantly attacked the Nandigram movement as being completely driven by opposition parties, who were trying to gain power. The national CPM party releases a weekly newsletter, and any reporting that the party did on the Nandigram violence referenced the TMC as well as a variety of other unpopular political factions (such as Maoists, and Naxalites) as driving and fomenting the resistance. For example, the newsletter released days after the infamous March 14, 2007 village uprising, in which 14 villagers were killed, started by saying, “Over the past nearly three months, the Trinamul Congress, aided by a host of political outfits of the right and the extreme left, and abetted by the scions of the corporate media, has been trying its worst to create a ‘free zone’ in an area of Nandigram.”²⁹ It went on to justify the police violence on March 14th, saying that,

On the morning of March 14, administrative officials accompanied by police personnel politely asked the agitating and armed Trinamul Congress lumpens to give way so that the repair work could start. In response, the hoodlums commandeered at gunpoint women and

²⁹ People’s Democracy: March 18, 2007, available online at http://pd.cpim.org/2007/0318/03182007_nandigram%20mayhem.htm, accessed 9 February 2009.

children and had them lined up as a barricade from behind which they started to lob bombs and brickbats on the advancing officials including the police.”³⁰

Interviews I conducted with villagers, media reports, as well as several documentaries that contained clear video footage of the events, showed that the CPM’s interpretation of the events were completely untrue of course. The party however continued to relentlessly attack the TMC and other parties as the months wore on. When the CPM launched its massive and violent attack in Nandigram on November 11, 2007 to quash the village resistance, it justified its attack, by saying “[f]rom the 3rd of January, 2007...an unholy nexus of Maoists-Naxalites under the banner of the Trinamul Congress took control of the area...”. They went on to say that, “[a]n important aspect that needs to be taken into account [in the Nandigram resistance] is the role of the Maoists and the opportunity provided to them by the Trinamul Congress to spread mayhem and terror.”³¹ They called the village resistance, “an alliance of forces led by the Trinamul Congress”, and argued that the BUPC was simply a “guise” for the opposition parties.

Given that the ruling CPM was capitalizing on the role of the TMC and other parties in the village resistance, saying in essence, that the entire resistance was the brainchild of opposition parties, villagers are quick to denounce the role of political parties in their resistance. As soon as I brought up the role of opposition parties, villagers would heatedly tell me that the movement is a village one, with opposition parties having a minimal role to play. As one BUPC leader, and village farmer explained to me:

Our movement gathered steam in January of 2007, but Mamata did not come until February. The BUPC was already formed. So in terms of organizing the movement, she

³⁰ People’s Democracy, March 18, 2007, available online at http://pd.cpim.org/2007/0318/03182007_nandigram%20mayhem.htm, accessed 9 February, 2009.

³¹ People’s Democracy, November 18, 2007, available online at <http://pd.cpim.org/11182007.htm>, accessed 8 October 2008.

did not have a large role to play. She didn't come until a month after the movement started.³²

Nonetheless, I pressed the Nandigram interviewees on the role of opposition parties in the movement. I initially asked them specifically about the role of opposition parties and had limited success in obtaining answers. However, later on in the interviews, I revisited the question, simply by asking “What do you think of Mamata Banerjee?” or “What do you think of the TMC?” Then villagers let their guard down a bit, indicating that they generally favorable impression of her role, once she became involved in the cause. Some answers I received are:

*Mamata's importance is immense. She is an important leader, so her coming here helped us take our movement forward as a political battle.*³³

*Mamata is very important to our movement. Our local TMC MLA is also very important to us.*³⁴

*Mamata and our local TMC MLA [member of legislative assembly] have a huge role to play in our movement.*³⁵

Similar to Singur, most interviewees professed their enthusiastic support for the TMC in the upcoming May 2008 panchayat elections, and how they switched their allegiance from the CPM since the Nandigram violence.³⁶

Perhaps the best evidence regarding the role of the opposition TMC in the Singur and Nandigram resistances lies in the results of the May 2008 panchayat elections in West Bengal. As outlined in Chapter 4, local government in West Bengal consists of three levels, running from

³² Respondent #45 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³³ Respondent #48 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁴ Respondent #47 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁵ Respondent #49 (Please see Table A-1 in appendix for respondent information)

³⁶ Perhaps providing evidence that Mamata is not purely a populist leader running the TMC, Nandigram villagers also spoke about the importance of a locally elected TMC member of the legislative assembly, Subhendu Adhikary to the village movement. In fact, most felt that his leadership role in the movement far surpassed that of Mamata Banerjee.

smallest to largest: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishads (districts). At the highest level, the ruling CPM lost two districts to the TMC, the two that contained the regions that were to be directly affected by the Nandigram SEZ. Table 6-3 shows the results. As table 6-4 shows, at the gram panchayat level (the lowest level of local governance), the CPM saw its seat share significantly eroded as well.

Based on the above elections results at the local level in West Bengal, the villagers in the areas that were affected or potentially affected by the Nandigram SEZ or the Singur automobile factory gave their verdict as to their assessment of the ruling CPM and their support of the opposition TMC. Assembly elections at the state level are a number of years away, so we must wait to see what effect the projects have had on the popularity of the CPM in West Bengal overall. However it is important to note that, villagers considered the TMC an important player in the resistance by voting them to power locally well over a year after the resistances began.

The TMC is not the only opposition party fighting the projects in West Bengal. Many smaller and even marginal opposition parties are also weighing in. I interviewed the leader of India's CPI(ML) Liberation party Diprankar Bhattacharya. The CPI(ML) is a small regional party that holds seats in only two states in India. In May of 2007, the party released a scathing publication against SEZs called "Corporate Land Grab: Issues of Development and Democracy". The publication is an diatribe against all aspects of SEZs, and is similar to publications released by other parties attacking SEZ policy. Diprankar has visited Nandigram and Singur many times, and he personally or members of his party has also traveled to other sites of anti SEZ resistance across the country. I asked him about the role of political parties in the anti SEZ resistances. He explained to me (with reference to the specific role of communist parties):

Nandigram is a peasant movement, but there are many parties which are very active. But traditionally in India the communist movement has been about the politics of the peasant. No other ideology in India has been consistently pro peasant. So it is an anomalous situation. You have a communist [CPM] government which is now being held responsible for this Nandigram massacre. So the CPM in Bengal is being seen as perpetrating massacres against peasants. This is a blot, a black spot in the communist tradition. India is an agrarian society, so the communist movement is punctuated by peasant revolts. So all communist currents in India are known as parties of peasant struggles. So although this is a peasant movement, it can also grow into a party movement. This can be the mainstay of a communist resurgence in Bengal and the rest of the country.³⁷

Similar trends have been occurring across the country – with opposition parties picking up localized anti SEZ resistances (with different intensities of course). The opposition BJP has been fighting the SEZ cause in states such as Karnataka, and Maharashtra. It was especially prominent during the village resistance to the 15 proposed SEZs in Goa. Again however in Goa, the question is raised about whether the BJP's role had crossed the line, and actually drove the resistance (something Goan villagers get very angry to hear about). One way to show the BJP's reactive role is to look at the party's political platform for the Goa state elections held in May 2007, a full two years after the SEZ act was passed, but about five months before the villagers of Goa started resisting the SEZ projects in full force. The Congress party won the elections with 16 seats. The BJP however came in a close second, winning 14 seats, and was established as the clear opposition, given that the next party won only 3 seats. (All other opposition parties won a combined total of 10 seats.) The opposition BJP released an 'election manifesto' prior to the assembly elections which in essence outlined the party's political platform. SEZs, and the issues surrounding them were not mentioned even *once* in the seven page document. The document did however contain a pledge to introduce a subsidized monthly bus pass system, and establish free internet connectivity for Goan students. Clearly, the SEZ issue was not within the scope of the party.

³⁷ Respondent #22 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

Things changed dramatically once the village movement against SEZs got off the ground however. I went into some detail about the villager led Goan anti SEZ resistance in Chapter 4. In terms of the party role in the movement, the BJP spearheaded a committee called *Goa Movement against SEZs* (GMAS). In the first week of October, the party launched a state wide public awareness campaign, and demanded that all SEZs be scrapped in the state.³⁸ The campaign included door knocking across the state to try and raise support. The BJP even went so far as to tell tourists to leave Goa by December 28, 2007, (a potential major blow to the tourist driven state), as it threatened that the agitation against the SEZs would dramatically intensify (a threat that they backtracked on days later, when it became clear that the ruling Congress party was going to cancel the zones).

Indeed, in Goa, even the ruling Congress led alliance realized the extent of the anti SEZ sentiment among the citizenry of the state. I spoke in Chapter 1 about how the Congress led government in Goa eventually bowed to social pressure and completely scrapped all 15 planned SEZs in the state. Among the many reasons the state party cited for scrapping all SEZs directly echoed the villagers concern that SEZs in the state would lead to an unwanted influx of migrants to work in factories, as which would mean that revenue would not accrue largely to locals and it would lead to a large-scale influx of people, putting pressure on land and resources.³⁹ What was interesting however in the context of this chapter is that initially, the Congress led UPA coalition in the central government refused to grant the state Congress party in Goa permission to repeal the notified SEZs in the state, thus pitting a the Congress state level against the Congress national level. National Commerce Secretary Gopal Pillai was quoted as saying, “[t]here is no

³⁸ “BJP campaign against SEZs in Goa”, *The Hindu*, 28 September 2007, <http://www.hindu.com/2007/09/28/stories/2007092851600300.htm>, accessed 9 February, 2009.

³⁹ “Scrap SEZ projects: Goa Task Force”, *The Hindu*, 31 December 2007, <http://www.hindu.com/2007/12/31/stories/2007123160051600.htm>, accessed 9 February 2009.

provision under law (for states) to recommend de-notification. They have no locus standi to withdraw the notifications to the SEZs.” In other words, notified SEZs have already become legal entities and therefore cannot be de-notified.⁴⁰ This led to an intra party battle, which the state level Congress party eventually won. On January 8, 2008, Kamal Nath, national Minister of Commerce saying, "Goan people do not want SEZs. SEZs will not come to Goa. The Congress government will not go against the people".⁴¹ The entire SEZ plan was scrapped in Goa soon after.

Opposition Parties at the National Level:

The SEZ issue came into political focus at the national level as well. As I mentioned above, the national BJP party has become a vehement critic of the SEZ act. I interviewed Nalin Kohli, National Convener of the BJP all media cell. I asked him about the BJP’s take on the SEZ issue. After speaking about Nandigram, he explained to me:

What is the bigger picture? If you have barren land, put to productive use by bringing in economic activity, there is merit to this argument [to have SEZs]. . . .but if you are developing cultivable land from agriculture to industry, you are directly and indirectly depriving the livelihood of hundreds of millions of Indians who are dependent on agriculture.⁴²

He then admitted to me that the Nandigram issue had exposed “certain weaknesses inherent within the whole SEZ acquisition process”. He went on however to frame the SEZ issue in an entirely different way, “In Goa, people are worried about losing their ethnic and cultural identity. Also there is tourism there. If the basic character of Goa undergoes a change [due to SEZs], this is a problem”. His sentiments echo those of the Goan villagers almost verbatim.

⁴⁰ “Goa scraps all SEZ projects”, *Sanhanti*, <http://sanhati.com/news/610/>, accessed 9 February 2009.

⁴¹ “Center not to impose SEZ on Goa, Nath assures Kamat”, *India Post*, 1 January 2008, <http://indiapost.com/article/techbiz/1776/>, accessed 9 February 2009.

⁴² Respondent #42 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

I was also able to interview a Dinesh Trivedi, National member of the Indian Rajya Sabha (similar to the US Senate), and member of the TMC party. I interviewed him about eight months after the initial March 14 violence in Nandigram. Just to reiterate the writing above, the original SEZ act in 2005 received only superficial dissent in the Lok Saba when the act was debated, thus showing that in essence, all political parties were on board with the concept of SEZs. At the time of the interview, almost 2 and a half years since the passing of the act, the tone of opposition party members has changed. The first thing that Dinesh explained to me was how, similar to other opposition parties, he had visited numerous sites of SEZ resistance across the country to lend his support face to face with villagers. He personally visited both Singur and Nandigram many times. I then asked him about his opinion on the SEZ act. He told me:

The entire policy is lopsided. You have to see the tradeoff between your gains and losses. I think that there are more losses than gains. You take it from a financial point of view, employment point of view, the social economic point of view. From any parameter from which you take it, it is not a win-win situation. . . .If we are trying to blindly follow a model which is in one country of another, and if you are going to follow the SEZ model of China and bring it to India, it won't work. Please understand, no land belongs to individuals in China.⁴³

I pressed him on his opinion of SEZs overall. His response is interesting, given that lack of parliamentary debate when the original SEZ act was passed:

Yes, as long as it is good for the farmers and good for the country. As far as we are concerned, we certainly have not said that SEZs are bad. There must be a debate. There must be a fair debate.⁴⁴

I then asked him how he personally was contributing to the opposition. He explained to me that he had written “hundreds” of letters to the government on the issues of Nandigram and Singur.

He also explained to me that “. . .for any debate of law and order [in the Rajya Sabha], I put in

⁴³ Respondent #38 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁴ Respondent #38 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

Nandigram. I said, how can we not talk about Nandigram? So somehow or the other, I would relate any violence to Nandigram”.

He then spoke about his role in helping to shut down the Indian national parliament over the Nandigram issue:

This parliament started. We said the first item on the agenda must be Nandigram. If we don't discuss Nandigram, then no parliament. So for a few days parliament didn't function until they agreed to discuss Nandigram. So it was the entire NDA opposition. The ruling UPA coalition had no choice. Fortunately this time the Congress party did not oppose it much. They said OK.⁴⁵

The more powerful BJP party echoed a similar sentiment. Soon after the Nandigram violence in early November, the main opposition party, the BJP sent a delegation of ten members of parliament to visit the affected villages, led by opposition leader L.K Advani (BJP). Calling his visit a “shocking experience”, Advani vowed to the villagers to raise the Nandigram issue in the national Parliament. Upon return, the BJP refused to participate in parliamentary proceedings unless the Nandigram issue was discussed. This is a highly significant move, given that the next political issue on deck for parliamentary debate was the proposed nuclear deal with the United States. Justifying his move, Advani said, “[w]e believe while a discussion on the nuke deal is important, no less important is a discussion on Nandigram and the plight of farmers there”. The national CPM, a member of the ruling coalition, however initially refused to allow the debate to occur, arguing that the Nandigram affair was a ‘state issue’.⁴⁶ Parliament was completely paralyzed for two full days on November 19 and 20 over this deadlock. The CPM finally relented, agreeing to discuss the Nandigram violence in Parliament. The debate that ensued was heated and many party members, who didn't speak about SEZs in the initial

⁴⁵ Respondent #38 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

⁴⁶ “Nandigram, BJP seeks discussion in Parliament”, *Times of India*, 13 November 2007, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Home/Nandigram_on_fire/Nandigram_BJP_seeks_discussion_in_Parliament/articleshow/2537295.cms, accessed 9 February, 2009.

parliamentary debate years earlier, rose to condemn the policy. The BJP opposition party leader L.K Advani was allowed to initiate the debate. He started by commending the house speaker for allowing the debate to occur:

Had the discussion on Nandigram not taken place it would have lowered the Parliament in the esteem of the people of the country. Therefore, it is imperative for the dignity of the Parliament that wherever such incidents take place, a discussion should be held on these with open mind.⁴⁷

Keeping in mind that land acquisition for SEZs was not discussed at all during the original debate over the SEZ act in May 2005, during this debate, the issue was at the forefront. For example, Devendra Prasad Yadav from the National Peoples Party (RJD) made connections with the Nandigram violence and land acquisition for SEZs:

The incident occurred in regard to acquisition of land in Nandigram is indeed unfortunate. Whatever the cause, such type of incident is a matter of concern for all of us and we can never solve such problems unless and until we rise above the petty politics. I am of the opinion that the policy pertaining to SEZ is entirely faulty and the basis on which land is acquired is entirely fallacious. The policy in regard to acquiring land rests with the State government. It is because of this also, I feel that this policy is faulty as the State government should not work as a private property dealer. I would like to know whether the GDP will not decrease, if the lands so allotted in the name of SEZs to MNCs [multi national corporations] who in turn converting the said lands into constructing big malls in the name of commercialization and industrialization?⁴⁸

M. Ramadass of the opposition PMK party offered a similar sentiment:

The Government should evolve a uniform policy, which should be applicable to all the States. We should have following ingredients in the national policy on SEZ. One is that the Government should not intervene in the acquisition of land. Whenever the farmer wishes to give, it should be given on the basis of lease for 50 years or 60 years and each farmer who gives land must be able to get a share in the company so that whenever there is a profit for the company, it will go to them. The Government should take an enlightened view and try to create SEZ without affecting the farmers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Lok Sabha Debates, Fourteenth Series, Vol. XXX, Twelfth Session, 2007/1929 (Saka) No. 4, 21 November, 2007.

⁴⁸ Lok Sabha Debates, Fourteenth Series, Vol. XXX, Twelfth Session, 2007/1929 (Saka) No. 4, 21 November, 2007.

⁴⁹ Lok Sabha Debates, Fourteenth Series, Vol. XXX, Twelfth Session, 2007/1929 (Saka) No. 4, 21 November, 2007.

Opposition party member Asaduddin Owaisi Aimim concurred:

As far as SEZ is concerned, this a concept which has been borrowed from China. The land can be acquired. But in our country the land can be taken only for public purpose. If the UPA Government is going to bring in a legislation, it should very clearly say that any industrialist or any company who wants land, let them go directly and purchase the land. Why should the common man suffer?⁵⁰

Interestingly, members of the national opposition CPM party (ruling in West Bengal, but members of the opposition front in the Lok Sabha), used the debate to come out against the SEZ policy in general. MD. Salim, CPM member said:

The stand of our party is clear as far as the setting up of SEZ is concerned. From the very beginning we have been urging the UPA Government not to implement the policy of the Union Government....Left Front Government believes that whatever scheme is formulated by the Central Government, it is not implemented in the State unless it is approved by the Panchayat and by the people of the State because the implementation is directly related to the development of the people. Therefore, their consent is necessary before taking any decision in this regard. Without them we cannot march forward. The matter of setting up SEZ is related to the grassroots level, it is related to the farmers, to the development. We want to have discussion of the matters which are related to new ways and means of development. We believe in democracy, we cannot take any decision without having any parliamentary, democratic dialogue, debate and discussion. . . without discussing the issue of land you cannot discuss Nandigram.⁵¹

These are important quotes to consider, given the lackluster debate that occurred during the original debates for the regulation. With a newfound focus, opposition parties were attacking all aspects of the policy, drawing parallels between land encroachment and the overall risks associated with the SEZ act. Although it would be difficult to establish direct causation, the evidence supporting the relationship between the grassroots movements against SEZs and the subsequent change of face for India's opposition parties is compelling.

⁵⁰ Lok Sabha Debates, Fourteenth Series, Vol. XXX, Twelfth Session, 2007/1929 (Saka) No. 4, 21 November, 2007.

⁵¹ Lok Sabha Debates, Fourteenth Series, Vol. XXX, Twelfth Session, 2007/1929 (Saka) No. 4, 21 November, 2007.

Opposition Parties and Ideological Stretching

The fact that two predominantly center right parties in India, the TMC and the BJP have been the primary opposition parties to take up the cause of land rights in the face of SEZs might lead some to question how rooted India's political parties are in the political ideological spectrum. After all, it is India's right wing parties that are trying to protect land rights for farmers, potentially playing a role in stagnating economic development while doing so. As Mainwaring and Scully remind us, it is important for citizens to be able to rely on consistent party platforms. Otherwise:

it would be impossible to begin every election anew, with no established party labels – without shortcuts that tell the electorate who is who. Party labels offer such a shortcut: they say something about the candidate....Parties help reduce the information costs of voting, making it easier for citizens with little time and little political information to participate in politics (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 3)

However it is critical to remember that altering and stretching of party ideology is a critical function of party competition in a democracy, and is especially important in a relatively new democracy such as India, where opposition parties have only become viable over the past few decades. As Downs argued, new parties can become stronger when an opportunity is presented (such as the SEZ issue) to wrest away political power from established incumbent parties (Downs 1957, 128). As such, the TMC in West Bengal saw the Singur and Nandigram resistances as a potential opportunity to gain much needed popularity away from the CPM in the West Bengal countryside. Indeed, as illustrated above, the move proved fruitful with the party making significant gains on the CPM in the May 2008 local elections.

With regards to the role of the center right wing party, the BJP, in the anti SEZ resistance; the embracing of the rural resistance against industrial projects that resulted in land encroachment is also inline with institutionalized multi party politics, and fits with Downs' models that examine the dynamics of shifting party ideologies, in order to capture the majority of

the electorate.⁵² Specifically with regards to multi party systems, such as India, opposition parties will move to distinguish themselves ideologically from ruling parties (Downs 1957, 127). Indeed, this is precisely what occurred with regards to the BJP's role in the anti SEZ resistance. As an illustration that the pro business party didn't abandon its party ideals, the party released a report, called *SEZ, A Report*⁵³ in January 2007 re-confirming its commitment to the notion that SEZs are important for India's development, noting in the report that it was the BJP who first instituted an SEZ policy in the late 1990's (Naidu 2007, 2). The report affirmed the party's support on several aspects of the 2005 SEZ act, including tax incentives, subsidized infrastructure for manufacturers, quick approval mechanisms for zones, and other incentives to attract foreign direct investments and foster exports. The report however noted that the SEZ act has several potential issues. For example, the report expressed alarm at the amount of approvals, noting that India had more approved SEZs than the rest of the world put together. The report also noted the fact that tax benefits were extended to non processing areas of zones – raising fears of real estate exploitation, and called for regulations to be put into place that ensured that any development within SEZs be for the purposes of serving processing areas. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the report stated that "...adequate safeguards need to be provided in the SEZ policy to ensure that irrigated and agriculturally fertile land is not swallowed up by the SEZs". The report also called for increasing compensation rates, and other rewards to land-losing farmers, and the conduct of social impact assessments where zones are to be developed. Thus the report shows that the party remains committed to its long standing pro business

⁵² Scott James (2000, 7) provides a good account of how party ideology shifts in the American Democracy. James documents shifts in the party ideology of the Democratic Party from 1884 to 1936 in an ongoing attempt to wrest political power away from the Republican Party. James saw this as a signal of healthy multiparty competition, noting that, "...policy choices sometimes have electoral implications (and, by extension, implications for the party control of spoils).

⁵³ This report is not available online. I obtained this report from the BJP party office in Delhi India. It was published in January 2007.

ideological platform, but recognizes the rights of the rural sector within it. Indeed it can also be argued that the heavy involvement of two right wing parties (the TMC and the BJP) in the resistance against land encroachment for the export projects aligns with the political ideology of the right in terms of the protection of private property rights against public ownership.

Conclusion

India's opposition parties have been immensely responsive to the resistance against the automobile factory in Singur, and the SEZ issues in Nandigram and across the country. This is significant to note regarding India's democratization. In many respects, India has only recently emerged as a multi party political system after having been historically governed by a predominant party for several decades after independence. At the national level, the BJP is really quite new on the political scene, in terms of being a stable and viable alternative to the historically dominant INC. The opposition TMC is a relatively new party overall, having been established in the early 1990s.

Many have problematized India's party system on a number of fronts. The issues with India's party system are real, and in many respects, India's political parties are a weak link in the country's democracy. While, it cannot be denied that the overall stability and effectiveness of India's party system is at risk in some cases, the role that opposition parties have played in the SEZ issue is an illustration of the long term efficacy of institutionalized multi party politics in the country.

Most importantly, the very fact that opposition parties were provided the political space in which to provide support and voice to the resistances in Singur, Nandigram, and various regions of Goa is evidence that India's political framework recognizes and embraces institutionalized political dissent. This can be seen in terms of ruling parties allowing opposition parties to stake claim in the SEZ issue, and in terms of the support that villagers gave to

opposition parties who took up their cause. Villagers saw political parties as a viable means in which to express their demands on government, and in many ways, their support of opposition party involvement was well founded, as parties at all levels of government began to fight the SEZ issue in assemblies across the states, and at the national parliament. Opposition parties proved their worth as being effective conduits for grassroots expression, as well as an important means in which to foster horizontal accountability in government. The fact that opposition parties are a legitimate tool of dissent was further exemplified when the TMC picked up a significant amount of seats in the May 2008 local elections across the state of West Bengal. Even after the elections, the TMC continued their leadership in the grassroots movement against the export automobile factory in Singur, showing their electorate that their vote was well placed. Indeed, Mamata Banerjee was at the forefront of village demonstrations in Singur soon after the May elections, and was a prominent face in the resistance until the project was repealed in September 2008. The fact that opposition parties, and especially the TMC, have capitalized on the political dissent regarding SEZs shows that multi party politics have roots in India, and that citizens see opposition parties as a legitimate means in which to foster social change. In Chapter 7, I discuss the important role of the media in the anti SEZ resistance.

Table 6-1. National election results: 1951-2004 (election years that are highlighted indicate a changeover of power)

Year	Winning party	Seats	% vote share	Runner up	Seats	% vote share
1951	INC	364	44.99	CPI	16	3.29
1957	INC	371	47.78	CPI	27	8.92
1962	INC	361	44.72	CPI	29	9.94
1967	INC	283	40.78	SWA	44	8.67
1971	INC	352	43.68	CPI	23	4.73
1977	BLD	295	41.32	INC	154	34.42
1980	INC(I)	353	46.29	JNP(S)	41	9.39
1984	INC	404	49.1	CPM	22	5.87
1989	INC	197	39.5	JD	143	14.79
1991	INC	232	36.26	BJP	120	20.11
1996	BJP	161	20.29	INC	140	28.8
1998	BJP	182	25.59	INC	141	28.82
1999	BJP	182	23.75	INC	114	28.3
2004	INC	145	26.53	BJP	138	22.16

Source: *India Elections*, <http://www.indian-elections.com>, (various years), accessed 4 February 2009.

Table 6-2. Electoral situation in West Bengal: 2001 and 2006 assembly elections

Party	Coalition	Assembly			
		seats (2006 elections)	Swing (from 2001 elections)	% voteshare (2006)	% voteshare (2001)
CPM	Left Front	175	+32	36.92	36.59
TMC	TMC+	29	-30	26.5	30.66
INC	INC+	21	-5	14.7	7.98
IND	n/a	6	-3	4.19	5.05

Source: *India Elections*, <http://www.indian-elections.com/assembly-elections/west-bengal/election-result-06.html>, accessed 4 February 2009.

Table 6-3. District level election results in districts that would have been affected by Nandigram SEZ and Singur automobile Factory (2003 vs 2008). Data corresponds to seats.

East Midnapore (Nandigram)		
Party	2003 elections	2008 elections
CPM	43	14
TMC	2	35
S 24. Parganas (Nandigram)		
Party	2003 elections	2008 elections
CPM	57	26
TMC	3	34
Hooghly (Singur)		
CPM	45	36
TMC	0	11

Source: “Nandi Payback”, *The Telegraph*, 22 May, 2008, Front Page.

Table 6-4. Block level election results (Gram Panchayat) in blocks that would have been affected by Nandigram SEZ and Singur Automobile Factory (2003 vs 2008). Data correspond to seats.

Nandigram		
Party	2003 elections	2008 elections
CPM	54	14
TMC	37	88
Singur		
CPM	136	42
TMC	90	131

Source: “Nandi Payback”, *The Telegraph*, 22 May, 2008, Front Page.

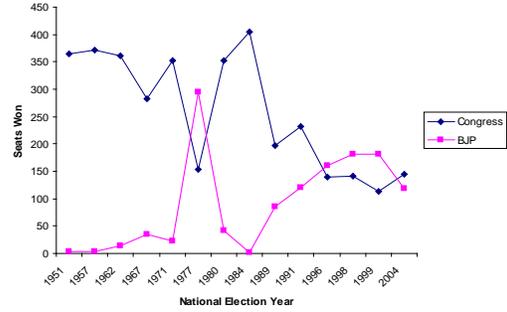
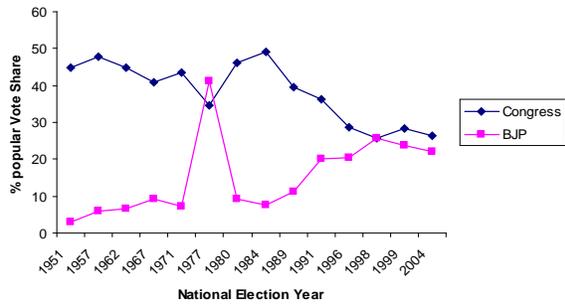


Figure 6-1. % popular vote share and seat share gained by the Congress Party and BJP during national elections: 1951-2004 [Source: *India Elections*, <http://www.indian-elections.com/assembly-elections/west-bengal/election-result-06.html>, accessed 4 February 2009.]

CHAPTER 7
DEMOCRACY AND THE MEDIA: COVERING THE SEZ DEBATE IN INDIA

Introduction

Even a cursory glance through India's newspapers during the Singur and Nandigram movements highlights the media's extensive coverage of these events. Coverage often made front page news, locally and nationally. Articles were often accompanied by large color photos depicting the unrest and violence that accompanied the resistance. In the days following an unusually violent episode in the villages, coverage sometimes took entire front pages of newspapers, with accompanying photos. This chapter analyzes print media coverage of the SEZ debate in India. The chapter sets out to accomplish three things. First the chapter will gauge the level of coverage given by the print media of the Singur and Nandigram movements, showing that coverage was impressive overall, and especially intense during times of heightened resistance and violence. As such, the chapter argues that the media was effective, giving timely and appropriately heavy coverage to a violent and newsworthy event in Indian politics. Second the chapter will show that the media were sometimes critical of SEZs in general, and especially critical of the government during times of violence. The data presented in this chapter show that the media rarely adopted the government's perspective that the automobile plant in Singur and the SEZ in Nandigram (and elsewhere) constituted good policy for the country. I thereby make the claim that the print media in India is autonomous, and capable of scrutinizing government policy and action. Third, presenting relevant data, the chapter will make the argument that the print media had an independent role in framing the SEZ issue in a variety of ways. First, the majority of articles on SEZs were displayed in political sections of newspapers and only rarely were in the business section. Covering the SEZ issue in this manner frames it more of a social and political issue, and less of an economic one. Second, the media devoted much coverage to

the role of opposition parties in the resistances. Based on interviews in Singur and Nandigram, opposition parties factored in less prominently than the media portrayed in their coverage.¹ The media thus had a role in the overall perception in the country that opposition parties were dominating the resistances. Third, the media often reported on SEZs in the context of land acquisition and resistance, thereby framing the SEZ issue as one that was facing considerable grassroots resistance over land in India.

The Importance of a Free Media: A free media has long been regarded as a critical element of democratic governance.² At a basic level, it is mainly via the media that citizens can become knowledgeable about their government. During times of election, a free press takes on a special importance, as it is often through the media that candidates engage in dialogue with citizens. In this way, citizen can learn about those vying for power during elections. The media also however provide a means in which citizens are able to hold governments accountable for their actions in between election cycles as well. Thus, in many respects, the media serves as a medium of communication between government and citizens in a democracy. In this respect, Mughan and Gunther called the media, “the connective tissue of democracy”, in that it is “the principle means through which citizens and their elected representatives communicate in their reciprocal efforts to inform and influence” (Gunther and Mughan 2000, 1).

Of course, media is often present and quite active in authoritarian regimes. The key difference between the media in the two contrasting systems of government however is autonomy of the press. Media in democracies have the freedom to scrutinize and criticize the actions of government, or as Toqueville stated, “...[i]ts eye is constantly open to detect the secret springs of political designs and to summon the leaders of all parties in turn to the bar of public

¹ I provide empirical evidence for this statement in Chapter 4

² Toqueville (1864, 190) was one of the first to write on the subject.

opinion” (Tocqueville, 1864, 195). In authoritarian regimes; it is often the government itself that holds the reins of power over the media establishment, and thus scrutiny of government is not possible.³ Thus to be considered an effective part of a democratic process, the media must be legally and politically free.⁴

The media is more than a static means of communication between citizens and government however. Much research has been conducted in terms of the independent role of the media in influencing those that consume it, otherwise known as ‘framing’. Perhaps its most powerful role is simply making decisions in terms of which issues are ‘newsworthy’. Those in the media establishment make key decisions every day in terms of what issues make it into the next day’s paper and what issues don’t. Issues that are deemed newsworthy are inevitably framed in certain ways.

The relationship between the media and democracy is inherently complex, and has been subject to extensive research. However as Hyden et,al., said of studying the media, “[a]ny student of this subject matter is compelled to make a choice of focusing on some part of it rather than trying to rein in everything” (Hydén, Leslie, and Ogundimu 2002, 29). Thus for the purposes of this dissertation, three key aspects of the media’s role in the SEZ debate will be considered. First, I try to capture some general characteristics of the media coverage of the SEZ issue. I ask questions such as, how much coverage did the Singur and Nandigram resistances receive. Second, I examine how critical the media was of the government during its coverage of

³ The power of government control over the media and the implications of such control was perhaps made most clear during the Rwandan genocide in the early 1990’s, in which the government controlled, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille continually broadcast hate propaganda against Tutsis. The actions of this station have been touted by many as one of the main catalysts to the genocide.

⁴ A free media constitutes one of the key measures used by Freedom House to ascertain levels of freedom and democracy across the world.

the Singur and Nandigram resistances, and the SEZ issues overall. In other words, I measure whether India's media has the capacity to scrutinize government. Finally, I look at how the media has played a role in shaping these village resistances and the SEZ debate in general. I start however with an overview of the media in India.

The Media in India

Many have cited India's rigorous and free media as one of the central hallmarks of its democracy (see for example, Varshney 1998; Adhikari 2000). Indeed as Adhikari notes, India became the first non-western, non industrialized nation to enshrine the freedom of the press into its constitution. The freedom of India's media was reinforced through several court decisions that ruled against state and national governments that acted in a heavy handed manner towards the country's media establishment, as well as the establishment of a Press Council in 1965 that monitored and reported on government influence over the media, as well as breaches of journalistic ethics on behalf of reporters (Adhikari 2000, 59).

In 2007, Freedom house gave India a generally positive review of its media, calling it, "by far the freest in South Asia".⁵ The Freedom House report noted that the nation's print media is mainly privately owned and diverse, and often scrutinizes the government. A glance at any daily paper published in India shows that indeed India's press is often quite critical of the country's government. Indeed, I gained a first hand appreciation of the level of freedom that Indian journalists have though during an interview with a reporter who had been present in Nandigram during the police violence on March 14.⁶ This reporter was able to record in detail,

⁵"Map of Press Freedom", Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7194&year=2007>, accessed 4 February, 2009. Note that Freedom house did report on various limitations on the freedom of the media in India, including periodic harassment of its journalists.

⁶ Respondent 3 (Please see Table A-4 in appendix for respondent information)

the events of that day, and went on to publish his observations and opinions widely. Indeed, at least one member of the press had a video camera rolling during the violence on March 14. This footage has been replayed in numerous documentaries that have been made on the issue, and was even a part of an official government investigation as to what took place that day.

The media can take a variety of forms, including print, television, and electronic, and all have an important role to play in India. Indeed, I was in Calcutta during the November 2007 government crackdown on protesting Nandigram villagers. In the days after the violence, all three forms of media were saturated with coverage of the events. I could hardly turn a television on, or pick up a newspaper during this time period without being privy to coverage of the issue. The internet was also ablaze with coverage. These three forms of media played an important role in terms of covering Singur and Nandigram, and the SEZ debate occurring in the country, and are worthy of study in of themselves. For the purposes of this dissertation however, I focus on the role of the print media. Analysis of television coverage of the issues would be a highly valuable study to undertake, however such a study could be the focus of an entire dissertation in of itself. The same issues of scope are exacerbated when one enters the realm of electronic media. A caveat is relevant here. In this chapter, I am making the claim that coverage of the Singur and Nandigram resistances provides evidence for the freedom and rigor of India's print media. I do not make this claim in regards to other forms of media in India. I did a thorough search to find scholarly work on the role of India's television media, but could not find any relevant material in this regard. As such, my arguments only extend to India's print media, although given India's freedom house ratings; one could make similar claims on other forms of media in the country.

India's print media has grown to such an extent over the last few decades, that one researcher called the trend a "newspaper revolution" (Jeffrey 2000). India's print media is thriving. 88.9 million Newspapers are sold in India every day, with newspaper sales increasing 13% in 2006, and 54 percent over the past five years.⁷ In West Bengal, there are almost 4000 newspapers and periodicals being published regularly, which together have a total circulation of over 5.6 million.⁸

As this chapter will show, the Singur and Nandigram resistances have received intense press coverage. Anti SEZ agitations often make front page news in local newspapers, and garner a fair share of headline coverage in national media as well. This serves the important function of dispersing information to Indian citizens across the country about SEZs, and the resistance to them. Indeed because of press coverage, Nandigram has become a household name and SEZs a household topic of discussion across the country.⁹

The media disperses important information, but is it consumed? Interviews with villagers in West Bengal and Goa revealed that the media (both print and television) was an important source of information for villagers involved in the anti SEZ resistance as well. Most villagers I spoke with both told me that they obtained most, if not all of their information about their own resistance, as well as resistances occurring across the country through the media. The Goan villagers displayed a special affinity for the media, telling me during interviews that the Goan media gave full coverage to even the smallest of village meetings, and that fundamentally, the Goan media was 'with the people'. I asked one of the leaders of the Goan resistance about

⁷ These statistics are from *the World Association of Newspapers*, <http://www.wan-press.org/article14362.html>, accessed 4 February, 2009.

⁸ Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, 2005, *Statistical Abstract*, 672.

⁹ This is an anecdotal statement of course, and should be subject to future research. I found that most I interacted with across the country had heard of and had an opinion on the Nandigram issue. I had countless such discussions with other students, friends I made along the way, including rickshaw drivers, and taxi drivers (among other people).

whether the media has been an effective ally. He told me, “Of course. They are giving good support. Whatever things are going on, they are giving publicity. Our story makes the front page often. Most Goans read the paper so this is important”.¹⁰

The praise of the media in the SEZ debate went beyond the villagers. A national opposition MP of the TMC party that I interviewed gave me his opinion of the media, telling me that,

[t]he media has played a very positive role, everywhere... West Bengal... nationally, and internationally. If it had not been for the media, both electronic and print, people would not have known what happened. Media has played an important role for various reasons. This shows the strength for our democracy.¹¹

This sentiment was echoed by a national spokesman for the leading opposition party, the BJP, who explained to me, “[t]he media has exposed what happened in Nandigram very effectively. The media is reaching out. I think it has a very positive role”.¹² Anecdotally therefore it seems that the media played an important role in the Singur and Nandigram resistances, and the SEZ debate overall. To see if this claim has merit, this chapter quantitatively assesses the coverage that these issues actually received in the print media in India.

Methodology

Data was collected on three different newspapers.¹³ I first coded the Telegraph, the largest circulated English newspaper in Eastern India. I chose to code this paper for many reasons. First, the paper has a wide readership. The paper is published in 5 different cities, including Calcutta, and is the largest English daily newspaper in the South East of India. It is also one of

¹⁰ Respondent #40 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

¹¹ Respondent #41 (Please see Table A-3 in appendix for respondent information)

¹² Respondent #42 (Please see Table A-6 in appendix for respondent information)

¹³ For a detailed breakdown of the coding criteria used to collect this data, please see appendix A of this study.

the fastest growing newspapers in terms of circulation in the region.¹⁴ Second, the paper is published in English which meant I was able to directly access its content. Third, the Telegraph is a good test of media coverage in West Bengal for the purposes of this dissertation because it is considered a ‘right wing’ newspaper.¹⁵ Thus coding this newspaper would give me the most conservative coverage of the anti SEZ resistances. This is important because if it can be shown that a conservative bias paper covered the village resistance heavily and was critical of the government’s role in these resistances, it can be assumed that more liberal papers were even more critical. I chose to code the Calcutta edition given the close proximity of both Singur and Nandigram to Calcutta, (Singur is about a one hour drive and Nandigram a five hour drive from the state capital).

One of my goals in this dissertation is to show if and how the Singur and Nandigram resistances gained national prominence. Thus, to obtain how the resistances were reflected at the national level, I coded articles in the Times of India. The Times of India is the largest English language newspaper in India, with publications in 13 cities. I focused on the Delhi edition of the paper because the city is the capital of the country, and would therefore better reflect the SEZ debate occurring within the central government. In 2007, the Delhi edition of the newspaper had a readership of over 20 million and continues to grow quickly. The Delhi edition saw a 13% increase in readership from 2006.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Audit Bureau of Circulations*, <http://www.accessabc.com/>, accessed 9 February, 2009.

¹⁵ Of course this is an anecdotal statement. My statement here however is based on numerous discussions with prominent West Bengal academics, as well as many different social activists. Another Bengali newspaper, ‘The Statesmen’ is considered to be West Bengal’s ‘left wing’ newspaper.

¹⁶“TOI is undisputed no. 1 in Delhi”, *Times of India*, 22 March, 2007, <http://epaper.timesofindia.com/Repository/ml.asp?Ref=Q0FQLzIwMDcvMDMvMjIjQXlwMDMwMg==&Mode=HTML&Locale=english-skin-custom>, accessed 9 February, 2009.

I coded articles in the Telegraph and the Times of India using a scope of thirteen months. This timeframe encompasses 6 months prior and 6 months after the March peasant uprising in Nandigram, which is considered to be ‘ground zero’ in the anti SEZ resistance across India. The Telegraph was coded at the National Library in Calcutta, and coding took approximately one month. An exact replica of the print edition of the Times of India is available over the internet.¹⁷ Thus coding for the Times of India was done using the online edition of the paper. Coding for the Times of India took approximately two months.

The limitation to focusing only on English language newspapers is that many in India do not speak English. To overcome this limitation, I hired a Bengali speaking research assistant to code media coverage of the Singur and Nandigram issue in West Bengal’s largest Bengali language newspaper, the Anandabazar Patrika. Due to time and budget constraints, only the front page of the Anandabazar Patrika was coded, using a time frame of ten months. Also, given research constraints, the front page was considered a single unit of analysis. For example, if the front page contained two articles on the Nandigram issue, this would be treated as one data point. However the overall purpose of coding this paper was to see if the major reporting trends that occurred in the English newspapers were mirrored in a Bengali language paper. Thus the scope and method of coding is appropriate. Coding was done at the National library in Calcutta and took approximately one month.

For the Telegraph, and the Times of India, articles were coded that fell within the timeframe of September 1st, 2006 to September 30, 2007, a period of 395 days. The Bengal newspaper, the Anandabazar Patrika, was coded from November 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007, a period of 334 days. It is important to note that the Nandigram resistance continued on past September 2007, however, a major state government crackdown on the protesting Nandigram

¹⁷This can be accessed at Times of India, <http://epaper.timesofindia.com/>, accessed 9 February, 2009.

villagers occurred in November 2007. This event changed the overall focus of the debate away from special economic zones and more towards issues of basic human rights. Of course, this is an important development in the anti SEZ peasant uprising in Nandigram; however the overall purpose of this study is to capture how the anti SEZ debate was reflected in the media. Thus it made sense to focus on the time period laid out above.

In all three papers, every article that met at least one of the following four criteria was included in coding and analysis:¹⁸

- any article that referred to the peasant resistance in Singur
- any article that referred to the peasant resistance in Nandigram
- any article that referred to special economic zones in general
- any article that referred to land acquisition for industrialization

For the Telegraph and the Times of India, a total of 1014 articles met the inclusion criteria outlined above. 680 articles appeared in the Telegraph, and 334 articles appeared in the Times of India. Most of the articles coded met more than one of the above criteria. Table 7-1 breaks down the number of articles that met each of the inclusion criteria. It should be noted that only 24 articles out of 1014 focused only on land acquisition for industrialization, without also referring to Singur, Nandigram or special economic zones. These cases were included however, to gauge whether the Singur and Nandigram uprisings were fostering a debate on land

¹⁸A number of sections of the newspapers were excluded from the analysis for a variety of reasons. For the Telegraph: the Metro section, and Sports section were not examined. The Metro section generally reported on entertainment or Calcutta specific happenings around the city. I examined this section for one month to confirm that articles on the Singur or Nandigram resistances were not displayed in these sections. For the Times of India: the International and Sports sections were not analyzed. I examined the International section over a month long period to confirm that articles on the Singur and Nandigram resistance were not being displayed in these sections. The editorial section of both newspapers was not analyzed due to time and budget constraints, and because these sections really do not contain factual reporting on an issue. For the Anandabazar Patrika, only articles that met the inclusion criteria listed above, and fell on the front page of the paper were coded. Any articles that were published in the inside of the paper were not analyzed.

acquisition for industrialization in general. The N of 24 however represents a negligible amount of data.

To reiterate with regards to the Anandabazar Patrika, only relevant articles that appeared on the front page were included in the analysis. As well, the front page was used as the unit of analysis, and not individual articles. The Anandabazar Patrika contained coverage related to the inclusion criteria above on 188 days. Most days that included coverage met more than one of the above criteria. Table 7-2 breaks down the number of days that the front page of the Anandabazar Patrika met each of the inclusion criteria.

Results and Analysis

Results: The Telegraph and the Times of India

Given that the coding of the Anandabazar Patrika was simplified in order to obtain a broad brush understanding of coverage in a newspaper of a native language in West Bengal, and was meant to simply gauge if some of the main trends in the Telegraph and the Times of India were reflected in a native language paper, I present the results separately. I begin with analysis of the Telegraph and the Times of India.

Results focused on addressing the 3 primary goals of this chapter: (1) gauging the level and timeliness of coverage given by the media of the Singur and Nandigram movements, (2) measuring the level of scrutiny within newspaper coverage, in terms of the movements and government response, and SEZs overall. The goal in this section is to analyze the extent of media autonomy in India, and whether the media are capable of criticizing government, and (3) analyzing how India's newspapers helped frame the SEZ issue overall.

1) Intensity of Media Coverage of the Singur and Nandigram Movements: The first empirical goal of the chapter is to gain a broad brush understanding of how intensely India's newspapers covered the Singur and Nandigram movements, as well as the SEZ issue over all,

and whether such coverage was timely.¹⁹ Indeed, the very fact that the Telegraph devoted 680 articles over a 395 day time period to the movements or SEZs speaks to the level of coverage that the media was devoting. The first task is to see where relevant articles were displayed in newspapers. Table 7-3 shows where articles that met the inclusion criteria were generally displayed in the newspapers. In the Telegraph it is notable that articles overwhelmingly were displayed either on the front page of the paper, or on the front page of an inside section. This clearly reveals that the local media in West Bengal treated the Singur and Nandigram issues as significant and newsworthy items. This is less evident in the Times of India, which is not surprising given that the Singur and Nandigram resistances were competing with other newsworthy events occurring across the country. Even so, it is notable that the issues made front page, or front page of an inside section coverage approximately 30% of the time, when appearing in the Times of India. As well, it is important to note that a photo accompanied the article in 57% of all articles appearing in the Telegraph, and 44% of all articles appearing in the Times of India.

The results in table 7-3 indicate that relevant articles received quite prominent coverage in the newspapers. Where in a given page were the articles placed? Generally, articles that are placed closer to the top of the page are more prominent than the bottom. Table 7-4 shows the placement of the article on a given page. The argument that the media gave the Singur and Nandigram issues a high level of prominence is bolstered by the fact that articles were placed at the top of a given page in over half of all cases in both the Telegraph and the Times of India.

¹⁹ Please refer to Table A-8 in the appendix for an overview of some general characteristics of the articles coded in The Telegraph and The Times of India.

To examine whether articles were placed in a more, or less, prominent position in The Times of India versus The Telegraph a Pearson Chi-square statistic was estimated. This analysis was significant $\chi^2 (2, 1014) = 7.5, p < .05$. Examination of the expected and actual distribution of data revealed that the Times of India was more likely to place articles in a position of greater prominence, i.e., in the top or middle position versus the bottom of the page, when compared to The Telegraph. Although this data does not take into account differences in the location of the page within the entire newspaper (e.g., front page of newspaper versus an interior page) it does illuminate that the Times of India, a national level newspaper gave at least as much, and sometimes more prominence than the Telegraph. This is notable and illustrates the newsworthiness of the SEZ issue on a national level. In practical terms it should be emphasized that the differences are small and both papers put the articles on the top of the page over 50% of the time they reported on this issue.

As noted above, on many days, more than one article met the inclusion criteria. On these days, in the Telegraph, there was a mean number of 2.3 articles per day (standard deviation = 1.7, range = 2–15) and in The Times of India, there was a mean number of 1.7 articles per day (standard deviation = 1.2, range = 2–10). As such, articles falling into the middle or bottom of the page might have been placed there because other articles discussing Singur or Nandigram might have been placed above. To gauge this, articles were categorized to capture the most prominent article of the day. Thus on days with multiple articles discussing Singur or Nandigram, where was the most prominent article placed? Table 7-5 shows how prominent coverage was on the issues on days where the papers had multiple articles covering the issues. It is notable that on days where coverage contained multiple articles; the coverage received the highest degree of prominence 24% of the time in the Telegraph. This was not the case in the

Times of India, which is understandable, give that the issues were competing with other newsworthy issues across the country.

As the results show, coverage of the movements was quite intense in India's newspapers. Articles often appeared in more prominent positions in newspapers, and many were accompanied by a photograph. Although it is clear that coverage was intense, was it timely? Did coverage increase during heightened times of the movements, as would be appropriate? In order to examine how the media coverage changed over time, the data were organized by month. Major events that occurred during the time period within the scope of the analysis were December 2006, January 2007, and March 2007. Thus media coverage of the issues should spike during these months. For reference, table 7-6, contains a brief synopsis of the major events that occurred during these months. The table includes a legend number that will be plotted on the graphs so the reader can easily see the months where major events occurred.

Figure 7-1 shows the general changing media coverage over the 13 month time period. As expected, major events received heavy media reporting in both the Telegraph and the Times of India. It is notable that the Telegraph devoted 115 articles and the Times of India 54 articles during the month of March 2007, the month of the Nandigram violence, an average of 4 articles a day for the Telegraph, and almost 2 a day for the Times of India.

Most articles that met the inclusion criteria fell on the front page, or the front page of the *Bengal* section in the Telegraph. In the Times of India, most articles were published on the front page, or the front page of the *Nation* section. To further underscore the level of coverage, I measured the proportion of articles falling on these pages that met the inclusion criteria. In other words, on a given day, if 5 articles fell on the front page of the Telegraph, what proportion met the inclusion criteria? To capture this data, I first averaged the number of articles on these pages

in a given month (I used January 2007). The limitation to this estimation is that I only counted articles every day for one month, and not the entire 13 months. However both papers tended to publish about the same number of articles on given pages, (clearly following established formatting guidelines), and thus doing a count for 13 months would probably not yield significantly different results.

The results are in figures 7-2 and 7-3. The results of the two graphs are noteworthy. In many months, the SEZ issue took up over 10% of all articles published on the front page in the Telegraph. In the three months where resistance was heightened, coverage approached 15%. Coverage was less prominent in the Times of India, which is expected given that this paper has predominantly national coverage. On the front page of the Bengal section of the Telegraph (the section where most of the SEZ articles were published), coverage of the SEZ issue took up a significant proportion of articles published, reaching close to 50% in the month of January 2007, and above 30% in many other months.

In sum, Indian newspapers gave the Singur and Nandigram resistances intense and timely coverage throughout India. On days where events were especially newsworthy in the village resistances, coverage sometimes even took up an entire front page, or the entire front page of an inside section of newspapers. This day to day coverage of these resistances gave those who read the papers an ongoing view into both the villagers resisting the projects, as well as the state and national government's reaction. Coverage dramatically increased during important events in the resistances as well, indicating that the media was often on scene, and reacted quickly as events unfolded, and newsworthy events often made the papers the very next day.

2) Media scrutiny of the Movements, the SEZ issue, and the Government: Results above indicate that media coverage of the movements and government response was intense and timely.

But intensity of coverage alone isn't enough to establish that the media in India is doing its democratic duty. As discussed above, media coverage can also be intense in more authoritarian regimes, where state leaders often will use state controlled media to relay government messages. The next analytical step therefore is to determine if the media was able to scrutinize the movements and government response. Was the media actually critical of the government?

To gauge media scrutiny, I coded the overall tone of relevant articles, and photos (if one accompanied an article). I took a conservative approach to this coding, categorizing the tone of an article as 'anti government' only when it was clear that this tone existed. (I discuss this further in appendix A of the study). I note an important caveat here. By using the label 'tone', I am not implying that the media in India has political leanings. However, the very act of writing critically about the government or portraying a photo depicting government violence, shows that the media is capable of criticizing the government overall in India. Thus my use of the label 'tone' here underscores the potential freedom of the media to criticize the government. The results of both the article and photo tone are notable. As table 7-7 shows, results indicate that coverage of the issues was mostly balanced with 70% of articles, and 72% of photos in the Telegraph, and 68% of articles and 78% of photos in the Times of India coded as neutral. Anecdotally, many articles in both papers captured several sides when reporting on an issue in a given article. For example, in the Singur resistance, most articles would present the perspective of the resisting villagers, as well as the perspective of the ruling government. However it is also important to note that articles were critical of the government 25% of the time in the Telegraph, and 28% of the time in the Times of India. A notable proportion of photos also were critical of the government (showing injured peasants for example, during times of violent unrest). It is also interesting that the media took a 'pro government' perspective very rarely, 4% of the time in the

Telegraph, and 3% of the time in the Times of India. Clearly the media is capable of criticizing the government. As will be set out in detail below, the negative coverage occurred largely during peasant resistances that were met with government violence.

To further bolster the argument that the media is capable of criticizing the Indian government, I broke the reporting down into one month increments by article tone, and plotted the results over the thirteen month time period, from September 2006 to October 2007. Figure 7-4 and 7-5 below breaks down the reporting further by article tone. For ease of viewing, the Telegraph and the Times of India were separated into two graphs. These figures clearly reveal a notable increase in the proportion of articles that have an 'anti government' tone during times of increase government violence during Nandigram resistance in January and March 2007. It is interesting to note that during the time period when the government suspended democracy in Singur in December 2006, there was no significant up tick in anti government tone in the reporting in the Telegraph, but there was a notable up tick in the Times of India.

In sum, the data reveal that the issues surrounding these resistances were subject to media scrutiny. The media clearly had their eyes open in terms of reporting all sides of the issues. The media generally portrayed a balanced coverage of the resistances and the SEZ debate. Most of the time, the positions of all stakeholders involved would be addressed in a given article. During times of government violence however, the reporting became increasingly critical of the government. This was especially evident during the March 2007 police violence in Nandigram when 14 villagers were killed. Similar trends were noted during the West Bengal government suspension of democracy in Singur, (and the accompanying violence) in December 2006, as well as the government violence in Nandigram in January 2007. This is a telling trend that provides evidence for the true freedom of the press in India. Although much of the reporting was

balanced, it is interesting to note how little of the reporting took a pro government tone, under 5% of the time in both the Telegraph and the Times of India. This indicates that the media generally did not adopt the government's stance that the car factory in Singur, the SEZ in Nandigram, and SEZs in general were good for the state and country. This is different from the observation that media coverage became critical during times of government violence. The media spent very little time reporting on the benefits of the industrial projects, even during times when there was no violence occurring.

3) The Media's role in framing the SEZ issue: I have established that the media gave intense and timely coverage to the Singur and Nandigram resistances, and while doing so, scrutinized government actions and policies during the movements. Did the media also help to independently frame the movements and the SEZ issue overall? This is the focus of the next section.

As discussed above, how the media reports on an issue plays a role in framing the issue, having an impact on those who are being exposed to the coverage. For example, although the villagers in Singur saw their agitation largely in the context of land acquisition, the media could hypothetically have reported on how the car factory would benefit the local economy, or on how the export of the cars would have affected the Indian economy overall. Indeed, both papers did devote coverage to these topics, as both projects would have unprecedented economic implications for West Bengal. This section examines what aspects the media chose to cover, and as such, how the media played a role in framing the Singur and Nandigram resistances, and the SEZ issue overall.

One way to determine how the media is framing the SEZ issue is to look at what section relevant articles are appearing in newspapers. Along with the political issues, SEZs have

enormous business implications. There is a large economic debate occurring in terms of whether SEZs make good business sense, and a good case has actually been made that they do.²⁰ Indeed, the potentially positive economic impacts of SEZs have been touted by various politicians since the passing of the act. As well, major global corporations have set up operations in such zones. The business angle of SEZs should be even more pronounced at the national level, given that in spite of the anti SEZ resistance in Nandigram, SEZs were still being set up at breakneck speed across the country. Indeed, SEZs do have the potential to have large economic impacts on the country. In the Indian Department of Commerce 2006/2007 annual report, it was projected that SEZs would draw US\$5-6 billion in foreign investment by December 2007, as well as generate approximately 500 thousand jobs. The department projects even higher investments and job creation in the years to come.²¹ As such, given the clear economic and business implications of SEZs, it is interesting to see where articles on Singur or Nandigram, and SEZs overall tended to be published. Table 7-8 shows where articles were generally placed in the newspapers. It is worth noting that coverage was rarely published in the business section in the Telegraph (6.6% of the time), and underwhelmingly published in the business section of the Times of India (21% of the time).

This is important to note, given that both the car factory, and SEZ in Nandigram are also significant in terms of a business issue, and of course SEZs across the country also carry significant business and financial weight. Yet the media did not report on the SEZ debate through the lens of business very often, and very few articles about SEZs were in the business section of the papers. By placing such articles in areas other than the business section, the media

²⁰ For a good overview of the costs and benefits of SEZs, please see Amirahmadi and Wu (1995).

²¹ *Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry*. "Annual Report, 2006-2007", available online at, http://commerce.nic.in/publications/annualreport_sezs.asp, accessed 9 February, 2009.

was helping to frame the SEZ issue as a social and political one. Indeed, anecdotally, informal discussions I had with countless Indian citizens during the duration of my fieldwork revealed to me that Indian citizens were generally not thinking of these zones in the context of economic growth, or increased foreign direct investment. Discussions inevitably turned to political issues, and relevant social impacts. How much role the media played in framing citizen opinion would be an interesting and important subject of further research.

It is clear that the car factory in Singur, and the proposed SEZ in Nandigram have widespread economic, political, and, especially in the case of the chemical hub in Nandigram, environmental implications. What issues did the media focus on? Results indicate that articles that covered the Singur car factory, discussed the factory in terms of land acquisition issues 96.6% of the time in the Telegraph and 97.7% of the time in the Times of India. The results were similar for the Nandigram SEZ, with the Telegraph reporting on the chemical hub in the context of land acquisition 81.9% of the time in the Telegraph, and 83.8% of the time in the Times of India. It is also interesting to note that the Telegraph and the Times of India also largely reported on the Singur and Nandigram industrial hubs in the context of resistance against them, over 80% of the time for the Singur issue, and over 90% of the time for the Nandigram issue. This is significant. Both the car factory in Singur and the proposed SEZ in Nandigram had many other newsworthy elements to them, especially in terms of the effects on the local economy. The projects would have had enormous economic impacts on the West Bengal economy and potentially unprecedented impacts in the future in terms of signaling to future investors that West Bengal is an investor friendly state. Such aspects were rarely discussed in the media however. Instead, the papers reported on these issues in the context of land acquisition and resistance, thereby projecting an overall negative image of SEZs. Thus the media framed

the Singur and Nandigram industrial projects in the context of land acquisition issues, and resistance against the projects, devoting little time to other issues, such as economic or environmental implications. Reporting on SEZs in terms of land acquisition and resistance might make sense at the local level, given that such issues were truly the newsworthy aspects of SEZs to be reporting on. The fact that the Times of India, a national newspaper, also focused on Nandigram and Singur in the context of land acquisition and resistance is significant in terms of framing the SEZ debate across the country.

It is also interesting to see how the media reported on the Nandigram resistance in the context of special economic zones. 66% of reporting in the Telegraph and 71% of the reporting in the Times of India mentioned the Nandigram resistance in the context of SEZs. This is an important point to consider. During interviews in Nandigram, it became clear to me that most villagers did not understand the concept of an SEZ. Indeed during one interview, I had to wait for several few minutes as my interpreter tried to explain what an SEZ was to one of the key members of the anti SEZ resistance. As my interpreter did so, the activist became very angry. Most in Nandigram simply knew that they were resisting against a chemical factory that was due to take over their land. By framing the Nandigram resistance in the context of SEZs and the issues surrounding them, the media helped to link the Nandigram resistance with the general national debate on SEZs. Via the print media, articles on SEZs came to be seen in the context of poor, often unarmed (or primitively armed) villagers squaring off against the overpowering forces of the state. Pictures accompanying such articles often portrayed villagers in a state of desperation, anger, injury, and overall despair. In other words the reporting on SEZs in these newspapers took on an air of negativity.

What about articles that discussed SEZs in general (ie not directly focused on the Nandigram issue)? Results indicate similar trends. Articles that discussed SEZs did so in the context of land acquisition 90.8% of the time in the Telegraph, and 88.4% in the Times of India. Articles that discussed SEZs did so in the context of resistance 71.3% of the time in the Telegraph and 66.7% of the time in the Times of India. This further buttresses my claim that the media are framing SEZs as something that is not good for India's development.

One further finding is relevant to note. Chapters 4 and 6 made the argument that opposition parties played an important supporting role to the grassroots movements in Singur and Nandigram. As I established in these chapters, they did not however play a constitutive role that the ruling party in West Bengal accused them of. In fact, I found that within the village resistance, opposition parties were playing a more distant role than was often perceived. How did the media portray the role of opposition parties in the movements?

Generally, opposition parties played a prominent role in media coverage. Articles that mentioned Singur also mentioned opposition parties 65.6% of the time in the Telegraph and 67.4% of the time in the Times of India. Articles that mentioned Nandigram did so in the context of opposition parties 61.6% of the time in the Telegraph and 71.3% of the time in the Times of India. Opposition parties played a less important role in discussions of SEZs overall, mentioned in 39.8% of such articles in the Telegraph and 41.8% of such articles in the Times of India. It is interesting to plot these results in terms of the changing frequency that opposition parties are mentioned in the media reporting over the time period covered. I do so in figure 7-6 and 7-7 to show the timeframes that opposition parties received the greatest media coverage in the Telegraph and the Times of India.

It is not surprising that opposition parties were most heavily covered during the month of December 2006, 82% of the time in the Telegraph and 84% the Times of India. This is the month that national opposition party leader Mamata Banerjee went on a 23 day hunger strike on a stage in the middle of downtown Calcutta. Opposition parties played a minimal role in the Singur and Nandigram resistance, but became a major part of the media stories that were being written on the issues.

What is also interesting to note however that that opposition parties received significantly less mention during the month of March, the month of the police violence against the protesting Nandigram villagers. This makes sense, given that opposition parties only really upped their participation in the movement after the March 14 violence. Lack of reporting with regards to opposition parties during the month of March also reflects that the media reported on this issue more in terms of grassroots protesting peasants against the government, with opposition parties playing more of a backseat role. Coverage of the Telegraph reveals that opposition parties reacted quickly to the March violence, as coverage of the role of opposition parties increased in the 3 months following March 2007. This trend is less evident in coverage in the Times of India.

Results: The Anandabazar Patrika

This next section gives a broad-brush picture of how the Anandabazar Patrika, the local Bengali language newspaper in West Bengal reported in the Singur and Nandigram resistances, as well as the SEZ issue in general. As noted above, time and resource constraints precluded a more in depth analysis of this newspaper. However the goal of this research was simply to see if papers in native languages were reflecting the trends of the English papers. In the results below, I focus on the intensity of reporting in the Anandabazar Patrika as well as the issues that the paper was reporting on. I do not focus on overall bias of reporting as such a measure is subject

to interpretation, and the result would be eroded given the inevitably different coding styles between my Bengali research assistant and me.

1) Intensity of Reporting: Similar to the Telegraph and the Times of India, the Singur and Nandigram issue as well as the SEZ debate overall received intensive coverage in the Anandabazar Patrika. As table 7-9 portrays, in over half of all days analyzed, the front page of the Anandabazar Patrika contained at least one article on the issues. As well, worthy of note, a photo accompanied such articles 54.8% of the time.

The Singur/Nandigram/SEZ issues often received front page coverage in the Anandabazar Patrika. Where on the front page were articles generally placed? Table 7-10 shows, on a day that the Anandabazar Patrika reported on Singur, Nandigram, or SEZs in general, the degree of prominence on the front page that the reporting received. To reiterate from the methodology section above, when multiple articles appeared on the front page on the issues, the most prominent article of the day was selected for this analysis. Similar to the Telegraph and the Times of India, reporting on Singur, Nandigram, or SEZs in general received a high degree of prominence in the Anandabazar Patrika. Indeed, articles appeared on the top of the front page (the most important location in the newspaper) 60% of the time.

Next, I examined media coverage over time to gauge the timeliness of coverage. In order to do so, I arranged the coverage by month. As discussed above, major events that occurred during the time were in December 2006, January 2007, and March 2007. Please refer to table 7-6 for a brief description of the events during these months. Figure 7-8 shows the frequency of coverage that the Anandabazar Patrika gave to the Singur/Nandigram/SEZ issues. Similar to the Telegraph and the Times of India, the Anandabazar Patrika covered the major events in Singur and Nandigram quite heavily. In March for example, 39 articles covering the events in Singur

and Nandigram made front page coverage. As well, it is clear that the events in Nandigram in January spilled over into February coverage. It is interesting to note the spike in coverage during the month of May. Although the Nandigram violence was still receiving heavy coverage during May (as the graphs of the Telegraph and the Times of India show), a reason for this unusually large spike in coverage during May eludes me and would be an interesting avenue for further research.

2) The Media's role in framing the SEZ issue: What issues did the Anandabazar Patrika focus on when reporting on Singur, Nandigram, or SEZs overall? Table 7-11 sets out the central issues that the paper was reporting on. Various aspects to this table are interesting to note. The Anandabazar Patrika mentioned land acquisition significantly less than the Telegraph and the Times of India. Opposition parties however garnered a larger role in its coverage. I suspect the discrepancies in the land acquisition variable are the result of difference of coding styles between me and the Bengali research assistant. However the opposition coverage is interesting. Further research would be necessary to ascertain whether this is correct. Nonetheless, I present the data in table 7-11.

Table 7-12 breaks this data down further, looking at how the Anandabazar Patrika framed the central events. It is interesting to note that, similar to the Telegraph, and the Times of India, land acquisition played a role in the reporting of the Anandabazar Patrika, although significantly less so in the Singur and Nandigram articles than the two English papers. Land acquisition did factor into almost half of articles that discussed SEZs however. Opposition parties played a disproportionately large role in reporting within this paper, discussed over 85% of the time in the context of the Singur and Nandigram resistances, and almost 70% of the time when discussing SEZs.

Conclusion

The media thus served as a key communication point between the affected citizens and the government. Protesting villagers often made sure there was media present before demonstrations began. Government also used the media as a means to convey messages to the affected villagers (calling off the Nandigram SEZ during a press conference for example). Even more so however, the media helped India's citizens hold the government accountable for its violent actions against villagers during protests. Finally, if one can look beyond the fog of violence that has periodically engulfed the Nandigram resistance, it is possible to see that the government has also reacted in a democratic fashion, allowing reporting to occur that was critical of the government's position, and (save for a few days in November 2007), allowing reporters free access to the villages where protests occurred. In this way, the government really has allowed the media free access into the SEZ issue in general.

This chapter has established a number of arguments relating to newspaper coverage of the Singur and Nandigram movements, and the SEZ debate overall. First the chapter shows that coverage of the movements and the SEZ debate was intense, rising significantly during the especially violent times of the resistance. Newspapers devoted many articles to the movements, and articles generally were placed in prominent spots within the paper. Further, coverage increased during heightened times in the movements, the suspension of democratic rights in Singur in December being one example. This indicates that the media were reacting in a timely fashion, often reporting on events immediately after they occurred.

Second, the chapter established that the media in India is capable of scrutinizing the government, a key facet of a democratic polity. Although media coverage tended to be balanced, often presenting the perspectives of the protesting villagers and government in a given article, a

notable proportion of the articles was clearly critical of the government. This reveals that India's media is rigorous and autonomous.

Third, this chapter is in keeping with this dissertation's theme of showing how different institutions of democracy are not merely conduits between citizens and their government, but that such institutions can also have a somewhat independent role in framing issues. Media publishers made conscious decisions on how to frame the SEZ news items, doing so largely in the context of land acquisition and resistance for example. Doing so would have impacts on those Indian citizens who consume media in the country. It would be difficult to measure the impacts of such framing on citizen perception of SEZs. However, one can make the argument that, because information related to SEZs was disseminated in the context of land acquisition, resistance, and negativity, such framing must have had at least some impact on those citizens in India who consume the media.

India's media has been highly critical of the government's implementation of the SEZ act, and has not minced words over government violence in this regard. By being an effective conduit for the resistance, and by framing SEZs in the context of land acquisition and dissent, the media has played a key role in eroding the viability of the SEZ act in the country. Overall this chapter has provided further evidence that India's democracy is functioning. India's media is free, rigorous and capable of exposing questionable government policy and action. As such the media provides an important check on the behavior of political leaders in India.

Table 7-1. Number of instances in the Telegraph and the Times of India that met the inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	The Telegraph	The Times of India
Nandigram mentioned	380	160
Singur Mentioned	323	129
SEZs mentioned	315	207
Land Acquisition mentioned	574	284

Note: 680 articles were coded from the Telegraph and 334 articles were coded from the Times of India.

Table 7-2. Number of days that the Anandabazar Patrika met the inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	The Anandabazar Patrika
Nandigram mentioned	108
Singur mentioned	84
SEZs mentioned	41
Land acquisition mentioned	49

Note: 188 days of the Anandabazar Patrika were coded. Some days contained multiple articles that met the inclusion criteria, and when this occurred the days were counted in the appropriate section above.

Table 7-3. Location of articles in the newspapers

Location of articles in newspaper	Telegraph (local coverage)	Times of India (national coverage)
Front page	20.7% (141)	10.2% (34)
Front page of inside section	71.2% (484)	19.8% (66)
Inside newspaper	8.1% (55)	70.1% (234)
N	680	334

Table 7-4. Location of article on page

Location of articles on page	Telegraph (local coverage)	Times of India (national coverage)
Top	52.2% (355)	56.6% (189)
Middle	36.5% (248)	37.4% (125)
Bottom	11.3% (77)	6.0% (20)
N	680	334

Table 7-5. Location of the most prominent article of the day if multiple articles met the inclusion criteria (inclusion criteria are outlined in table 7-1 above)

Location	Telegraph (local coverage)	Times of India (national coverage)
front page, top	70	14
front page, middle	37	18
front page, bottom	13	1
front inside, top	111	21
front inside, middle	35	20
front inside, bottom	13	4
inside, top	6	81
inside, middle	6	34
bottom of inside	2	4
Total days with multiple articles	293	197

Table 7-6. Major events in the Singur and Nandigram resistances

Legend #	Month	Event
1	December 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 144 imposed by government on November 30, 2006 in Singur: All demonstrations banned. Assembly of more than five persons prohibited. Individual liberties suspended. Section 144 imposed for over two months. • Singur villager and anti land acquisition activist eighteen year old Tapasi Malik raped and murdered on December 18, 2006 • TMC national opposition leader Mamata Banerjee goes on a hunger strike in downtown Kolkata for 23 days, beginning on December 4, 2006
2	January 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On January 3rd, 2007, The Haldia Development authority places a notice at a local government office in Nandigram indicating the imminent acquisition of 10,000 acres of farmland in the region. 28 villages potentially affected. Protest quickly turns violent and numerous casualties are reported in the next several months.
3	March 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police fire on demonstrating villagers in Nandigram. Official death toll is 14, however villagers report a death toll in the hundreds. March 14th is considered 'ground zero' or the national anti SEZ resistance.

Table 7-7. Article and photo 'tone' in the Telegraph and the Times of India

	Telegraph (local coverage)	Times of India (national coverage)
Articles		
Pro government	4.0% (27)	0.3% (1)
Neutral	70.5% (479)	68.3% (228)
Anti government	25.5% (173)	28.4% (95)
N	679	333
Photos		
Pro government	3.6% (14)	0.0% (0)
Neutral	72.2% (281)	78.8% (115)
Anti government	23.7% (92)	21.2% (31)
N	389	146

Table 7-8. Section of newspaper that the article was published

The Telegraph		The Times of India	
Section	%	Section	%
Front page	20.9% (142)	Front page	9.9% (33)
Nation	15.7% (107)	City	3.0% (16)
Bengal	56.5% (384)	Nation	66.2% (271)
Business	6.6% (45)	Business	21.0% (70)
N	679	N	333

Table 7-9. Number of relevant articles on the front page of the Anandabazar Patrika
Number of articles on the front page Percent and number of days

1	54.8% (103)
2	32.4% (61)
3	11.2% (21)
4	1.1% (2)
5	.5% (1)
N	188

Note: Articles that meet the inclusion criteria during the period as described in table 7-2

Table 7-10. Location of the most prominent article of the day in the Anandabazar Patrika that met the inclusion criteria

Location of article	Percent
top of front page	61.2% (115)
Middle of front page	34.0% (64)
bottom of front page	4.8% (9)
N	188

Note: Articles that meet the inclusion criteria during the period as described in table 7-2

Table 7-11. Some general characteristics of front page articles displayed in the Anandabazar Patrika that met the inclusion criteria

	Percent
Days that mentioned SEZs	41 (21.8%)
Days that mentioned land acquisition	49 (26.1%)
Days that mentioned opposition parties	147 (78.2%)
Days that mentioned Singur	84 (44.7%)
Days that mentioned Nandigram	108 (57.4%)
Days that contained a photo	103 (54.8%)

Table 7-12. How the Anandabazar Patrika framed the debate

	Percent
Articles that mention Singur (N=84)	
articles that also discussed land acquisition	25% (21)
articles that also discussed opposition parties	85.7% (72)
Articles that mention Nandigram (N=108)	
articles that also discussed land acquisition	12.7% (15)
articles that also discussed opposition parties	89.8% (106)
Articles that mention SEZs (N=41)	
articles that also discussed land acquisition	47.6% (20)
articles that also discussed opposition parties	69% (29)

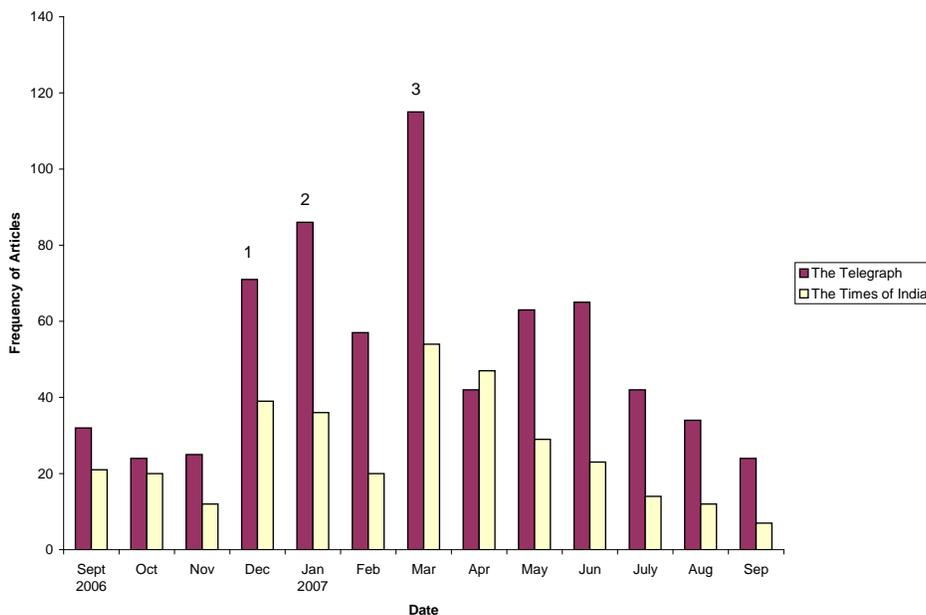


Figure 7-1. Frequency of articles that met the inclusion criteria in the Telegraph and the Times of India (note, please refer to table 7-6 for descriptions that correspond to numbers) [Note: 680 articles were coded from the Telegraph and 334 articles were coded from the Times of India]

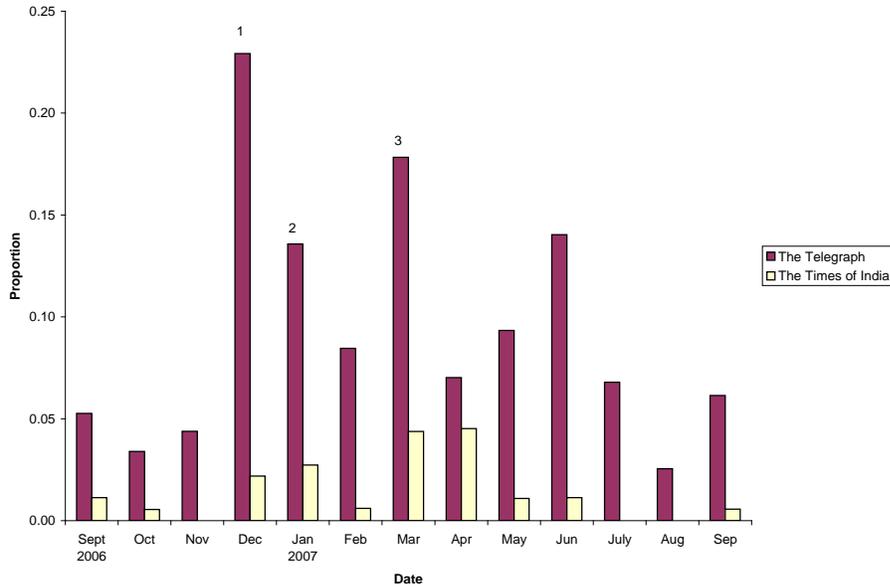


Figure 7-2. Proportion of articles on the front page of The Telegraph and The Times of India that met the inclusion criteria. *The proportions were calculated using a baseline of 3.8 articles a day on the front page of the Telegraph and 4.8 articles on the front page of the Times of India. These baselines were calculated by averaging general coverage on these pages per day over a month long time period. **Refer to 7-6 for descriptions that correspond to numbers

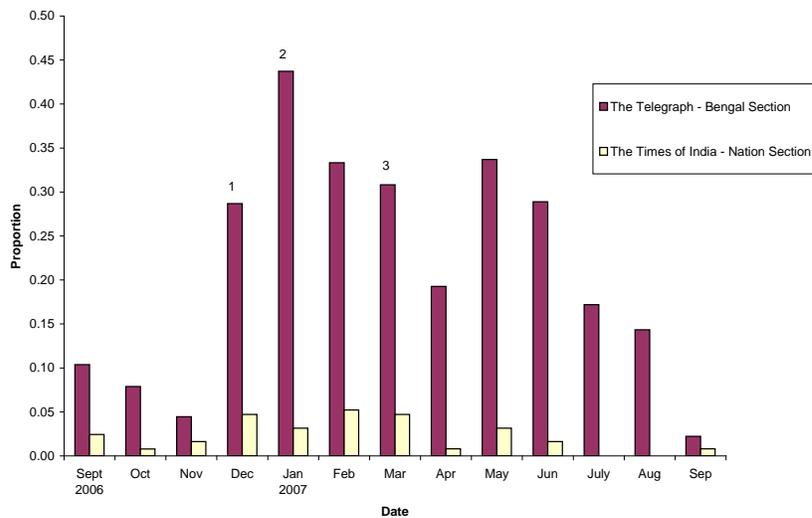


Figure 7-3. Proportion of articles in the front page of the Bengal Section of The Telegraph and the Nation Section of The Times of India that met the inclusion criteria *The proportions were calculated using a baseline of 5.9 articles a day on the front page of the Telegraph and 4.1 articles on the front page of the Times of India. These baselines were calculated by averaging general coverage of these pages per day over a month long time period. **Refer to 7-6 for descriptions that correspond to numbers

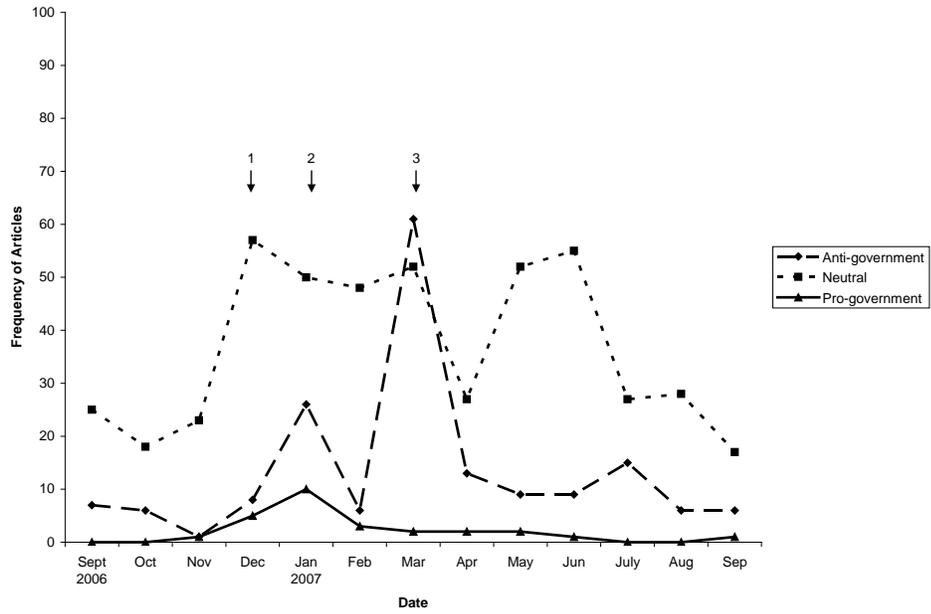


Figure 7-4. Changing tone of articles reported in the Telegraph over the 13 month period. *A total of 680 articles were coded in the Telegraph. ** Please refer to table 7-6 for descriptions that correspond to numbers

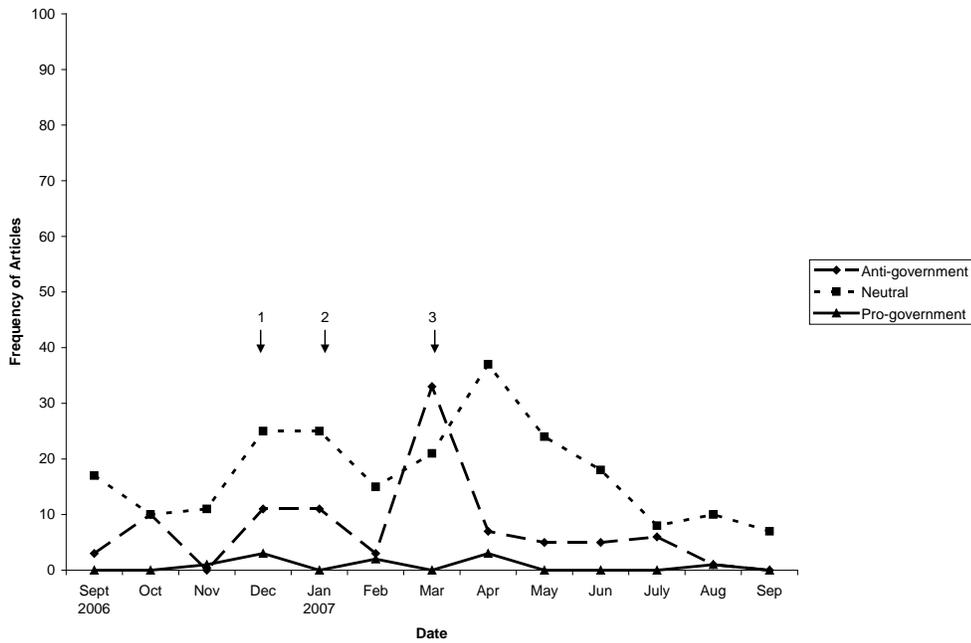


Figure 7-5. Changing tone of articles reported in the Times of India over the 13 month period. *A total of 334 articles were coded in the Times of India. **Please refer to table 7-6 for descriptions that correspond to numbers

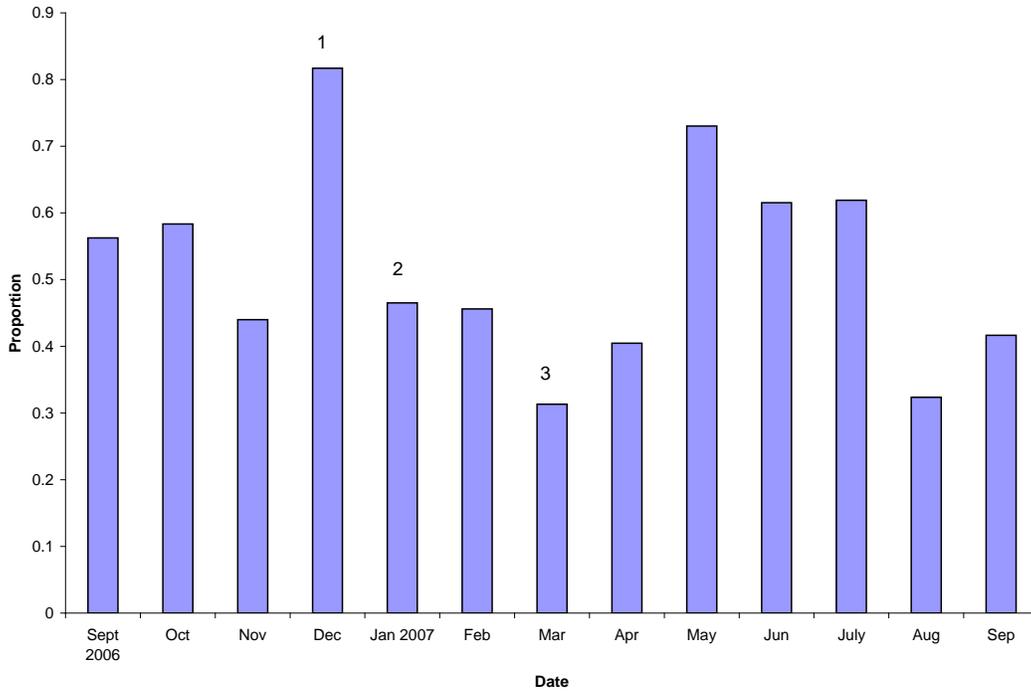


Figure 7-6. Proportion of articles mentioning opposition parties each month in the Telegraph. *Refer to table 7-6 for descriptions of the corresponding numbers

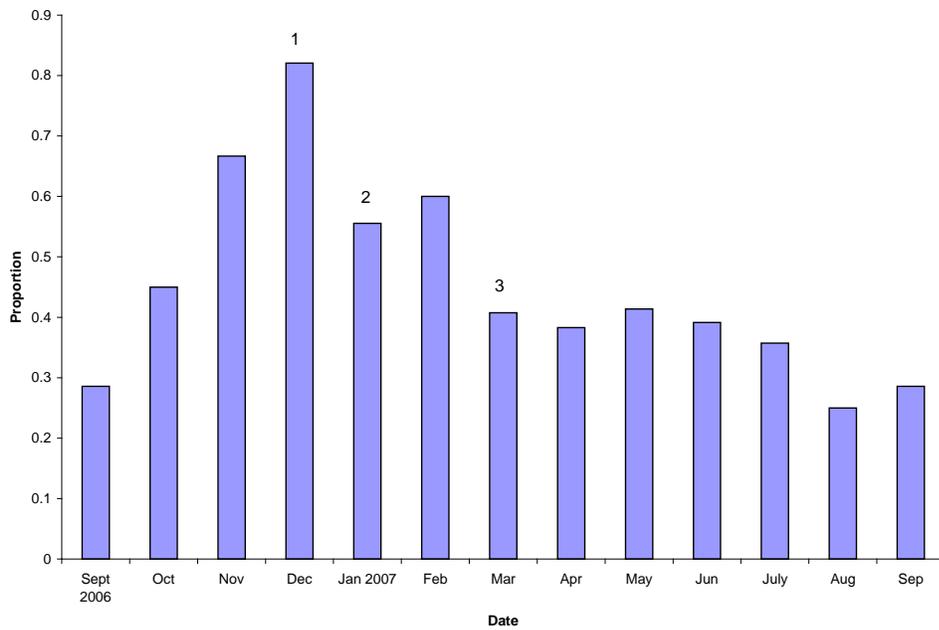


Figure 7-7. Proportion of articles mentioning opposition parties each month in the Times of India. *Refer to table 7-6 for descriptions of the corresponding numbers

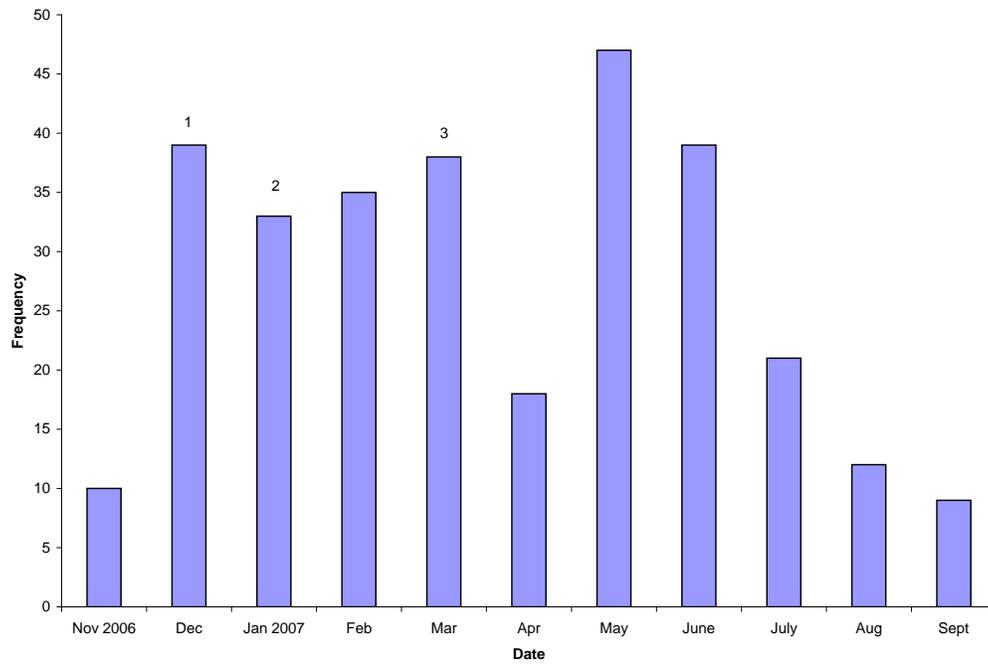


Figure 7-8. Frequency of articles that met the inclusion criteria in the Anandabazar Patrika. * A total of 301 articles met the inclusion criteria. **Please refer to table 7-2 for descriptions of the corresponding numbers

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Introduction

As this study draws to a close, the story of SEZs in India, and the resistance against them is ongoing. As such, the final outcome of the SEZ debate, as well as the impact that the SEZ issue will have on India, economically and politically, remains to be seen. As of this writing, SEZs are still being heavily promoted by the central government, and most state governments. A total of 531 SEZs have now been formally approved by the Indian central government.¹ The Indian Board of Approvals, tasked approving SEZ applications, meet regularly and new proposals seem to be approved weekly. Many SEZs are under development across the country, and some have become fully functional. West Bengal is currently looking for alternative sites in which to house the chemical SEZ that was originally slated for Nandigram. SEZs still have a role in India's economic and political future.

The political environment with regards to SEZs has changed however, and SEZ approvals are occurring under different circumstances than before the resistances. Several zones have been cancelled outright, most notably the chemical SEZ in Nandigram, and all 15 zones in the state of Goa (some of which were already under construction). The government has mandated that no land can be forcefully acquired to establish SEZs. The maximum legal sizes of SEZs have been reduced, and various concessions have been made within the policy that alters the tax incentives of the zones. For example, non processing areas of zones do not receive the same tax benefits as processing areas. This is a significant concession designed to stem non processing real estate development within SEZs. The central government has also revised the country's existing

¹ Up to date information of SEZ approvals is available online on the Special Economic Zones page of the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry's website, <http://www.sezindia.nic.in/>, accessed 17 October, 2008.

rehabilitation and resettlement policy to provide further benefits to those who sell their land to development projects, and help land losers transition into other livelihoods. Significantly, SEZs have also become a campaign platform issue. SEZs dominated the May 2008 local elections in West Bengal, with the opposition Trinamool Congress gaining significant vote share over the dominant CPM party, in Singur and Nandigram, a gain largely due to the opposition party's role in the fighting the industrial projects in the regions. The role SEZs play in the next national elections remains to be seen, but it can be reasonably assumed that they will be an important part of any party's campaign.

Revisiting the Puzzle

The anti SEZ resistance in West Bengal, Goa and other regions across India, as well as the relatively favorable government response posed a number of theoretically relevant puzzles. How were peasants in large numbers able to rise up forcefully and engage in widespread collective action against the projects? Why did activists who would not have been impacted by the projects choose to participate in the resistance? Why did the state governments in West Bengal and Goa cancel SEZ and other similar projects that had already been approved, and that were in some cases under development? Why did the central government concede significant policy points to the resistance? I begin by revisiting existing explanations found primarily in the academic literature that addressed peasant politics.

Revisiting Existing Explanations: A number of existing theoretical explanations have provided insight into the peasant political resistance against SEZs in India. The communitarian approach to peasant political behavior, has been attributed to Scott's (1976), *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, and further developed by many other academics including McClintock (1984), Anderson (1994), and Edelman (2005). Within the communitarian approach to peasant political behavior, peasants engage in reciprocal behavior, leaning on one another in times of need. This

approach helps lessen the risk of economic disaster, which is important given that peasants often live on the edge of subsistence. I have shown in this study that the SEZ resistance in West Bengal was certainly a community response. Scott's original notion of the peasant community was confined however to the village. In this study I extended the communitarian approach to include elite that are external to village settings (such as urban intellectuals and students), who also participated in the resistance against SEZs. Even if it was not in their immediate rational self interest to do so, many of such elite were participating in the resistance in the name of social justice, a key aspect of Scott's work and the earlier work of Thompson (1971) that illustrated the political power of the moral economy.

The Individualist approach to peasant behavior, originally attributed to Samuel Popkin's (1979) work *The Rational Peasant*, provides an alternative but also valuable contribution to this study. Popkin argues that peasant political participation is based on rational calculations of self interest. The reality is that some of the peasant action in West Bengal can be attributed to such calculations. The encroachment of land for both the automobile factory in Singur and the chemical SEZ in Nandigram would have had real life and death implications for the many families whose livelihood's depended directly on the land. It simply made rational sense to participate. Further this approach can provide a window into the peasant resistance overall in West Bengal. As I detailed in Chapter 4, peasants in the state undertook a similar movement in the first decades after India's independence, voting a pro poor communist party (the CPM) into power soon after. Once elected, the party embarked on a number of pro poor reforms. As such, it can be argued that success in the past changed the perceived cost benefit ratio of participating. Peasants had a rational incentive to participate, knowing that they had an increased chance at gaining government concessions (based on based successes).

This same approach is limited in terms of this study in a number of ways however. First, as discussed above, many of those involved in the resistance were not landowners. Some had no economic stake in the land at all in fact. Second, the rational choice perspective, especially as developed by Mancur Olson (1965) predicts a suboptimal climate for collective action, especially due to the large size of the group involved in the resistance. However, political participation against the projects was immense, with the size of protests often running in the tens of thousands of people. Third, in the case of Nandigram, peasants continued their resistance long after the project was cancelled, demanding justice for those killed or injured in the violence. The notion of justice is a non excludable good, and thus the length of the Nandigram resistance cannot be explained by the rational choice paradigm.

They key element missing from both the communitarian and individualist approaches to political participation is that these approaches do not put enough explanatory weight on the importance of political structure in peasant resistance. Some work has been done in this regard (see for example, Anderson 1994). However, these works typically looks at how political structure can either empower or constrain state behavior, thus altering citizen's portfolio of actions. This literature does not lend appropriate credence to how democratic political structures can play a direct role in conditioning both political behavior and the very motivations behind such behavior however. The literature also does not examine how democratic political structures can also condition the outcomes of citizen political behavior in terms of positive policy responses from government. I have extended this literature by showing how India's democratic political structure has been critical to the resistance against SEZs in India and the favorable government response. India's political structure provides the framework in which development is negotiated.

Negotiated Development in India

The widespread resistance against SEZs and the favorable government response is indicative of the fact that India has historically engaged in a process of negotiated development. The foundation for this process is rooted in the country's emergence from colonial occupation as a democracy. The country gained freedom from British rule in 1947 and held its first national elections in 1951. Since then, India has held regular elections at the state and national levels (and more recently at the local level). All elected positions are open for contestation, and the country has adopted universal suffrage from the outset; all adult citizens in India are eligible to vote irrespective of race, gender, or socio-economic status. Political dissent and freedom to protest are hallmarks of India's politics. India's media is free and rigorous, and is often critical of the government. India's founding national party, the Congress, once a dominating force in the country's political landscape has been voted out of power several times, and the country is now regularly governed by coalition governments (Kohli 2001a, 3). India's post independence history has been defined by its democracy. How has this factored into the SEZ issue?

India's democratic political context set the stage for the anti SEZ resistance and government response in a number of important ways. In West Bengal, a grassroots land reform movement in the 1970's and the election of a pro peasant political party (the CPM), who then instituted land distribution and legalized tenant rights taught peasants in the state that resistance and elections can yield results. In other words, peasants in West Bengal understand that participation through India's channels of democracy can work. West Bengal's democratic political history did more than condition the behavior of the state's contemporary peasantry, it also conditioned peasant motivation. Peasants in West Bengal understand that they are, not simply peasants, but also citizens of India with entrenched democratic rights. As such, forced land encroachment for SEZs not only constitutes a risk to the livelihood of Indian peasants, it

also constitutes a violation of their rights as free citizens of a democratic country. In West Bengal, peasants were angry about the reality that their democratic voice was being compromised. The party they had supported turned against them by trying to force them off their land for industrial projects. This same party tried to suppress political dissent through violence. As such, peasants in West Bengal were fighting for political justice along side their fight for their land. This was illustrated by the fact that the resistance in Nandigram continued long past the cancellation of the chemical hub, as peasants continued their fight to gain justice for those killed, injured, or otherwise victimized in the violence. Peasant political participation in the anti SEZ resistance was driven by their anger at land encroachment and their anger over their loss of citizenship rights in a democratic country.

Although the initial resistance against SEZs was primarily within the villages of India, where farmers stood to lose their land for their development, voices of dissent extended quickly beyond rural India. This study provides a small illustration that India's civil society is vibrant and rigorous, as it played a key role in the anti SEZ resistance in India. Many Indian citizens, while not directly affected by an SEZ, drew distinct parallels with those villagers who were directly at risk of being impacted by an SEZ project. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, this was illustrated during a large rally of Calcutta's street hawkers in support of the Nandigram villagers, under the premise that land is precious for street hawkers too. Similarly activist citizens in Bhopal India, still reeling from the decades old Union Carbide chemical disaster thought it unjust that a chemical hub be established in the country, and protested accordingly. Writers, film makers, students, renowned social activists and NGOs also stepped into the fray, fighting the SEZ issue on many fronts. Civil society even descended on Delhi, India's capital, to protest injustices pertaining to SEZs on the national front.

Where the country's institutions of democracy become critical in the case of civil society is that civic participation in the anti SEZ debate was not suppressed by the government. Demonstrations, some numbering in the tens of thousands of participants, were allowed to proceed, often clogging up downtown cores of large cities. Indeed, police often created the space for such resistances to occur, cordoning off large swaths of downtown areas so that demonstrations could occur in a safe manner. Civic activists in Calcutta for example were permitted to erect a protest stage beside the busiest road in downtown Calcutta, taking up a full lane of the road in the process. This stage was the venue for countless demonstrations, speeches, and hunger strikes. What's more, India's civil society understood their democratic rights as citizens and knew that they could participate in civic resistance with little risk of suppression by the government.

India's transition to multi party politics has created the political space for opposition parties to have an important role in political dissent. Opposition parties in India have a real chance of gaining political power nationally, and in the country's various states, and act accordingly. India's opposition parties played an appropriate role in the anti SEZ resistance. Research in Chapters 3 and 4 showed that opposition parties did not instigate the resistance against SEZs. However, as I discussed in Chapter 6, opposition parties reacted with vigor to the resistance. Members of state and national opposition parties were often found at the sites of resistance, sometimes leading demonstrations. Elected opposition members at the state and national level, once silent on SEZs, turned state assemblies and the national parliament into an arena for vigorous debate, shutting down parliament for days at a time until ruling governments agreed to discuss the issue. Most dramatically, opposition TMC party leader Mamata Banerjee engaged in a 28 day long hunger strike on the streets of downtown Calcutta over the issue of land

encroachment for the automobile factory in Singur. What is important to note is that, through their deep involvement in this grassroots issue, opposition parties in India are gaining legitimacy as effective vehicles for dissent, and social change amongst the Indian populace. This was best illustrated by the fact that local elections in May 2008 in West Bengal, resulted in a decisive shift in power away from the ruling CPM and toward opposition parties in the affected regions. Villagers have chosen to take their fight to the electoral arena.

India's media is free and rigorous, and has to a large extent had full access to the anti SEZ resistance. India's media covered agitations that were occurring in the villages across the Indian countryside, as well as demonstrations that were occurring in Indian cities. Amazingly, India's media were present during the violent government crackdown in Nandigram on March 14, 2007, and footage of police and state party cadres shooting activist peasants in the back as they fled the violence is widely accessible. Coverage of the SEZ issue has been heavy and has often been critical of government action.

Peasants in India had a favorable response in terms of media reporting on the anti SEZ issue. Most peasants that I interacted with indicated that they received their news about the SEZ issue, as well as other resistances occurring across the country through both print and television media, and spoke favorably of the coverage. Indeed, I was able to access a high level peasant leader of the anti SEZ resistance in Nandigram during the height of the resistance (and just after the height of violence) only because I was able to bring a journalist along who had interviewed this leader before many times, and had gained his trust. This same journalist garnered me free access to any villager in Nandigram.

The anti SEZ resistance took place against the backdrop of India's democracy. India's democracy did not only constrain the state's coercive power, it played a deeper role, conditioning

the motivations and behavior of those involved in the anti SEZ resistance, protecting the capacity of Indian citizens to express dissent from government, and providing institutional channels in which political dissent could be heard. The powerful role of dissent in India facilitated a process of negotiation where the government conceded important aspects of the SEZ act and the development of SEZs.

Other Contributions of This Study

I would like to make note of two other contributions that this project makes to scholarly literature. In one sense the arguments in this dissertation might not seem surprising: a democratic structure provides a more egalitarian framework on which the voice of the poor is better heard and more effectively responded to than in an authoritarian political structure. However it is important to note that this project adds to a growing weight of evidence against the once mainstream structuralist approach to understanding the politics of the poor during times of economic change. Beginning in the 1960's, William Rostow (1960), set the tone for the modernization perspective, his basic argument being that a state should modernize the agricultural sector so as to allow it to produce a surplus in terms of capital. This surplus would finance a process of industrialization, which would in turn facilitate a transition from a rural based economy to an industrial one, as cultivators moved from the countryside to factory work in the cities. As Yujiro Hayami explains, in such a model, "the peasantry is a remnant of feudal society and bound to disappear as modernization proceeds" (Hayami 1996, 1157). In other words, the fate of the peasantry is inevitable within this perspective.

In response to modernization theory, the school of dependency theory emerged. Its basic premise was that developing countries were excluded from full modernization because of an unequal relationship with modern core countries (Galli 1981, 216). Such a relationship *inevitably* keeps the peripheral country in a state of underdevelopment. Development as such

was defined as the uncoupling of the peripheral state from the unequal economic conditions inherent in the global economy. As Rosemary Galli eloquently points out, both the modernization school and the dependency school provide a purely structuralist window to economic change, both acknowledging, but not accounting for the potential role of political struggle in defining development trajectories. Galli notes, “[b]oth were ideologies of the ruling class, although they represented competing elements” (Galli 1981, 216). This dissertation project provides further evidence against the structuralist perspectives of the modernization and dependency schools, by showing that the poor can be important agents of political change in time of economic growth, and as such, are not relegated to inevitability in politics.

This project also contributes to a growing body of literature (residing mainly in the discipline of economics), that researches special economic zones. Much of this literature is engaged in a debate regarding the cost effectiveness of such zones, and whether they deliver economic backward linkages to host states, as industrialization in a traditional sense should in theory (see for example, Jayanthakumaran 2003). Another important body of work has emerged that document the sometimes deplorable environmental and labor standards existing within such zones around the world (although much of this research remains in the realm of investigative journalism). By researching the SEZ issue primarily in the context of land acquisition for the zones, this project adds a new dimension to the ‘SEZ debate’ that of social justice and land reform for export oriented manufacturing.

Moving Beyond This Study

Both the central strength, as well as the Achilles heel to this study has been the fact that I conducted my fieldwork on the anti SEZ resistance in India during the height of the resistance. In fact, as of this writing, the resistance against SEZs is still occurring across the country as activists and the government negotiate the future of this method of development. Given that I

was able to conduct my fieldwork in real time, during the height of the resistance in West Bengal, I was able to directly observe and record mass demonstrations taking place, speak to people who were directly and recently affected by the resistance, and quite simply, soak up knowledge as the resistance was taking place in front of me.

The real time nature of this fieldwork also limited the study in various respects. For example, when I conducted my fieldwork in Singur, in late 2007, most village activist leaders felt that the resistance against the car factory had failed. Indeed during my fieldwork, construction on the automobile factory was proceeding in full swing. As such many of the respondents in Singur had an air of defeat. Some nine months later however, the resistance proved fruitful when Tata Motors, the automobile manufacturer, pulled the plug on the entire project in October 2008. Similar research limitations occurred in Nandigram. I attempted to conduct my fieldwork in Nandigram during the height of the resistance and violence, but was not able to enter the villages for several months. Once I was able to gain access, it was only for a short time due to ongoing violence. This reality inevitably limited my data collection in this regard. As such, this study reviews an important slice of time in what is an ongoing struggle in India. The final story of the negotiated path of SEZs in India cannot yet be told. Further research will be necessary in the years ahead to fully capture the SEZ issue in India.

It would also be pertinent to empirically extend this study outside of the case studies I have chosen. Due to time and financial limitations, I chose to focus my research in West Bengal, and to a lesser extent, Goa and Delhi. At the time of my fieldwork, these choices made empirical and theoretical sense. I had learned during pilot fieldwork that West Bengal was considered by many as ground zero of the anti SEZ resistance. Some months later, when I returned for further fieldwork, the resistance in West Bengal was in full swing, providing me the opportunity to

capture this story in real time. A similar resistance was taking place in Goa, allowing me to extend my research into another state. Through initial fieldwork in the villages, I learned of the importance of the activist movement against SEZs in Delhi and spent time in Delhi capturing this story as well. There are many other similar stories of resistance occurring across India however, all deserving to be captured empirically and indeed, as of this writing many researchers are currently embedded with various movements against SEZs across India. It will be interesting to look for their work in the future.

Another aspect to the resistance worthy of study is the cutting edge nature of the movement in terms of technology. The anti SEZ resistance is representative of contemporary political dissent, with all the latest means of communication at the disposal of the activists. Cellular telephones, a staple amongst even poor Indian citizenry (it is not uncommon to see a rickshaw puller talking on a mobile), were key to the resistance. Activists across the country stayed in constant communication with one another via text messaging, and many of the mass demonstrations were organized in this manner, which helps explain how demonstrations formed so quickly. One activist even explained to me that many organizers explicitly avoided the use of the internet, choosing to use text messaging to relay messages to one another. This kept the government largely in the dark with regards to the planning of demonstrations.²

Another area in need of further study is how the movement also transcended the territorial boundaries of the Indian state. Blogs quickly surfaced on the internet, some supporting the resistance, and others admonishing it. An online research collective was established, where those researching SEZs and/or the resistance to them could place their findings. As of this writing, the collective is quite successful, and it is possible to find a wealth of information on the

² Respondent #44 (Please see Table A-5 in appendix for respondent information)

site.³ Various groups on the online social community *Facebook* have also sprung up, some quite popular. Global NGOs such as *Amnesty International* also participated in the resistance, criticizing the government violence associated with SEZs. The international element of the anti SEZ resistance, and its potential effects on those in India that are involved in the resistance first hand is worthy of further study.

Concluding Remarks: Wider Implications of This Study

By way of a conclusion, I would like to revisit the question I set out at the end of Chapter 2. Similar to India, masses of people in many developing countries remain in destitute poverty. It is critical that development be fostered and nurtured in such countries. The foundational question that this study raises is: Under what political conditions is economic growth best fostered in developing countries? While democracy is of course typically put forth as the ideal means of governance, especially in terms of the protection of civil and human rights, is this political system also the best means to foster economic development?

In *State Directed Development* (2004), Atul Kohli has answered this question in the negative. Kohli argues that a strong, penetrating, and repressive state augurs best for economic development in late industrializing countries. Such states can forge ahead with aggressive economic plans, while repressing dissent and availing a capitalist class with a cheap, disciplined, and flexible workforce in which growth and industrialization can be nurtured. Quite simply Kohli's perspective points to the authoritarian governments as the system most conducive to rapid economic growth.

On the surface, Kohli's argument, while difficult to swallow, is convincing. He illustrated his argument with a review of the recent political history of Korea, showing how it's strong, stable, and repressive state under the military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee from 1961-

³ *The Citizens Research Collective*, , <http://sez.icrindia.org/>, accessed 5 November, 2008.

1979, provided the political foundation for rapid economic development. It was during this period when dissent was repressed, the media censored, and Korean citizens kept in a state of terror. This was best illustrated by the fact that factory laborers were forced to march to their jobs military style, salute their superiors and have mandated crew cuts. As is know well known, Korea emerged from this authoritarian state of politics a much wealthier country. The country constitutes one of the four ‘Asian Tigers’, and is often heralded as a model for late developing countries. Indeed, Kohli noted, “[a]s records of developing countries go, South Korea is a great economic success story of the twentieth century” (Kohli 2004, 122).

Kohli’s argument is quite appealing when put into the context of India’s development, especially with regards to SEZs. This study has shown that a political democracy can provide the framework in which development can be significantly slowed, or even halted in the case of the chemical SEZ in Nandigram, the automobile factory in Singur, and all 15 SEZs in the state of Goa. The loss of income due to these cancellations is immeasurable. This economic loss is only compounded by the reality that the political instability caused by the resistance to SEZs runs the risk of scaring away future investors. Has India’s democracy stunted its development?

The answer gets to the very core of the notion of economic development, and more precisely – development for whom? Over the last several decades, many developing countries that have grown economically have also seen unprecedented increases in levels of inequality. Countries might be growing, but the poor are getting poorer. In fact, United Nations has estimated that upwards of 100 million more people were at risk of falling into poverty during 2008, which is a sad indictment in terms of our current prescriptions for economic growth.⁴ Growth is not trickling down to where it is needed most.

⁴ *United Nations Radio*, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/detail/10962.html>, accessed 9 February, 2009.

Kohli's answer to effective economic growth might now be dated. In Korea, the Park Chung Hee regime fostered development behind high tariffs, heavy subsidies, and currency devaluation. Economic development was nurtured domestically from above. In the increasingly globalized economy however, development is instead nurtured in some respects from forces that rest outside of the nation state. The last several decades has seen a marked increase in international economic relations, along the lines of increased trade, foreign direct investment, as well as unprecedented growth in capital flows. These globalized economic forces call for a different set of economic instruments to be imposed. It is no surprise that this upsurge in activity in the global economy has been met with increasing economic liberalization among developing countries, of which SEZs play a key role (Rudra 2005, 35). To better position themselves to capture a piece of the global economic pie, developing countries are compelled to lower taxation rates, reduce tariffs and subsidies to domestic industry, loosen labor and environmental standards, and generally reduce the costs of doing business in their country. Such trends led to the coining of a now highly popular phrase, 'the race to the bottom', which signifies the downward pressures that are placed on the economic, social and political environments of countries who strive to create environments that conducive to the profit making initiatives of both foreign investors, and exporting domestic investors. The evidence that developing countries are reducing taxation, and generally weakening social safety nets (ie labor and environmental standards, etc. . .) is compelling and increasingly difficult to dispute (see for example, Rudra 2002). This leads to the strange paradox. Governments are growing in terms of GDP, but are getting less out of it, (due to tax breaks given to foreign investors), and are even eroding their social safety nets (Rudra 2002) As this study has shown, sometimes governments are willing to facilitate development through the use of force.

The critical buffer to these downward trends is democracy. It is through the institutions of democracy that the poor can become better enfranchised in the process of economic development, and thus be better heard in terms of aspects of development that directly impinge on their well being. The inclusion of the poor might slow, or in the case of India, halt development sometimes. Development would be more messy and incremental. Overall however, development under democratic conditions might prove more sustainable.

An immediate caveat can be raised. The advancement of democracy in developing countries might only exacerbate the so called 'race to the bottom'. Countries that promote civil rights, unionization, and social welfare will most certainly lose investment to those countries who seek to create good business environments for FDI. Thus in the short run, one can make the argument that democracy will impede development. However, taking a longer term perspective, the strengthening of democracy would eventually slow the race to the bottom as more and more of the world's poor gain a stronger say in how development is to proceed. For development to have a positive impact on the world's poor, it can no longer be imposed, either through the forces of repressive regimes, or the forces of economic globalization. To prove sustainable, it is imperative that development be negotiated.

APPENDIX A RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This study provides a small window into the overwhelming complexity of Indian politics. I have attempted to capture a little piece of India's deep and vibrant political history, and tell it as best as I could. To do so, I tailored the methodology of this study two ways. First, I used a somewhat unique level of analysis, combining data from a variety of sources to try to tell the story of the SEZ resistance in India more holistically. Second, I engaged a mixed methods approach to capturing this relevant data. In this appendix, I begin by describing briefly the levels of analysis I for this study, and the mixed method approach I used to capture data. I then lay out my methodology in detail.

Level of Analysis: In many respects, this dissertation undertakes a high level and small N approach to understanding the anti SEZ resistance, and government response. While in the field, I learned of many researchers conducting in depth analysis of single SEZs, or localized sites of resistance against proposed zones. Currently there are also at least two books, and several dissertations being written that undertake comparative analysis of select states that are seeing resistance against SEZs. While such research is of course, warranted and important, I felt that a larger national picture was being missed, because all research that I saw was taking place in a localized context. As such, I felt that there was a danger in missing a bigger story by remaining 'too close to the ground'. Thus, I thought it valuable to approach the anti SEZ story by trying to represent what I thought to be the most important actors in the resistance; the villagers themselves, social activists and NGOs (constituting the realm of civil society), opposition parties, and the media. By capturing these important elements of the anti SEZ resistance, and looking analytically at the links between them; as well as their relationship with the village

resistances, and finally the policy impacts that all these elements have had, I have presented a ‘bigger’ picture of the anti SEZ resistance and its associated effects. This is, in my knowledge the first such attempt to do so. It is my hope that, in capturing this bigger picture, I complement the important research taking place that is focusing primarily on local issues related to SEZs in India, or is looking comparatively in terms of Indian states, by presenting a study that examines the different layers of the anti SEZ resistance, both locally and nationally.

Multi Method Approach

As is now common in the discipline of political science, this study strayed from a single methodological approach to scientific inquiry. Instead, I used a variety of methodological tools available within the social sciences in which to inquire about the SEZ resistance in India. This multi method approach was, in my mind, the best means in which to embrace the complexity of the subject matter that comprised this study.¹

In many ways the subject matter of my study dictated the methodologies I employed. This aligns with Uwe Flick’s philosophy regarding qualitative methods that, “[i]n order to do justice to the diversity of everyday life, methods are characterized by an openness towards their subjects” (Flick 2002, 5).² For example, although I had anticipated conducting structured interviews with villagers in West Bengal, I quickly realized in the field that a semi-structured interview format was a better means to capture the stories of their resistances. Often, my interviewees often took the interviews in directions that I had not anticipated, but in ways that enriched the quality of data in this study. Also, I had not anticipated conducting participant

¹ For a good overview of the methodological debates occurring in the discipline of political science, and an overall case for employing a multi method approach to political research, please see Monroe (2005)

² Almond and Genco (1977) wrote a seminal piece on the need to fit methods to the subject matter. On page 10, they argued, “[s]cience...is a commitment to explore and attempt to understand a given segment of empirical reality. The means employed in pursuing this goal should be secondary: in “good” science, methods are fit to the subject matter.

observation. However the opportunity presented itself to me while in the field, when activists set up a protest stage in support of the Nandigram resistance, in the middle of downtown Calcutta. I ended up spending over a week observing the activities at this stage, which formed a significant portion of my data in Chapter 5.

This study directly employed three different, yet interspersed methodological tools. Semi structured in depth interviews, participant observation, content analysis. These are tried and true methods of the social sciences and are excellent tools in which to capture data on social phenomenon.

I used the semi structured interview technique when conducting my interviews. Using this technique places more weight on the subject in terms of defining the direction of the interview. As Flick notes, interest in this technique as a viable methodological tool has grown in recent years, and he argues that, “[t]his interest is linked to the expectation that the interviewed subjects; viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in a relatively openly designated interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire” (Flick 2002, 74). Although I had structured questions going into many of my interviews, often the interviews would be taken in new directions that I had not anticipated, which added to the quality of the study.

The participant observation technique was used to record the activism against the Nandigram violence in Calcutta during November of 2007. This technique is an ideal means in which to capture actions as well as the spoken word (Flick 2002, 159). This was an important methodology during this activism as I was able to capture the essence of demonstrations and protests, as well as a silent march of 50,000 participants in real time.

The methodological technique of content analysis was used to capture information about newspaper reporting of the Singur and Nandigram resistance, as well as the SEZ issue overall in

the country. This is also an important analytical tool with regards to the study of politics, and especially the study of the media. By coding approximately 13 months worth of newspaper articles (Chapter 7), I was able to capture trends occurring during reporting on SEZs and the resistance to them. As Krippendorff notes, “content analysts examine data, printed matter, images, or sounds – texts, in order to understand what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what information conveyed by them does” (Krippendorff 2004, xv). Content analysis became an important means in which I was able to systematically capture underlying meanings and trends behind the newspaper reporting. For example, I was able to show that the media in India can be critical of the government at times, and that the media reported on the SEZ issue largely in the context of political resistance, thus framing SEZs in this way.

Finally, I also used the narrative technique to frame the study in many ways. As Cecelia Lynch explains, “[a] narrative is, simply put, a story. A narrative explanation of interpretation is one that seeks to explain or interpret by constructing from the available evidence a story about an event or series of events or about an actor or group of actors” (Lynch 2005, 158). Robert Bates et al., also describe the narrative, but in less academic terms. In using the narrative methods, the authors pay, “close attention to stories, accounts, and context” (Bates 1998, 10). Given that I was in the field, conducting research as many of the events that defined this study were unfolding in real time, I was afforded the luxury of engaging the narrative method of social inquiry. This was evident in my stories of activism in the villages of West Bengal, as well as Calcutta, as well as similar stories in Goa. In the sections below, I detail the other three methods I used in this study, semi structured in depth interviews, participant observation and content analysis.

In-Depth Interviews

A total of 69 in-depth interviews were conducted during fieldwork in India in 2006 and 2007. This includes interviews with villagers in Singur, Nandigram, and Goa, as well as interviews with members of opposition parties, NGOs and activist groups, government officials and journalists. The sampling was not random, but instead employed a snowball approach. This was especially the case in the villages, where often an interviewee would help me secure other interviews with people they felt important for the resistance stories.

Interviews with Villagers in Singur and Nandigram (West Bengal)

Interviews with villagers in Singur and Nandigram, West Bengal took place during two fieldwork trips. The first was in August of 2007, and the second spanned from November 2007 to February 2008. Table A-1 and A-2 outline demographic data for respondents in these village blocks.

Interviews in Singur: Interviews in Singur took place in August of 2007, and November-December 2007. I used an interpreter for all of these interviews as English is very limited in rural West Bengal. Interview sampling generally followed the ‘snowball’ technique, whereby an interviewee would often recommend the next person I should speak to. In August 2007, I did not conduct interviews in Nandigram. At the time, it was deemed unsafe for a foreign researcher to enter the Nandigram village block, due to sporadic conflicts taking place between villagers and police/state party army. It was five months before it was considered safe for me to enter Nandigram block due to the ongoing resistance to the chemical SEZ in the region.³ Given that local elections were scheduled to be held in May 2008, I was informed to expect a marked increase in violence in the region. Thus, fieldwork time constraints necessitated that I conduct

³ I had various local contacts, including researchers and journalists, who were in touch with the leaders of the Nandigram resistance. I relied on their advice in terms of when it was safe to enter the village block.

interviews in Singur first. Given that the resistance stories between Singur and Nandigram are quite similar, and indeed are related in many respects, Singur provided me with an indirect means in which to fill holes left by research limitations in Nandigram.

Interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours and typically took place inside households of activist villagers. Due to the language barrier, it was necessary to use an interpreter for the interviews. Most interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder (some villagers did not wish to be recorded however, in which case, I took notes). I also spent time in Singur undertaking participant observation of demonstrations and protests taking place on stages in the downtown core of the village block.

Interviews with Nandigram Villagers: I arrived in Calcutta for my second field work trip in November 2007, during the height of the government crackdown on Nandigram villagers. I was not able to safely enter the village block until January of 2008. Even then, the situation was precarious. I was told that it would be best that I keep my time there to a minimum, and I was only able to secure an escort/interpreter for three days. The interpreter is also a prominent Bengali journalist and it was clear that he had gained the trust of the Nandigram activist villagers. As such, I was able to interact with leaders of the resistance movement, as well as those victimized by the violence. While in Nandigram, we were advised to leave the villages well before sunset and spend the nights outside the affected region. The tension in the region was made quite clear to me in fact when, on my last day in the villages, I was informed by a resistance leader that I had been under the covert watch of armed cadres of the ruling party. Interviews took approximately one hour. While in Calcutta in November 2007, I was also able to interview six Nandigram villagers who had been brought by a national social activist from Nandigram to demonstrations against the violence taking place in Calcutta.

Interview Questions: Singur and Nandigram Villagers: The following Interview questions guided the interviews with villagers in Singur and Nandigram:

- How do you earn your income?
- How long have you lived in this village. How long has family lived in this village?
- Do you own your own land?
- If so,
 - How long has this land been in your family?
 - How many acres do you own?
- If not,
 - Do you lease (rent) your land? If so, are you a registered sharecropper?
 - Do you work on someone else's land?
- What types of crops do you cultivate?
- How many crops do you typically harvest in a given year?
- Does your income come solely from agriculture?
- If not, what types of other work do you do besides farming?
- How many family members are you supporting?
- Do other family members work this land as well?
- How important is this land to you? What does this land mean to you?
- Understanding that some people choose not to vote:
 - Did you vote in the last national elections in 2004?
 - Did you vote in the last West Bengal state elections in 2006?
 - Did you vote in the last Panchayat elections?
 - Will you vote in upcoming elections?
- What state party did you vote for in the 2006 elections? If elections were held today, what party would you support?

- Do you feel that participation in elections is important to help solve your problems?
- Do you feel that your vote can make a difference?
- Do you feel that it is important to vote in elections?
- Have you participated in any election campaigns?
- Have you participated in any way during elections besides voting?
- Do you participate in politics in any other way besides voting (during elections times or at other times)
- Do you feel you have enough information about politics in general and the political process in India?
- Where/how do you get your political information?
- Where do you get most of your news? Radio? Newspapers? If so, which ones?
- Are you a member of a political party? (At which level - village, district, state, national)
- Do you prefer a particular state/national party? Why?
- Do you always vote for this party, or does your vote change? Why?
- Do you interact with local party/government officials?
- Have you participated in any protests/agitations/demonstrations in your past besides the recent ones in [Singur/Nandigram]? If so,
 - When and where and why?
 - What was your role in these agitations?
 - What specifically did you do?
 - Do you know who organized the agitations?
 - How were they organized?
 - How did people get information regarding the demonstrations?
 - Did other members of your family/friends become involved?
- Some people say that the CPM gained power in the 1970s and remain in power due to the peasants (ie peasant vote). Do you feel this is true? If so, how do you think this is impacting the current resistance against land acquisition?

- Are you a member of any social organizations? What is your position in this organization?
- Do you know of/interact with members of your local Panchayats?
- Do you feel that Panchayats get things done?
- How important do you think the Panchayats are to your life?
- What role do you think Panchayats have/should have in the land acquisition/SEZ issue?
- Have you or your family or friends demonstrated publicly against SEZs/car factory? If so,
 - Why did you participate in the resistance?
 - What caused you/family/friends to become involved in the demonstrations?
 - Could you please tell me a bit about the demonstrations? When? Where? How many people? Why did you become involved?
 - How did you/family/friends find out that the demonstration was taking place?
 - Do you know who the key organizers were in the agitations?
 - Do you feel the agitation was affective? If so, how? If not, why not?
 - If you were given back your land/given guarantees that your land would not be taken away, would you stop participating in the agitations? Would you continue participation in resistances against West Bengal's current path of development?
- Have you heard of the "Tebhaga movement"? If so, what does this movement mean to you?
- Are you familiar with the 1857 rebellion in Kolkata against the British? If so, what does this rebellion mean to you?
- Some people say that Bengali citizens played a unique and prominent role in the national Independence movement. What is your opinion on this? How important is West Bengal's role in the quit India movement to you?
- Have you heard of 'Operation Bargadar'? If so, what does this mean to you?
- Was your family directly affected by Operation Bargadar? If so, how? If not, do you know other families who were affected by Operation Bargadar?
- Are you familiar with the land reforms/redistribution that the government undertook in the 1970s? If so, what is your opinion on the land reforms?
- Why do you think the government undertook land reforms?

- I have been told that Bengali children grow up hearing stories from their parents/elders about peasant resistance in West Bengal. What is your opinion of this?
- Have you heard any songs or read any poetry regarding the Singur/Nandigram issue? If so, what do these songs/poetry mean to you?
- Are you familiar with other resistance movements in West Bengal's history? If so, which ones? What do these movements mean to you?
- Some people say that the peasant resistance against land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram is so forceful/prominent because rural citizens in West Bengal have a past history of resistance. What is your opinion of this?

Role of NGOs in the resistance

- Have outside organizations, (aside from opposition parties) been involved with this resistance? If so, which ones? Where are they from? Do you think that they have helped or hindered the resistance?
- Some people say that non government organizations (such as NAPM) are driving the land acquisition resistance in West Bengal (and nationally). Others say that non government organizations are playing a supporting role. Which of these is closest to your opinion?
- Have you been exposed to/interacted with NGOs prior to this resistance?
- Have you heard of Mahasweta Devi, Medha Patkar, Malay Sengupta or Arundhati Roy? (*key social activists often mentioned*) Did you know these social activists before the resistance began? If so, what do these people mean to you? What role do you think these people are playing in the land acquisition resistance in Singur and Nandigram?
- Are there other national activists that you think are important to this resistance? (or the national resistance against land acquisition and SEZs?) If so, who and what role do they play?
- Have you been exposed to/interacted with these social activists prior to this resistance?
- Have opposition parties been involved with this resistance? If so, which ones? What was their role?
- How important a role do you think opposition parties are playing?
- Do you think opposition parties have helped or hindered the resistance? (how?)
- Some people say that opposition parties are 'driving' the resistance against the [car factory/SEZ]. Others say that opposition parties are only playing a supportive role. Which of these is closest to your opinion? How strongly do you feel about this?

- Some people say that Mamata Banerjee (*TMC state leader*) and the TMC party are driving this resistance as a means to gain popularity, especially before the May 2008 Panchayat elections. Which of these is closest to your opinion. How strong do you feel about this?
- Who would you say are the key leaders of the resistance?
- Have you interacted with opposition party members before this resistance? If so, in what way/how frequent?
- Some people say overall that outside stakeholders (such as NGOs, social activists, opposition parties) are the driving force behind the land acquisition resistance in West Bengal. Others say that outside stakeholders are merely reacting to and/or supporting the resistance, and that the resistance is primarily driven by peasants. Which of these is closest to your opinion? What role do you think ‘outsiders’ have played in this resistance?
- How much do you know of the SEZ resistances going on in other parts of the country? If so, how did you come to find out about this?
- Do you think the resistance against the car project/SEZs was successful in any way? (in what ways)
- Many have suggested that the resistances in Singur and Nandigram have helped foster a national debate about the future path of India’s development?
- Do you think this has happened?
- Do you think that activist organizations/opposition parties have had a role in this? If so, how?
- How long do you think the resistance will continue for? What factors might stop the resistance?
- What are your hopes and aspirations for your children in the future?

Singur only

- Were you offered compensation for this land? If so,
 - How much money were you offered for this land?
 - Tell me a bit about this? (who offered, negotiations, final result)
 - Did you accept compensation for this land?
 - If yes, why?

- If not, why not? If not, would you have accepted if the compensation rate was higher?
- If not, would you have given up your land if you were promised a job at the factory?
- Did you ultimately lose your land to the car factory? If so, how much land did you lose?

Nandigram Only

- How did you find out that there was a proposal to establish an SEZ in your region? (media, friends, opposition party members etc. . .)
- Where do you currently get your up to date information regarding the establishment of SEZs? (Newspapers? Friends? Opposition party members?)
- Where do you currently get your information regarding the ongoing resistance in Nandigram?
- Some people say that the resistance in Nandigram was partly driven by the resistance to the car project in Singur. What is your opinion?
- Of course, one success of the resistance is that the SEZ project in Nandigram has been halted. Do you see any other successes in the resistance?
- Given that the SEZ project has been halted in Nandigram, why do you think the resistance continues?
- In your opinion is the BUPC composed/driven by opposition parties or villagers or a combination of both?
- What is your opinion about SEZs overall?
- Do you see any benefits to setting up SEZs in India?
- If so, what do you think the government needs to do to make SEZs beneficial for the country?
- The government of West Bengal has had 21 proposals to establish SEZs accepted by the central government. What is your opinion of this?
- Do you think there are other regions in West Bengal, or in other parts of India that are more suited to having SEZs?
- Do you talk about SEZs with your family and friends? If so, do they have the same or different opinions than you?

- What do you think your community overall thinks about SEZs?
- Even though the government has promised not to establish an SEZ here, do you think there is still a risk of an SEZ being established directly on your land?

During fieldwork in Singur in December of 2007, I learned that Singur villagers went on various trips across the country, that were organized by social activists and opposition parties. Generally, villagers went to other sites of resistance, or to Delhi to participate in activism in the country's capital. I returned to Singur, and conducted five interviews with villagers who had participated in such trips. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. I used an interpreter and recorded the interviews using a digital voice recorder. The following questions served as a guide to the interviews:

- When did you go to Delhi?
- For how long?
- Who funded the trip?
- Who organized the trip?
- How many villagers went?
- Who came up with the idea to go?
- Did you go anywhere else?
- How did you get to Delhi?
- Where did you stay while in Delhi?
- What did you do while in Delhi?
- Did you participate in demonstrations, talks, or conferences?
- Did you participate in activism that was unrelated to the Singur issue?
- Did you meet any party members or government officials?
- Were there farmers from other parts of the country participating also?
- Did you meet with any non government organizations?
- Was Medha Patkar there?
- Was Mamata Banerjee there?
- Why do you think you were brought to Delhi?
- Do you think the trip to Delhi was important for the Singur resistance? If so, why?
- Did you feel inspired to continue the resistance after going to Delhi? If so, why?
- Did the trip help you see that other parts of the country were supporting you?

Interviews With Goa villagers

Interviews in Goa took place in December 2007 and January 2008. The main reason I travelled to Goa to conduct the interviews was that it was becoming clear in the media that the Goa resistance against SEZs was coming to a head. Thus I decided to go to Goa to capture the anti SEZ resistance in real time. I traveled to the villages of Keri and Verna, two villages that abutted proposed SEZ sites. Table A-3 provides demographic information for villager interviewees in Goa.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Interviews took place inside village households, and beside proposed SEZ sites. I did not need an interpreter during these interviews as the villagers generally spoke quite eloquent English. The following questions served to guide me during the interviews with Goan activist villagers:

- Can you tell me about the SEZ issue in Goa?
- How did you become involved in this resistance?
- What is your role in the resistance?
- Why is the church specifically involved in the resistance?
- Has your organization interacted directly with government officials? If so, in what capacity?
- Did your organization directly help organize demonstrations?
- What forms has the resistance in Goa taken?
- What role have the villagers had in the resistance?
- Some people say that outside stakeholders (such as opposition parties) are the driving force behind anti SEZ resistances in the country. Others say that the anti SEZ resistances are primarily driven by villagers. Which would you say is closer to your opinion?
- Who would you say are the key leaders of the Goa resistance?
- Has Medha Patkar participated in any demonstrations in Goa? If so, what effect did she have?

- Did any other social activists or out of state politicians come to participate in demonstrations in Goa? If so, what effect have they had?
- What role have opposition parties played in the Goa resistance?
- Did the Goa resistance form any linkages with resistances in other states? If so, how?
- What do you think the Singur and Nandigram resistances in West Bengal mean to the resistance in Goa? Do you think the West Bengal resistances have served as an inspiration? If so, why, how?
- It seems that the Goa resistance has been successful. Will the resistance continue to support other anti SEZ resistances in other states?

Civil Society Interviews

Interviews with members of civil society: social activists, intellectuals, writers, and members of non government organizations took place during both fieldwork trips (August 2007, and November 2007 to February 2008). Table A-4 and A-5 outlines demographic data for civil society respondents.

Interviews with civic activists in West Bengal took place primarily in November of 2007. These included interviews with prominent Bengali writers and social activists, Mahasweta Devi and Nabarun Bhattacharya. I also interviewed a leader of a student activist organization, and a journalist who was present during the March 14 violence in Nandigram. I also conducted several interviews with citizen activists while attending two demonstrations that were held in Calcutta in response to the Nandigram violence. I also conducted interviews with Bengali scholars at the Center for Social Sciences and Jadavpur University in Calcutta during August and November of 2007.

I conducted interviews with leaders of national activist organizations while in Delhi in December of 2007. I interviewed a national convener for the National Alliance of People's Movements, (NAPM), an important non government organization in the anti SEZ resistance, and led by Medha Patkar, a key Indian social activist. I also interviewed a leader from Students for

Bhopal, and founder of The Citizens Research Collective, both important actors in the anti SEZ resistance. While in Delhi I interviewed a leader from an organization called Delhi Forum, the organization responsible for holding Action 2007, a three day national event in Delhi, designed to bring together many activist movements and organization from across the country. In January 2008, I interviewed two members of the church led, “Council for Social Justice and Peace”, while in Goa. One interviewee was Father Maverick, a key leader of the council and important member of the anti SEZ resistance in Goa. The following questions guided my interviews with civil society activists:

Bengali Writers/intellectuals

- How important are writers, artists, and intellectuals to politics in West Bengal?
- Has the creative element had an important role in Bengali politics historically?
- How important is the support of writers, artists, and intellectuals to the CPM party?
- How important do you think the ‘intellectual’ demonstration was on Wednesday?
- What role do you think writers, artists, intellectuals and social activists played (and continue to play) in the resistances in Singur and Nandigram?
- Do you think that writers, artists, poets, intellectuals help provide a voice to the peasants in West Bengal? If so, in what way?
- How important do you think that the support of the writers and artists etc. is to villagers in Singur and Nandigram?
- I read that many filmmakers boycotted or withdrew their films from the recent film festival – how significant is such an action in West Bengal?
- I have learned that West Bengal has a long history of social movements and social resistance. How important do you think the various movements (Tebhaga movement, land to the tiller, freedom movement in Nandigram, 1857 resistance against British in Kolkata) are to the peasants of West Bengal? (Singur and Nandigram specifically?)
- What do you think the land reforms in the 1970’s mean to West Bengal? How important are these land reforms (ie operation Bargadar) to West Bengal?

- How important is Bengali culture (for example, its poetry, its artists, its authors) to Bengalis?
- I have been told that West Bengali children grow up hearing stories about peasant resistance in West Bengal – What do you think of this statement?
- I have been told that West Bengali peasants have a deep culture of resistance? Do you think that this is true?
- Have you ever visited Singur and/or Nandigram, prior to the uprising? If so, why?
- Have you written specifically on the Singur and/or Nandigram issue?
- What role do you think opposition parties are playing in this resistance?
- Some people say that the resistances in Singur and Nandigram are mainly fights between parties, with the villagers caught in the middle. What do you think of this?
- Some people say that Mamata Banerjee is driving this resistance and attempting to keep it alive before the May 2008 Panchayat elections. What is your opinion of this?
- How important do you think democratic freedoms (such as the right to protest) to Bengalis?
- How important do you think panchayats are to rural citizens in West Bengal?
- How important do you think the resistance in Singur and Nandigram is to the country as a whole?
- Some say that the resistance in Nandigram has caused resistances against SEZs across the country. What do you think of this?
- What do you think this resistance is about?
- Do you see any successes in the resistances in Singur and Nandigram?
- What is your opinion about Special Economic Zones?
- Do you support land acquisition for development? If done in a fair way with the full consent of the villagers?

Non Government Organizations

- What specifically does your organization do? (What issues is your organization involved in?)
- What are the goals of your organization?

- What is your role in this organization?
- How did you personally become involved in this organization?
- How long has your organization been in existence?
- Does your organization have formal membership? If so, how many members do you have?
- Does your organization try to recruit members? If so, how?
- How many states does your organization operate in?
- Who are the key leaders of your organization?
- Is your organization formally affiliated with any political parties? Does your organization support a given party?
- How is your organization funded
- What is your organization's stance on SEZs overall?
- What is your organizations stance on land acquisition for development?
- Is your organization involved in the SEZ resistance? If yes
- In what capacity?
- Can you describe how your organization first got involved with the movement against SEZs?
- How does your organization contribute to the resistance movement? (letter writing, lobbying etc. . .)
- What means have you used to try to influence government decisions about the zones?
- Does your organization help organize demonstrations/movements regarding SEZs?
- If so how?
- How did you get the information out that the demonstration was going to occur?
- Does your organization help organize demonstrations/movements for other political issues? If so how?
- How did you get the information out that the demonstration was going to occur?
- Does your organization affiliate with other organizations/participate in activism with other organizations? If so, which ones? How do you accomplish these links?

- How are NGOs banding together to fight SEZs?
- What role do you think opposition parties have played in the resistance in West Bengal and Nationally? What role do you think they should play?
- Some people say that NGOs are driving the resistance against land acquisition and SEZs across the country. Others say that NGOs are reacting to/supporting the resistance and that the peasants are the real engines behind the resistance. Which of these is closer to your opinion?
- Some people say that without NGO and/or opposition party support, the resistance in West Bengal would not have had such prominence. What is your opinion on this?
- What role do you think the media has played?
- What is your organization's future plans regarding the resistance to SEZs?
- One of the goals is to try to understand if and how the resistance against land acquisition in West Bengal fostered a national debate on development and globalization in India.
- Has your organization been directly/indirectly involved in the Singur and/or Nandigram resistance? If so, in what capacity? Have members of your organization traveled there
- Many non government organizations site Singur/Nandigram when involved in national resistances against land acquisition/SEZs. Why do you think this is the case? What role do you think Singur and/or Nandigram have played in the current national debate about SEZs?
- If you think that the resistances in West Bengal are playing a prominent role, why do you think this is the case?
- What role do you think NGOs are playing in the Singur/Nandigram resistance? The National Resistance?
- Some people say that NGOs are helping to frame the resistance as not only being about forced land acquisition, but India's overall role in the global economy. What is your opinion of this?
- What (if any) do you see are the successes of the resistance against land acquisition and SEZs at the state and national levels?
- Do you think the NGOs involved in the anti SEZ resistance have had success?
- If so, how/in what capacity?
- How would you define the successes of the NGO movement?

- How do you think the government has responded to the resistance at the state and national levels?
- How do you think the government will respond in the future?
- What other organizations/activists are involved in this resistance?
- Do you know of any organizations that are in favor of establishing SEZs across India? If so, which ones?

Interviews with Members of Opposition Parties and Government Officials

I conducted interviews with members of three different opposition parties, and a key government official. Table A-6 summarizes the demographic information of these respondents. Each interview took approximately one hour, and each was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The following questions guided my interviews with opposition party members:

- How long have you been a member of parliament?
- What is your position on SEZs overall? Is there any room for them in India?
- Would you see benefits of SEZs if they are established on barren land? If not, do you think the SEZ act should be abolished?
- Why do you think the SEZ act was passed with little debate in parliament? Why do you think there is such strong debate now?
- I understand that you are on an SEZ committee? Can you tell me a bit about that?
- What avenues do you as an opposition MP has in terms of making your voice heard on this issue?
- Is your party doing anything else with regards to the SEZ issue?
- Have you visited sites of SEZ resistance across the country? If so, what did you do at these other sites?
- What role do you think Singur and/or Nandigram is playing in the national movement against SEZs?
- What is the role of opposition parties in this movement?
- What role do you think Mamata is playing? Medha?
- Do you think NGOs are playing a role in the national resistance?

- Do you think the Media is playing a role in the national resistance??
- Why do you think Nandigram happened?
- What do you think will happen at the state level and nationally regarding the Nandigram issue?
- Many say that the CPM base is in the peasantry. Why do you think the party when so blatantly against its electoral base?
- Why do you think the center has avoided this issue thus far?
- Based on media reports, it seems to me that the resistance against SEZs was more forceful in Nandigram than other parts of the country. Why do you think this is so?
- I have been told that the West Bengal resistance is so forceful because the state has a great history of resistance – and this is fresh in Bengalis’ memories. What do you think of this?
- Have you or other members of your party visited other sites of resistance against SEZs across the country? If so, what did you do at these other sites?
- What role do you think opposition parties are playing in the Nandigram resistance? What role do you think they should be playing?
- Is Nandigram a peasant movement or a party movement?
- How important do you think Mamata Banerjee is to this movement?
- How important do you think activists such as Medha Patkar are to this movement?
- What role do you think NGOS have played in the anti SEZ resistance in WB and nationally? What role should they play?
- What do you think the impact of the Singur resistance has been across the state, and nationally?
- What do you think the impact of the Nandigram resistance has been across the state and nationally?
- Do you think Nandigram has been the main catalyst behind resistances now going on across the country against SEZs?
- How do you think Nandigram changed the character of the SEZ movement nationally?
- Do you anticipate a change in the national SEZ policy due to Nandigram? Do you think the centre parties have been weakened due to Nandigram?

I also interviewed Gopal Pillai, India's commerce secretary at his office in January 2008.

The interview lasted 20 minutes and was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The following questions guided this interview:

- What role do special economic zones have in the current and future economic development of India?
- Why do you think SEZs have become so controversial in India?
- Your government had strong support from all parties when the act was passed. Why do you think this has eroded?
- Why do you think Nandigram has become such a controversial issue?
- Do you think Nandigram has had a role in the current national debate on SEZs?
- Since the inception of the act, the government has made changes to SEZ policy that seems to address some of the adverse social and economic impacts of SEZs. Do you think that some of these changes have come about in response to the resistance to SEZs in the country?
- Did the government anticipate the current resistance to SEZs in the country?
- The Congress government has officially notified the center of its intention to scrap all proposed SEZs in the state. If SEZs are indeed good for the economic development of the country, why do you think the government in Goa is taking this course of action? Would you see this as a sign of differing perspectives/positions within the congress party? Does this weaken the party's position on special economic zones?
- What role do you think opposition parties have had in the current SEZ debate?
- What role do you think the media has had in the current SEZ debate?

Participant Observation

While in Calcutta in November 2007, I undertook participant observation of demonstrations taking place at a protest stage that was erected to facilitate protests against the Singur and Nandigram violence. I observed the demonstrations and activism that was taking place on and around the stage for a period of three days. I observed numerous demonstrations, as well as speeches, and protest marches. I also observed a protest march of 50,000 people that

took place on November 12, 2007. The march consisted mainly of intellectuals, writers, and filmmakers. While attending these demonstrations, I also conducted several interviews. I undertook participation observation for a period of ten days in November 2007.

Content Analysis

I have overviewed the methodology utilized for the content analysis of India's newspaper coverage in Chapter 7. I present further details here. Content analysis was undertaken of two West Bengal newspapers – The Telegraph and The Anandabazar Patrika. For national coverage I coded articles from the Times of India.

Coding Criteria: The following coding criteria were used to collect data on The Telegraph and the Times of India

Date: The date of the paper for the article

Location: The location of the article in the newspaper. The article was coded as being either on (1) the front page of the newspaper; (2) the front page of an inside section (for example, the front of the business section within the newspaper); or (3) inside of the newspaper (not falling on either the front page of the paper, or the front page of any of the paper's sections).

Section: This is the section of the newspaper that the article was displayed. The article was coded as being either on (1) the Front page, (2) the City section, (3) the Business section, (4) the Nation section, or (5) the Bengal section (Telegraph only).

Page Location: The article was coded as either falling on (1) the top of the page, (2) the middle of the page, or (3) the bottom of the page.

SEZ: The article was coded as having mentioned special economic zones or not.

Land Acquisition: The article was coded as having mentioned land acquisition or not.

Resistance: The article was coded as having mentioned grassroots resistance or not.

Opposition Parties: The article was coded as having mentioned opposition parties or not.

Singur: The article was coded as having mentioned Singur or not.

Nandigram: The article was coded as having mentioned Nandigram or not.

Article Tone: Each article was coded for tone present in the article. Articles that presented information that was primarily favorable to the position of the government were coded as ‘pro government’. For example, The Telegraph would periodically run stories about how the Auto plant in Singur would stimulate the local economy. Such articles would be coded as ‘pro government’. Articles that presented information that was primarily favorable towards the resistance were coded as ‘anti government’. For example, on March 15, 2007, the day after police opened fire on peasants in Nandigram, killing 14 villagers, the Times of India published an article with the title: “Red Terror Leaves Nandigram in Tatters”, (Red Terror referring to West Bengal’s ruling CPM party).⁴ This article was coded as ‘anti government’. Articles that presented both sides of the issue were coded as ‘neutral’. It should be noted that articles were coded as anti or pro government, only when this clear tone existed. In the absence of a clear tone, articles were coded as neutral. As such, this presents a conservative test of the existence of media tone.

Photo: The article was coded as containing a photograph or not

Photo Tone: Each photo was coded for the tone that it represented. Photos that were generally favorable to the position of the government were coded as ‘pro government’. Photos that were generally favorable to the position of the resistance were coded as ‘anti government’. Photos that were neither pro government, nor anti government were coded as ‘neutral’. Of course coding bias in a photo is a subjective endeavor. As such, similar to the conservative approach taking in the Article Tone variable, in the absence of a clear tone, photos were coded as neutral.

⁴ *Times of India*, March 15, 2007, Delhi Edition, Nation Section

Most Prominent Article of the Day: As stated above, 680 articles in the Telegraph and 334 articles in the Times of India were coded over a period of 395 days. On particular days, the media coverage was extensive. For example, on March 15, 2007, the day after the police violence in Nandigram, The Telegraph had 16 articles that met the inclusion criteria, and The Times of India had 6 articles that met the inclusion criteria. To get a sense of the prominence of the media coverage on a day-to-day basis, the most prominent article of the day was categorized in terms of the location of the article in the paper, and the location of the article on the page. Table A-7 shows the hierarchy of prominence. Table A-8 lays out a summary of some of the general characteristics of articles coded in the Telegraph and the Times of India.

The Anandabazar Patrika: The following coding criteria were used to collect data on The Anandabazar Patrika

Date: The date that the front page contained an article that met the inclusion criteria

Page Location: Articles on the front page were coded as falling either on the top, middle, or bottom. If multiple articles appeared on the front page, the position of each article was recorded.

SEZ: The front page was coded as having mentioned special economic zones or not.

Land Acquisition: The front page was coded as having mentioned land acquisition or not.

Singur: The front page was coded as having mentioned Singur or not.

Nandigram: The front page was coded as having mentioned Nandigram or not.

Opposition Parties: The front page was coded as having mentioned opposition parties or not.

Photo: The front page was coded as having a photo or not.

Total Articles: Articles that met the inclusion criteria were counted.

Most Prominent article of the day: As stated above, on 188 days the front page of the Anandabazar Patrika met the inclusion criteria. Similar to the Telegraph and the Times of India,

on some days, coverage was extensive. On March 16, 2007, two days after the police violence in Nandigram, five articles appeared on the front page of the paper. To gain a sense of the prominence that the articles received on the front page table A-7 sets out how the most prominent article of the day was categorized.

Table A-1. Demographics of anonymized respondents from Singur and Nandigram

Location	Respondent Number	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date
Singur*	5	male	landowner	Aug-07
	8	female	Housewife	Aug-07
	9	male	landowner	Sep-07
	15	male	landowner and sharecropper	Dec-07
	16	male	sharecropper	Nov-07
	17	female	housewife	Sep-07
	18	male	Landless laborer	Sep-07
	19	male	landowner	Nov-07
	20	female	housewife	Nov-07
	32	female	housewife	Dec-07
	33	female	housewife	Nov-07
	34	female	housewife	Dec-07
	35	male	landowner	Dec-07
	50	male	landowner	Sep-07
	51	female	landowner	Aug-07
	52	male	landowner	Sep-07
	55	male	Landowner	Dec-07
	65	male	landowner	Dec-07
	66	male	landowner	Nov-07
67	male	sharecropper	Dec-07	
Nandigram*	23**	female	housewife	Nov-07
	64**	female	housewife	Jan-08
	45	male	landowner	Jan-08
	47	male	sharecropper	Nov-08
	48	female	housewife	Jan-08
	49	male	landowner	Jan-08
	53	male	sharecropper	Jan-08
	54	female	housewife	Jan-08
	68	male	landless laborer	Jan-08

*Singur: N=19, Nandigram: N=9

**These interviews took place in Calcutta

***Respondents in this table were anonymized because at the time of the interviews, the situation was still quite volatile both in Singur and Nandigram. The state government was in the process of trying to identify villager activists who might have perpetrated violence during the resistances. Many activists had been charged with various crimes against the state. Further, the situation regarding SEZs and the resistance to them is still potentially volatile in India. Thus it was important to protect the anonymity of the respondents, something I explained to all respondents at the outset of the interviews.

Table A-2. Demographics of Singur respondents who were not anonymized

Respondent Number	Name	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date	Interview Location
6	Shankar Jana	Male	shop owner and local party leader in Singur Gram Panchayat	Sep-07	Singur, West Bengal
7	Dudh Kumar*	male	elected leader with the Trinamool Congress Party	Sep-07	Singur, West Bengal

*N=2

** All respondents in this table explicitly gave me their permission to use their names

Table A-3. Demographics of anonymized respondents in Goa villages

Respondent Number	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date	Location
39	male	day laborer	Jan-08	Verna, Goa
40	male	landowner	Jan-08	Keri, Goa
41	male	landowner	Jan-08	Keri, Goa
56	male	day laborer	Jan-08	Verna, Goa
57	male	elected member of panchayat	Jan-08	Keri, Goa
59	male	Landowner	Jan-08	Verna, Goa
60	male	Landowner	Jan-08	Verna, Goa
61	male	Landowner	Jan-08	Keri, Goa
62	female	housewife	Jan-08	Keri, Goa
63	male	day laborer	Jan-08	Goa

*N=10

** Respondents in this table were anonymized because at the time of the interviews, the situation was still quite volatile in terms of village resistances against SEZs. Thus it was important to protect the anonymity of the respondents, something I explained to all respondents at the outset of the interviews.

Table A-4. Demographics for anonymized civil society respondents in West Bengal

Respondent Number	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date	Interview Location
3	male	reporter	Aug-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
10	male	Researcher/activist	Aug-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
12	male	student activist	Aug-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
14	male	Journalist	Aug-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
24	male	Protest Organizer	Dec-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
25	male	NGO leader	Nov-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
26	male	Organizer for National Hawkers Association	Dec-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
27	male	Organizer for National Hawkers Association	Dec-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
29	male	street hawker	Dec-07	Calcutta, West Bengal
35	male	Senior TMC party member	Dec-07	Singur, West Bengal

*N=10

** Respondents in this table were anonymized because at the time of the interviews, the situation was still quite volatile both in Singur and Nandigram. Further, the situation regarding SEZs and the resistance to them is still potentially volatile in India. Thus it was important to protect the anonymity of the respondents, something I explained to all respondents at the outset of the interviews.

Table A-5. Demographics of civil society respondents who were not anonymized

Respondent Number	Name	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date	Interview Location
	Nabarun				Calcutta, West Bengal
1	Bhattacharyaa	male	writer	Nov-07	Bengal
	Mahasweta				Calcutta, West Bengal
2	Devi	female	writer	Nov-07	Bengal
30	Rajendra Ravi	Male	Leader NAPM Activist, Students for	Jan-08	Delhi, India
			Bhopal		
31	Shalini Sharma	female	Former land reform commissioner:	Nov-07	Delhi, India
	Debarata		West Bengal		
36	Bhattacharya	male	leader Citizens Research	Dec-07	Delhi, India
	Aseem				
37	Shrivastava	male	Collective Activist, Delhi	Dec-07	Delhi, India
44	Vijayan MJ	male	Forum	Jan-08	Delhi, India
	Father		Priest, Panaji		
58	Maverick	male	Goa	Jan-08	Panaji Goa

*N=8

** All respondents in this table explicitly gave me their permission to use their names

Table A-6. Demographics of opposition member party member and government official respondents

Respondent Number	Name	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date	Interview Location
	Diprankar		leader of national opposition party		Calcutta, West Bengal
22	Bhattacharya	male	CPI (ML)	Nov-07	West Bengal
			Member of Indian national parliament		
38	Dinesh Travedi	Male		Dec-07	Delhi, India
	Nalin Satyakam		national convener, media cell, BJP		
42	Kohli	male	Commerce Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India	Jan-08	Delhi, India
43	Gopal Pillai	male		Jan-08	Delhi, India

*N=4

** All respondents in this table explicitly gave me their permission to use their names

Table A-7. Hierarchy of prominence of articles that met the inclusion criteria in the Telegraph and Times of India

Location of Article	Degree of Prominence (1=most prominent, 9 = least prominent)
<i>Most prominent:</i> top of front page	1
Middle of front page	2
Bottom of front page	3
Top of front page of inside section	4
Middle of front page of inside section	5
Bottom of front page of inside section	6
Top of inside of newspaper	7
Middle of inside of newspaper	8
<i>Least prominent:</i> bottom of inside of newspaper	9

Table A-8. Some general characteristics of the articles coded in the Telegraph and the Times of India

Variable	Telegraph N=680	Times of India N=334
Location of articles in newspaper		
Front page	20.7%	10.2%
Front page of inside section	71.2%	19.8%
Inside newspaper	8.1%	70.1%
Location of articles on page		
Top	52.2%	56.6%
Middle	36.5%	37.4%
Bottom	11.3%	6.0%
% articles that mention Singur	47.5%	38.6%
% articles that mention Nandigram	55.9%	47.9%
% articles that mention SEZs	46.2%	62.0%
Articles that mention Land Aquisition	84.4%	85.0%
Articles that mention resistance	78.2%	72.5%
Articles that mention opposition parties	51.9%	47.3%
Bias of Article		
Pro government	4.0%	3.0%
Neutral	70.5%	68.3%
Anti government	25.5%	28.4%
% of articles that also contained a photo	57.2%	43.7%
Bias of Photo		
Pro government	3.6%	0.0%
Neutral	72.2%	78.8%
Anti government	23.7%	21.2%

Table A-9. Hierarchy of prominence of articles that met the inclusion criteria in the Anandabazar Patrika

Location of Article	Degree of Prominence (1=most prominent, 9 = least prominent)
<i>Most prominent:</i> top of front page	1
Middle of front page	2
<i>Least Prominent:</i> bottom of front page	3

APPENDIX B
TWO LETTERS TO GOAN STATE GOVERNMENT FROM GOAN CIVIL SOCIETY



October 29, 2007

MEMORANDUM TO CHIEF MINISTER, GOVERNMENT OF GOA

IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF SEZ POLICY

We write to draw your attention to the news item appearing in the Economic Times, Saturday, October 27, 2007, entitled "NO SEZ IF LOCALS DON'T WANT IT: NATH" (copy enclosed for your perusal). In the report, Mr. Kamal Nath, Commerce Minister and one of the strongest proponents of SEZs in the Central Government, has said "The Government can revoke permission and scrap any SEZ if people do not want it". In the report, the Central Commerce Minister further makes it abundantly clear that the government will not hesitate to intervene even after work on the SEZ has begun and all necessary permissions granted. He says "If people don't want it, it will not go ahead." The PMAS salutes the Union Commerce Minister's democratic and people oriented stance on the SEZ issue.

The people of Goa have said a resounding NO to SEZs through gram sabha resolutions and the South Goa Zilla Panchayat resolution. Therefore, in the light of the Union Commerce Minister's statement, there seems to be no reason for the Goa Government not to immediately put a stop to all ongoing work on SEZ projects in Goa and in fact, forthwith withdraw the SEZ policy for the state, in view of the strong people's opposition to the same.

The SEZ policy is a life and death issue for Goa. We are sure that as Chief Minister you would not wish to preside over and be responsible for what will surely go down as the biggest government created disaster in the history of liberated Goa. Therefore, the PMAS sincerely appeals to you to stand by the people and not condone the serious lapses of previous state Governments, who have neither applied their minds vis a vis the disastrous implications of this policy on the state nor have consulted the people and shown any transparency in their dealings on this issue, but withdraw the SEZ policy forthwith for Goa before the people from all over the state are compelled to act in order to make their voices heard and display their determination to protect the state from the Government's destructive SEZ policy.

The PMAS is also surprised at your statement that the GIDC is formed under the Companies Act and as such you do not feel the need for an inquiry. Even if the GIDC is formed under the Companies Act, the allegations and the FIR filed by us at various police stations cannot be swept under the carpet since it involves large tracts of public land and huge losses for the public exchequer. Therefore, the people of Goa have a right to know the truth about the functioning of GIDC. This can only come about through a CBI inquiry in the interests of objectivity, transparency and credibility.

When the people's demand for a CBI inquiry is vociferously and publicly echoed by those at the centre of the controversy, namely Aleixo Sequeira, Power Minister and MLA and Chandrakant Kavlekar, Chairman, GIDC and MLA, it is perplexing why you are reluctant to call for a CBI inquiry in the pursuit of truth, taking shelter instead under the Companies Act. Surely you will appreciate that an impartial inquiry will either clear your colleagues of all charges or make them accountable for their deeds whilst holding public office.

Looking forward to your early action

Yours truly,
For and on behalf of PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT AGAINST SEZs

Charles Fernandes
Convenor

Encl: Press cutting from Economic Times, Saturday, October 27, 2007

SAVE GOAN LAND. PROTECT GOAN IDENTITY.

NAGARIK KRUTI SAMITEE
KERI PONDA GOA

Date: 11/10/2007

To,
HON. HOME MINISTER,
Govt. of Goa
F8nsj1 - Goa

Sub: Deliberation against SEZ proposed
to be set at BHUTKHAMB, Kerim of Ponda
Taluka.

Sir,

This deliberation is given to you by the undersigned Samitee of village Kerim of Ponda Taluka for the following:

1. First of all the villagers protest against the decision taken by the Government of Goa for setting SEZ in the village Kerim of Ponda Taluka.
2. That the Village Kerim mostly consists of agricultural/horticultural land and people are happy with their age old tradition.
3. That the proposed area i.e; Bhootkhamb is a plateau underneath contains stock of water which helps in supplying regular water not only to the Village of Kerim but also to surrounding Villages like Priol, Savai-Vere, Vagurme, Khandepar and Opa.

The Villagers can do their age old tradition of farming only on the said water stock. The paddy fields of Vagurme, and the 'Kulagars' of other villages gets water only from the said plateau.

4. According to the policy of SEZ implemented by the Government the SEZ authority shall ensure the provision of adequate water supply within the SEZ for SEZ units.

To ensure the provisions of adequate water supply, the SEZ units have to go for bore wells. The Villagers have experienced this fact when the said plateau was allotted to the Nylon 6,6 unit and the said unit had dug some bore wells on practical basis. These had affected the natural flow of water in the villages.

Further the garbage will be spread by wind to all the surroundings villages. The Pharmaceuticals Industrial waste is disposed in the soil, the same will mixed with ground water, it affected not only surrounding villages it but also mix with Opa water works from where water is supplied to the most of the parts of North Goa. Therefore if the said area is allotted to SEZ, great harm will be caused to the nature. The villagers have to leave their age old tradition of farming which is the basic source of income in the surrounding villages. Further it will also affect the health of the villagers.

The village of Kerim and surrounding villages are rich in culture. It has given birth to many well known artists, freedom fighters and social workers. By setting SEZ, the same will affect the social life of the villagers. The village have to suffer influx of migrants. This may lead to further problem like health, Garbage, law and order, prostitution etc. Presently Goa is experiencing many crimes in the industrial estates e.g. Tanuja Naik murder case at Madkai Industrial Estate. The villagers in the village of Kerim and surrounding are presently residing in peace. By setting up SEZ the same will going to affect.

6. The Villagers of Kerim wanted to live in non-polluted environment in peace and harmony. The village have therefore objected for the project of Nylon 66 which was imposed on the village. The villagers do not want any factories at the said acquired place and wanted to keep the environment green and clean.

The said plateau was used as pasture ground by the ancestors of the villagers till it was acquired by the government. To create employment the Government may go for eco friendly projects. The said acquired land may be allotted to start projects like dairy farming. Through which people will get an opportunity of

employment for unskilled as well highly skilled persons. The villagers are ready to start the project if proper infra structures are provided.

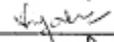
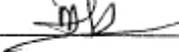
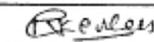
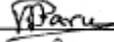
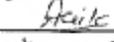
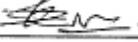
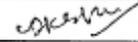
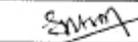
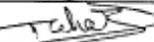
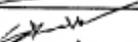
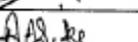
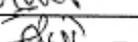
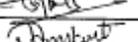
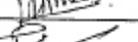
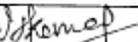
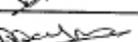
7. In short the said plateau underneath contains stock of water which is in the breath of the villagers from Kerim, Priol, Savai-Vere, Khandeparkar and Vargurme and to protect it the villagers are ready to do on.

8. You are therefore, requested to study the matter and to direct to the concern party to stop the construction carried out at the said acquired land at Bhutkhamb, Kerim immediately within 15 days.

9. Hope that the Government will not see the end of the villagers.

Copy to :

1. His Excellency President of India.
2. Prime Minister of India.
3. His Excellency Governor of Goa.
4. Leader of Opposition, Lok Sabha.
5. Leader of Opposition, Goa Legislative Assembly.
6. Chief Secretary, Govt. of Goa.
7. Minister of Industries, Govt. of Goa.
8. M.L.A., Priol Constituency.
9. Collector of North Goa, Panaji.
10. Village Panchayat, Kerim.

SR. NO	NAME	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
1	Dr. Vedesh Jalmi	Sarpanch, V.P. Keri	
2	Ankush Varik	Dy. Sarpanch, V.P. Keri	
3	Sitaram Gaude	Panch, V.P. Keri	
4	Rohidas Kerkar	Panch, V.P. Keri	
5	Mrs. Ashwini Gaude	Panch, V.P. Keri	
6	Mrs. Asshruti Parwar	Panch, V.P. Keri	
7	Mrs. Trupti Naik	Panch, V.P. Keri	
8	Ramkrishna Jalmi	Teacher/Farmer	
9	Santosh Gaude	Ex. Sarpanch/Farmer	
10	Dattanand Gaude	Ex. Sarpanch/Farmer	
11	Mrs. Pratiksha Gaude	Ex. Sarpanch/Farmer	
12	Amol Kerkar	Business/ Farmer	
13	Sudhir Desai	Business/ Farmer	
14	Dilesh Hazare	Teacher/Farmer	
15	Rohidas(Anna) Satarkar	Farmer /	
16	Ramdas Jalmi	Service/Farmer	
17	Subhash Kerkar	Business/Farmer	
18	Abhijit Kerkar	Business/ Farmer	
19	Shailesh Kerkar	Service	
20	Uday Jathar	Business/ Farmer	
21	Pravin Shrivant	Business	
22	Rajesh Gaude	Farmer/	
23	Dipak Hazare	Teacher/Farmer	
24	Willam Perera	Business/ Farmer	
25	Uday Kamat	Farmer/	
27	Naresh Kamat	Service/Farmer	
28	Devdatt Kerkar	Teacher/Farmer	
29	Dilip Palsarkar	Teacher/Farmer	

30	Mrs. Shivani Kerkar	Farmer/	<i>Shivani Kerkar</i>
31	Dipak Gaude	Farmer/	<i>Dipak Gaude</i>
32	Miss.Alisha Sawant	Students	<i>Alisha</i>
33	Miss.Swati Kerkar	Farmer/	<i>Swati Kerkar</i>
34	Aditya Dhamaskar	Business/ Farmer	<i>Aditya</i>
35	Pradip Gaude	Farmer/	<i>Pradip Gaude</i>
36	Prakash Satarkar	Service	<i>Prakash Satarkar</i>
37	Sagar Gad Kerkar	Service/Farmer	<i>Sagar Kerkar</i>
38	Premanand Gaude	Farmer/	<i>Premanand Gaude</i>
39	Prasad Gurav	Teacher/Farmer	<i>Prasad Gurav</i>
40	Sanjay Gurav	Business/ Farmer	<i>Sanjay Gurav</i>
41	Sanjay Shinde	Business	<i>Sanjay Shinde</i>
42	Pawankumar Naik	Sesvice/Farmer	<i>Pawankumar Naik</i>
43	Nanda Palsarkar	Service/Farmer	<i>Nanda Palsarkar</i>
44	Mahesh Satarkar	Business/ Farmer	<i>Mahesh Satarkar</i>
45	Ulhas Shrivant	Ex Serviceman	<i>Ulhas Shrivant</i>
46	Ulhas Chari	Business/ Farmer	<i>Ulhas Chari</i>
47	Lutikesh Gaude	Business/ Farmer	<i>Lutikesh Gaude</i>
48	Sanjay Naik	Business/ Farmer	<i>Sanjay Naik</i>
49	Chandrashekhar Naik	Business/ Farmer	<i>Chandrashekhar Naik</i>
50	Prasanna Naik	Service/Farmer	<i>Prasanna Naik</i>
51	Miss Pornima Varik	Sesvice/Farmer	<i>Pornima Varik</i>
52	Mrs. Soniya Kerkar	Farmer/	<i>Soniya Kerkar</i>

SR-NO	NAME	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
61	Ekknath Gaudle	service/farmer	
62	Siddesh solvi	service	
63	Anil Naik	service/farmer	
64	Rajesh Satkencav	service/farmer	
65	Bhanuday Kerkar	student	
66	Sunil Kerkar	service	
67	Sujog Gaudle	farmer	
68	Sachin Dhume	service	
69	Uhas Kerkar	farming	
70	Ankaram Gaudle	farming	
71	Shekar Kerkar	farmer	
72	Ganesh S. Kerkar	farmer	
73	Sudh M. Gaudle	farmer	
74	Dipak S. Naik	farmer	
75	Mahesh Kerkar	farmer	
76	Hemant Gaudle	farmer	
77	Darudra C. Kerkar	farmer	
78	MUKESH S Naik	farmer	
79	Ekknath. R. Naik	farmer	
80	Makarand S Hudekar	service	
81	Atmaram k. Naik	teacher/service	
82	Aishwarya A. Naik	Teacher/Service	
83	Zandeep B Satarkar	Business	
84	Gajanan V. Kerkar	satodra	
85	Tulsidas Naik		
86	Krishnanath m kerkar	<u>BUSINESS</u>	
87	Sameer P. Raikar		
88			

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan Jones was born on September 7, 1972 in Ottawa, Canada. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies and a Master of Arts degree in Legal Studies from Carleton University in Ottawa. Upon graduating with his MA degree in 2000, Jonathan worked as an Environmental Risk Administrator with Morguard Investments, and then spent four years working as a consultant with the government practice at Accenture (a large global consulting firm). While at Accenture, Jonathan worked on a variety of initiatives with Canadian government clients including a project to reform Ontario's welfare system and a project to streamline Canada Post's commercial customs delivery process to the United States. Jonathan has been married to Elizabeth Hay (PhD, Human Development and Family Studies) for over 5 years. They have two children, Oliver, age 4 and Clara, age 2.