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Neo-Liberalism and Protest in West Bengal: An Analysis through the Media lens*†

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Abstract

Neo-liberalism is revival of liberalism that is radically dismantling the state and sifting power to the private sector. People favour welfare state and oppose any move against it. This paper attempts to gauge the protest in West Bengal against neo-liberalism. The recent protest in West Bengal that led to the electoral defeat of the Left Front is not only about land acquisition and loss of livelihood. Instead, it goes to the core of over three decades of left rule and raises serious questions about the policies adopted by the Left Front governments.

This paper demonstrates that land reform and decentralisation of rural power, through institutions of local government, consolidated the authority of the CPI-M in the state but were detrimental to capital formation, necessary for industrialisation. Lack of adequate capital forced the left leadership to lure private investors to cope with the instability caused by increased aspiration in a globalised set up coupled with technological innovation. This being paradoxical to the political doctrine of the left resulted in a tension in the midst of an already unstable situation caused by economic stagnation and lack of adequate job creation in the state. The actions of the government to ward off the protests raise moral questions as to whether the CPI-M has the authority to claim to be representing the poor.

Key Words: Land acquisition, land reform, decentralisation, political doctrine, left leadership, economic stagnation, lack of jobs, intellectual support

JEL Classifications:

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1. Introduction

Neo-liberalism is a development doctrine which advocates transferring control of the economy from public to the private sector and supports economic liberalization, free trade and open markets. Neo-liberalism is a political philosophy which believes that it will produce efficient government and improve the economic conditions of the nation through deregulation. It is a transition from pro-government to pro-private¹. Automatically a socio-political conflict arises within the social system. Recently, it happened in West Bengal. A transition from socialism to neo-liberalism is realised at the beginning of the 21st century and specifically after the West Bengal Assembly elections in 2006. Consequently there were manifestations of signs of social resistance.

This paper attempts to gauge the protest in West Bengal against the backdrop of neo-liberalism, and also investigates the formation of preconditions of this shifting paradigm in West Bengal. One of the most important preconditions is the erosion of support of the existing left political regime. In this context, paper describes the situations, reviews and analyses the evolving popular protest at Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal. This analysis is based on Bandyopadhyay (2010), who studied the crisis of Left in West Bengal. This paper extends and elaborates it in details.

West Bengal is one state of the eastern part of India. West Bengal marked a change in its political direction since 2006 (Bandyopadhyay (2010)). The events that happened at Nandigram², or involving it, over land acquisition for building a chemical hub, eroded the support³ base of the Left Front (LF) government⁴, which is in power in the state since 1977. The events in Nandigram⁵ also

¹ It suggests that the size of the public sector squeezes while the role of private sector allows rising in the country.

² Nandigram is a rural area in the East Medinipur district of West Bengal. Located 70 km south of the state capital Kolkata, Nandigram shot into prominence after a stiff resistance by various groups, including the villagers, following the state government's decision to acquire agricultural land for the Salim Group to set up a chemical hub under the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy.

³ The continuous decline in the support base of the LF, an alliance of the left parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) -- CPI -M, was manifested first in the Panchayat (three-tier local government structure in the rural areas) polls in 2008 (Jana, May, 2008; The Telegraph, May 24, 2008), then in the parliamentary elections (Lok Sabha polls) in 2009 (Chakarabarti, May, 2009), followed by the civic polls in 2010 (Chakrabarti, June 2010).

⁴ For the purpose of this analysis, the connotations like the left, LF, CPI-M and the party would be used interchangeably. Although each of these connotations has different domains but this analysis uses them interchangeably as the CPI-M is the main constituent of the LF government in West Bengal and it is also India's most influential left party in contemporary electoral politics.

highlighted, other land acquisition cases in the state, the other most talked about being at Singur⁶, where the state government had acquired 1000 acres of fertile multi-crop land to facilitate the Tata Motors⁷ setting up a factory to produce ‘Nano’ cars, claimed to be the cheapest in the world (Vaswani; Mar, 2009).

The violence at Nandigram resulted in popular protests, including a huge rally, led by the intellectuals in Kolkata on November 14, 2007 (The Telegraph; Nov15, 2007a). The justification put forward by the West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in favour of his party cadres (*ibid*, Nov 14, 2007) and asserting that he was not above his party (*ibid*, Nov 15, 2007b), created even more resentment. Subsequently, many intellectuals, including some ideologically inclined to the left, intensified their protests against the path followed by some of their former ‘comrades’ on industrialisation (Mitra, 2007 b). Even those who were in favour of industrialisation in West Bengal openly raised their voice against the actions of the LF government (Dasgupta; Nov, 2007).

The main objective of this study is to analyse the shift in development paradigm in West Bengal based on ideological change in super structure from socialism to neo liberalism without social base, and its consequences on socio-political protest. Just after violence, in Nandigram social protest was instantaneous or spontaneous; it added certain weight to the ongoing political protests. This paper identifies the origin of protest in the existing political philosophy in West Bengal, and look for the reasons behind its manifestation through ways like popular resentment, protest, movements, resistance etc.

The change in the political landscape of West Bengal was also accompanied by a significant shift in the support (both moral and physical) that the left enjoyed from the intelligentsia - comprising

⁵ Although Nandigram was marred by violence for a very long period of time ranging over several months, the two incidents which drew maximum public attention were on Mar 14 2007, when police forces marched into the area to break the resistance by the local population leading to the death of 14 people in police firing, and in early November 2007, when CPI (M) supporters ‘recaptured’ Nandigram, breaking the resistance of those opposing land acquisition by ‘bloody’ means, resulting in loss of lives. (The Telegraph, Mar 15, 2007 & Siddiqui, Nov, 2007.)

⁶ a cluster of villages in the Hooghly district, 40 kilometres from Kolkata.

⁷ a subsidiary of the Tata Group, one of the well known business houses in India.

academics, writers, performers and the likes and henceforth referred to as the civil society here -, in the state for many decades (Banerjee, 2008a, p: 14).

In a broad sense, civil society is made up of all sorts of associational groupings which 'inhabits' the area between the individuals (or families) and the state (Blair 1997; p: 24). The intellectuals (or intelligentsia) that have been referred to as the civil society in the case of West Bengal are also part of these associational groupings. However, ideologically they are not supporters of the 'bourgeois society' that Hegel and Marx envisaged the civil society to be. From that point of view, the intelligentsia of West Bengal do not comprise the 'restrictive' domain of civil society, which existed before the 18th century. However, following the changes that the definition of civil society has undergone, the domain of such a grouping, in countries like India, could be 'restricted to a small section of culturally (also intellectually) equipped citizens'. (Chatterjee; 2004; p: 41). Due to land acquisition event, one might be tempted to think that the movement of the intellectuals away from the left could have a role in the decline in the CPI-M's electoral fortune. The poll results and their timing could be a pointer in that direction. The shifting away of a section of the intelligentsia and the subsequent electoral reverses are manifestations of the problems faced by the left in West Bengal but the crisis was much deep-rooted.

Despite the hegemonic presence of the left in the terrain of urban politics, rifts emerged among the intellectuals. This could be indicative of the tension within the left. Those intellectuals who were ideologically committed to the left protested against the neo-liberal path of development followed by the CPI-M. For them it was nothing sort of 'moral betrayal' of what the LF stood for (Banerjee, 2007 pp: 1240- 1241). Some of them even alleged that the CPI-M was now more inclined to look after the interests of the 'capitalists'. Acceptance, by the LF government, of the primary role of the private sector in development in an age of globalisation, with government playing a secondary role, pushed the ideological left even further away from the CPI-M (Mitra, 2007a). However, the new breed of intellectuals and professionals, which chose to maintain their proximity with the party for

enhancing their career interests, defended the policy of land acquisition for industrialisation⁸, despite the plight of the poor people (Banerjee, 2010; p: 20). This led to a war of words between those who supported the version of ‘leftism’ as propagated by the CPI-M and those who opposed it but whose left credentials are beyond doubt. This resulted in alienation of a section leading to vertical division within the intelligentsia (Datta Gupta, 2009). Some of the intellectuals even decided to go with the main opposition party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC). For many intellectuals, who were erstwhile supporters of the LF, TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, through her protests at Singur and Nandigram has done what was expected of the traditional left. For others, Miss Banerjee was the rallying point of those who are opposed to the official left, i.e. the CPI-M (Sharma, 2010).

The threats faced by the rural population raised moral questions against the policy adopted by the LF (Hughes, 2007). Some even questioned the democratic credentials of the CPI-M, which once took radical measures to democratise the rural power structure.

The plan for this article is as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on neo-liberalism. Section 3 describes the Left Paradox in West Bengal. Section 4 presents and analyses the protests in West Bengal. Section 5 provides a theoretical analysis and finally section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review on Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is a revival of *liberalism*. *Neo-liberalism* emerged as an ideological response to the crisis of the *Keynesian welfare state*. After the end of the World War II (WWII) the world rejected the *laissez faire* doctrine. During the following quarter-century or so, a variety of interventionist

⁸ Land acquisition for private industries was not something which started in West Bengal with Singur and Nandigram. Even before the LF government announced its New Industrial Policy over 200 acres were land were acquired in Kharagpur for the pig-iron factories of the Tatas and the Birlas. The acquisition of agricultural land and the compensation offered in lieu of that created resentment among the affected population, leading to protests by some political parties locally. However, such protests didn’t impact in the same way as the events at Nandigram and Singur did (Guha, 2007, pp: 3706- 3711). One could thus argue that the participation of the intellectuals in protest rallies added a greater momentum to the movement against land acquisition.

economic theories, such as welfare economics, Keynesianism and the early development economics, set the agenda for the debate on the role of the state (Chang and Rowthorn, 1995a; also see Deane, 1989). These interventionist theories identified several market failures and argued that active state involvement was necessary to correct these failures. There were marked changes in the terms of debate on the role of the state (Marglin and Schor, 1990). The new terms of debate were set by neoliberal economists like Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, George Stigler, James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Anne Krueger, Ian Little and Alan Peacock (for critical reviews, see Mueller, 1979; Cullis and Jones, 1987; Chang, 1994a; and Stretton and Orchard, 1994). Neo-liberalism emerged out of an unholy alliance between neoclassical economics (mostly provides analytical tools) and Austrarian-libertarian tradition (provides political and moral philosophy).

The main argument regarding state intervention is that we cannot assume the state to be an impartial and omnipotent social guardian as it is assumed in capitalism or market economy. We observe the state as an economic agent run the organisation by self-seeking politicians and bureaucrats, who are not only limited in their ability to collect information and execute policies, but are also under pressures from interest groups. Neo-liberal economists argue that this imperfect nature of the state results in government failures. As a result there are regulatory capture, rent seeking, corruptions and so on. Neo-liberal economists argue that the costs of these government failures are typically greater than the costs of market failures. Logically, it is better for the state not to try to correct market failures, because it may make the outcome even worse. In the neo-liberal view of society, the market is always opposed to the state: the market is the realm of freedom, whereas the state is the realm of power. This power is often not well used by self-serving employees of the state, which is seen as always less efficient than the market.

Simon Clarke presents the neo-liberalism that reasserts the fundamental beliefs of the liberal political economy which was based on intuition and assertion rather than rigorous analysis. The ideological appeal of liberalism demands for 'social reform' precipitated by the rise of the organised working class and a growing awareness of the 'social problems'. The liberal model of society remained the ideal, but it

was recognised that this ideal could not be attained by the power of the market⁹ alone, which would have to be supplemented by the guiding hand of the state. Ha-Joon Chang (2001) critically examines the neoliberal discourse that currently informs the dominant view on the role of the state, and suggests an alternative theoretical framework, institutional political economy, to overcome its limitations. Scholars within the field of comparative political economy remain overwhelmingly attached to theoretical approaches that emphasize the mediating role of institutions, insulating national political economies from common economic pressures, and that identify a variety of features of institutions which encourage stickiness, incrementalism, and path dependence. In contrast, practitioners of industrial relations, particularly trade unions, are much more likely to identify a vast change in which the balance of power between class forces has shifted toward employers, unions have largely been on the defensive and collective institutions and forms of labour market regulation have been weakened. Baccaro and Howell (2011) reconcile these two forms of knowledge. Neo-liberal transformation manifests itself not just institutional deregulation but also as institutional conversion, as the functions associated with existing institutional forms change in a convergent direction. Industrial relations systems are being transformed in a common direction, a direction that we characterize as neoliberal (Baccaro and Howell 2011). This does not mean that industrial relations institutions in each advanced capitalist country are necessarily coming to resemble those of an archetypal liberal market economy, though there is certainly movement in that direction.

The conceptual starting point for neoliberal theory is the rational, self-interested individual with unique and subjective preferences¹⁰. Drawing upon public choice theory, neoliberals argue that governments operate according to the individual self-interest of bureaucrats, politicians and lobby

⁹ The dominant strands of economics no longer rejected demands for social reform on the basis of the primacy of the market, but sought instead to identify and delimit the scope of reform by identifying the ‘market imperfections’ that led the reality of the market economy to fall short of the liberal ideal.

¹⁰ It is constructed an economic defence of free markets. Neoliberals argue that markets, when freed from external ‘interferences’, most notably in the form of the state, are the most moral and the most efficient means for producing and distributing goods and services. Neoliberal theory holds that a market-led economy is better than a government-led economy in terms of development in general (Lubliner 2006). It means that markets can distribute capital, goods, and services, more efficiently throughout the world than governments can. The welfare state in contrast, according to the neoliberals, tends to privilege ‘special interests’.

groups and that welfare payments of all types simply serve these interests of bureaucrats, politicians and lobby groups. Welfare bureaucrats and lobby groups have an interest in maintaining levels of disadvantage in order to justify their own existence. For the neoliberals, government agencies are not subject to the neutral pricing mechanisms and discipline of market forces. The monopolistic provision of government services tends to 'crowd out' initiatives from the private sector. Government regulation of markets creates 'distortions', thus creating inefficiencies, and the political considerations involved in formulating such regulations means that governments are, in effect, 'picking winners' by favouring certain industries rather than allowing markets to produce optimal outcomes. The regulations inevitably infringe individual liberty. Neoliberal truly advocates a radical dismantling of the state: the transfer of the provision of goods and services from the public to the private sector.

Government and markets are interconnected in four ways: (i) they represent the two dominant ways to distribute goods and services, (ii) public power is necessary to create free markets, (iii) governmental authority is required to address and regulate market failures, and (iv) the government intervention may be necessary to provide public infrastructure investment or insure profitability of private businesses. Neo-liberalism is a political economic theory committed to the laissez-faire market fundamentalism ideology that includes a belief in comparative advantage, a minimalist state and market freedom¹¹. If neo-liberalism includes a commitment to market fundamentalism then that also means that it is decided to a politics of limited government. This includes privatization, deregulation and a scaling back of many traditional functions that capitalist and communist states had performed since WWII. Attitudes towards neo-liberalism can be divided into four categories (Gosme 2002): those who support it because (i) it clearly benefits them; (ii) they genuinely believe

¹¹ Neo-liberalism theory transcends the state and provides an international economic theory committed to free trade and globalism. Steger describes globalization as a social or material process referring to a form of a means of production. Globalism is the dominant political ideology of the day that serves neo-liberal interests. According to Steger globalisation is presented as a inescapable process, going in one precise direction: a world market where investors are all-powerful, and where the role of the state is reduced to providing basic infrastructure as well as law and order. Such an idea of globalisation is violently rejected by many, who define themselves as anti-globalisation. Most people involved in the anti-globalisation movement are against the neoliberal ideology.

that a neo-liberal political and economic system is the best way to bring about prosperity and happiness to the people; (iii) enthusiastic about it but cannot see any alternative; and (iv) those who resolutely oppose it.

A neo-liberal state commits to cut regulation or make them more business friendly and encourage private capital accumulation. The anti-capitalist movements and pro-poor government were active in West Bengal since 1970s. People of West Bengal oppose the process of neo-liberalism or privatisation even in the 21st century. The socio-political protests were organised against the agricultural land acquisition for private sector in 2006. The state government of West Bengal facilitated the controversy by using 1894 land acquisition act rule to conduct a takeover of 997 acres (4.03 km²) of farmland to have Tata Motors build its factory. The rule is meant for public improvement projects, and the West Bengal government wanted Tata to build in its state. The project was opposed by activists and opposition parties in Bengal. The critics of the government's industrialization policy have argued on the other hand that while India is moving towards a "free market" economy, government has been acting as a broker for the private sector by forcing private citizens to give up their property at throw away prices. It seems that neo-liberalism ideology starts to prevail in West Bengal and people oppose it.

3. Left Paradox in West Bengal

The protest against the acquisition of agricultural land for industrialisation in West Bengal might in itself imply a challenge to the authority of the CPI-M following its departure from the ideological standpoint of being a pro-poor party to the one that is embracing neo-liberalism. However, we would argue that the protests transcend beyond the physical space they occupy at a point in time and are indicative of a much deep-rooted tension emanating from over three decades of left rule in the state.

This, one could argue, is not only the fallout of the 'mistakes' committed by the left but also the outcome of the policies that they followed over the past years. The CPI-M's eagerness to invite

private capital in West Bengal might be an admission of the fact that within the structure of a liberalised Indian economy, it is not possible for a state to embark on a diametrically different economic policy. However, we would argue that the immediate intention behind the paradigm shift in the development model followed by the LF was to stave off the crisis that they thought could threaten their long held authority in the political domain.

The land reform carried out by the LF has resulted in the dramatic reduction in the number of owners of large holdings thereby impeding rural capital formation. The implementation of the Panchayat system, to ensure decentralisation of rural governance, led to the emergence of a new class, whose power was not entirely based on land holdings (Sanyal, 2008). The aspiration of the constituents of this new class increased with their rise in the political hierarchy. The relative importance of agriculture as a source of income depleted resulting in the increased demand for industrial jobs, which, however, was not immediately available as the LF over the past decades have ‘neglected’ industrialisation in its bid to hold on to rural support base.

All these have contributed to a crisis and I would argue that the post-2006 LF government had taken recourse to neo-liberalism only to overcome it (this crisis). From that standpoint one could argue that the protests against land acquisition are in a way manifestation of the failures or the weaknesses of the damage control exercise that the LF embarked on. An aspect of this paper would be to find out as to why the LF failed despite being in power for decades with such thumping majority. However, a clear understanding of the crisis is possible only if we take a look at how the LF consolidated its power and held on to it for such a long time.

3.1 Rural Focus

Ever since the LF assumed power in 1977, their focus was predominantly on the rural sector. Like in other parts of India, West Bengal is also a predominantly rural society and according to many the ‘key’ to the left’s electoral success, was mainly because of its ‘rural popularity’, (Bhattacharya, 2010; p: 51), which is the result of land reform, decentralisation of the rural power structure etc.

The land reforms, carried out in the state within the first few years of the LF assuming power, not only eliminated the dominance of the landed class from the rural society but also ensured the emergence of new beneficiaries in the villages. These beneficiaries, comprising mostly of the ‘rural proletariat’, were offered small plots of land and in turn they ensured that the interests of the party were served. The rights of the sharecroppers or bargadars, who cultivated bulk of the land, were also legalised, as a matter of priority, through ‘operation barga’ (the movement to register the names of the sharecroppers). (Guha, 2008; p: 529-530)

The landed class, mostly comprising of absentee landlords, were considered to be supporters of the Congress as these groups had benefited to some extent from the actions of the party (Congress), (Kohli, 1990; p: 273) - the main opposition party of the LF then. The elimination of the landed class from the rural power structure provided the CPI-M with a freehand in the countryside (Bhattacharya, 2010, pp: 52-54)¹².

This social phenomenon provides an interesting insight in understanding the domination of the CPI-M in the political landscape of West Bengal for such a long time, which is unprecedented in the electoral history of India. This was made possible as the CPI-M created a system of ‘Clientelism’ (Chatterjee, 2009; p: 42) and dished out favour to those who supported the party. The ‘institutional effectiveness of the local government structure’ (panchayat system) and the control that the party enjoyed over those helped the CPI-M in ensuring legitimacy of their actions (*ibid*, pp: 44-45).

Following its rural supremacy a new brand of local political leaders emerged in the countryside, who were more inclined in maintaining the physical and electoral domination (of the party), through fear and favour, rather than being ideologically committed to the party. A similar class of beneficiaries also emerged in the urban and semi-urban areas. They played important roles like, distributing seeds, and fertilisers etc. in the countryside, mitigating disputes (*ibid*, p: 43) and often

¹² Bhattacharya (2010) formulates the concept of ‘party society’ the constituents of which are either heavily dependent or largely benefited by the actions of the party and its machinery. The author feels that the creation of the party society played a significant role in consolidating left power in West Bengal and is unique compared to many other states in India, where social elements like caste, creed and religion are more pronounced as compared to the societal framework prevalent in West Bengal.

providing security in both the urban and the rural terrain. Absence of a strong opposition for many decades ensured the consolidation of the party and for many people it became a way of life. Thus the old power structure of rural Bengal was replaced by a new one where party supremacy replaced the social and economic domination of the landed class. The ‘institutionalisation’ of the party within the system of governance as well as in the social and economic structure was thought to be the main reasons behind the stability that prevailed in West Bengal for a long time under the left rule. (Williams, 2001, p: 605).

3.2 Instability in the Realm of Party Domination:

The domination of the party, which was initially evident in the rural and then in the urban areas, faced instability for a multiplicity of reasons one being the rising aspirations of a section of the society (the new emergent class of leaders), who were beneficiaries of the uninterrupted left rule.¹³ These elements of the rural society who yielded power and position because of their proximity to the party now wanted to move further up the social and economic ladder¹⁴. However, there was no provision to fulfil this aspiration within the social and the economic structures that the party created. I would argue that the objective of the party was short-term political gain rather than long term economic development. If the intention of the party was to ensure long term development the natural way would have been to use the agricultural surplus for industrialisation. However, that didn’t happen and the large scale fragmentation of land even denied the benefits of economies of scale. The absence of the landed class in the rural economy was detrimental to necessary capital formation.

In the rural arena the instability was also manifested by marginalisation of the peasantry although the objective of the land reform was to halt such de-peasantisation. Census figures available from

¹³ I owe this argument to a personal interaction with Abhirup Sarkar of the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

Dated: Au g 23 2010.

¹⁴ The agrarian success in the initial years of the LF rule led to creation of profitable businesses, like cold storage, rice mills etc., which were not directly linked to the land but to the rural sector. Those because of their proximity to the party managed to do well in these areas now aspired to move to new terrains of economic profitability.

and the Statistical Handbook 2004, West Bengal, BAES, government of West Bengal (and quoted in Banerjee & Roy, 2007, p: 2048) show that the number of owner-cultivators in the state decreased during the period 1991-2001 (from 64.07 lakhs in 1991 to 56.54 lakhs in 2001), while the number of agricultural labourers increased (from 54.81 lakhs in 1991 to 73.63 lakhs in 2001) by a significant proportion.

The owners of small holdings were forced to part with their land -- as farming in such holdings were no longer economical -- and work either as sharecroppers or agricultural labourers. This shows that although land reform was showcased as a thumping political success by the LF, it did not necessarily bring about the economic benefits to those for whom it was targeted.

Negation of democratic values despite having an elected rural government structure was also another reason behind the instability within the realms of the domination of the party. Decentralisation of rural power may have been the motive behind the introduction of the Panchayat system but party domination resulted in its concentration only with those who were close to the CPI-M, thereby depriving the poor from occupying positions of leadership (Bhattacharya, 2010, p:56). Thus the decentralisation of rural power in West Bengal came to be seen as 'based on an unstable mixture of idealism and opportunism' (Guha; 2008, pp 670-71)

Following rapid commercialisation of the agricultural sector and the withdrawal of subsidies from the agricultural inputs under pressure from neo-liberal globalisation, the contribution of agriculture to family income decreased (Bhattacharya, 2010; p: 52). This was also another source of instability within the rural sector. There was a demand for new support structure to help those who were not attracted to the agricultural sector for employment. The dearth in job creation in the absence of adequate speed of industrialisation also resulted in instability in both the rural and urban areas.

3.3 Embracing Neo-Liberalism:

Faced with such instability in its support base, the LF, one could argue, took recourse to a path of economic growth by competing with other states of India in attracting private capital. I would argue

that this was imperative as the state lacked in adequate capital formation necessary to set up industries. The continuous disregard by the LF of the need for industrialisation in the three decades of its rule also contributed to this factor.

I would argue that as a 'class-based' social movement party (Heller, 2005; p: 81) the CPI-M tried dealing with this instability by reproducing another wave of social movement, as it did in its initial years after assuming power and driving out the landed class from the rural areas. This time the wave of social movement was branded in favour of industrialisation and the thumping victory of the party in 2006 assembly polls was portrayed as a popular mandate in that direction (Chattopadhyay, 2007). The left leadership in the state argued (*ibid* & Chattopadhyay, 2006) that land reform was not an end in itself and industrialisation was necessary for moving into the next phase of development.

Thus the path of industrialisation followed by the LF was based on the principle of neo-liberal capitalism, which accepts the dominance of capital over other factors of production and the state government also provided the necessary support to ensure the supremacy of capital, by dishing out huge benefits to keep the capitalists in good stead (Mitra; 2007a). This is somewhat paradoxical as ideologically, the LF and the CPI (M) are opposed to unfettered liberalisation and also to the formation of SEZ (Mukherjee, 2006). However, the apparent opposition of the party to economic liberalisation was in contradiction to what the state Chief Minister Mr Bhattacharya had reiterated, that globalisation is now a fact of life and one should try and reap its benefits (Mazumdar, 2005).

This trajectory of development also marked a significant shift in the way the CPI-M maintained its domination. The model followed by the CPI-M for many years was that of 'patron-client relationship' which was maintained by offering small favours in lieu of votes. Since 2006, the party under the leadership of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya switched to the model of 'elite capture'. One could argue that the new model might have emanated from the increased aspiration of the CPI-M from being a party of the proletariat to one representing the ever expanding middle class. This can be construed as being urban-biased resulting in a void in support structure of the party in the rural areas, which has so far been its bastion.

4. Protest in West Bengal

The move by the seventh LF government (2006) to acquire agricultural land for industrialisation faced protests right from the beginning. It started with Singur, where the local people, comprising medium and marginal farmers, sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers, led the resistance. Such protests reached its peak with the events in Nandigram, where the villagers resisted the state machinery, including the police, from entering that area for a long time.

As an electoral constituency, Singur has been under the control of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) – the main opposition party in the state – and hence it is difficult to standardise the protest there as a case of resistance against the LF primarily by those who once constituted their support base in the rural sector. However, Nandigram, which had been under the electoral control of the LF (Communist Party of India or CPI a constituent of the LF) for a very long time, can be portrayed as a prototype of popular protest against the move by the LF government.

The reasons behind the popular protest against land acquisition by the LF government for industrialisation are manifold. However, they underline the paradox that lies in the LF toeing a neo-liberal path of growth leaving out a large section of the population, which once constituted their core support group, outside the ambit of development. It also underlined the short-sightedness of the LF leadership and its inability to take the state to the next phase of development, despite long tenure in power.

4.1 Reversal of Rural Reforms:

Opposition to land acquisition for industrialisation could be viewed as a backlash emanating from the dichotomy between what the CPI-M as a political party had once professed (Banerjee & Roy, 2007; p: 2048) and their actions now. The extensive land reforms, which the left showcases as its resounding success in West Bengal, were virtually ‘negated’ by the way land acquisition was carried out for industrialisation.

Three decades ago, the left consolidated power by redistributing agricultural land taken away from the landed class. Following their focus on industrialisation, the LF government was now taking back the same land that they had given to the 'rural proletariat' and handing it over to corporate capitalists with huge concessions. This was also seen as an attempt to 'pauperise' those who once supported the left wholeheartedly and helped it to retain power (Gangopadhyay; 2006).

This argument finds support in the compensation package offered to the agricultural labourers and unregistered *bargadars* or sharecroppers. These two groups are to lose their livelihoods in case the land they cultivated was to be acquired for industrial projects. The sharecroppers were offered one quarter of the land value as compensation, despite the fact that they produced three quarters of the crops. This is in sharp contrast to what was on offer for the landowners, mostly non-cultivating absentee landlords, who were given 30 per cent more than their land value (Banerjee & Roy, 2007; p: 2048). Given the large number of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, the LF faced mounting opposition to its mission of industrialisation (Chandra, 2008; p: 49).

The rehabilitation schemes which were offered in the form of training and apprenticeships etc. were also inadequate given the number of people involved. Added to this is the fact that the sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers, who have been involved in farming for generations, would find it very difficult to adapt to such changes (Sau, 2008; p: 11).

Decentralisation of the rural power structure, which was made possible by the LF through implementation of the Panchayati Raj system, was also called for question in the drive for industrialisation. Through the local government structure in the rural areas a democratic set up was formulated whereby the people living in the villages would have their say on the way they live and also on their livelihood. This system may have several shortcomings; the least because of the domination of the party in the rural domain, but one cannot deny the fact that it created an atmosphere of self-governance. However, that was 'negated' by the way industrialisation was meant to be carried out. The local people had no say in the land acquisition process as well as in the

compensation and the rehabilitation packages (Bhattacharya, 2007a). The whole thing was decided at the highest level of the LF government and the party.

The CPI-M leadership in West Bengal totally overlooked its rural constituency in its attempt to 'rationalise (neo liberal) capitalism' (Banerjee, 2008b; p: 15). The state industry minister Nirupam Sen even justified their stance stating that in a market economy the wishes of the investor were supreme (Pathak, 2006). This highlighted the paradox between the party's ideology and what it practised. One could argue that this paradox depleted the party of its moral authority to act as a custodian of the rural community, which provided it necessary support to remain in power.

4.2 Lack of Dignified Livelihood

Another reason behind the popular protest against the land acquisition in West Bengal could be the fallout of what some would refer to as the 'lack of dignified livelihood' of those who are at the receiving end of industrialisation. (Bhaduri, 2009, pp: 79-80). The decisions of industrialisation were taken without any consultation even with those who would be affected most. Taking advantage of being in power for over three decades, the CPI-M leadership considered themselves as the custodians of the people in the state and this was often seen as 'arrogance' by the same people who once supported the party. The general perception among the rural community, especially the poor and the marginalised, was that the drive for industrialisation was mainly directed towards the rich and the middle class.

The CPI-M leadership totally ignored the fact that meaningful engagement with the people was necessary for the successful implementation of any policy. In some cases people were forced to accept whatever was decided by either party officials or those who represented the LF at the Panchayats (Bhattacharya, 2007b). Although, the Chief Minister admitted that such a communication gap was a 'mistake' (Chattopadhyay, 2007) yet such decision-making remained within the domain of the elite, the middle class policymakers and the media commentators (Bhaduri, 2009; p: 79).

Such an attitude of those at the helm inflicted a sense of insult among the rural community, especially those who owned small plots of land. For the farmers, who take great pride in cultivation for generations and have been immensely benefited by way of employment and income, now found themselves in a precarious situation of being forced to do menial jobs to facilitate better lives for the urban middle class. The price being offered for land cannot be any substitute to the sense of family security and social esteem that it (land) provides to the farming class (Sau, 2008, p: 11).

This insult found its way out in different elections, despite the CPI-M having strong machinery to mobilise supporters. In fact, those people who have once mobilised support for the party, now were antagonised as the moral political economy which prevailed in the rural areas - that the CPI-M would look after the poor - was tarnished and this was also reflected in some of the urban and semi-urban constituencies, dominated by the 'proletariats' (Sanyal, 2009).

4.3 Jobless Growth

It is a well-known fact that market-oriented plan for economic progress based on neo-liberalism and coupled with technological development has resulted in growth which is not necessarily equitable (Shrivastava, 2007). To make economic progress sustainable it needs to be made equitable, which can only be ensured if the benefits of growth trickle down to the lowest economic strata. The way to make this happen is through creation of jobs. However, technological development coupled with the enhanced profit motive of capital has resulted in jobless growth, i.e. creation of only fewer jobs. While Tata Steel, a company of the Tata Group, increased its annual production five times between 1991 and 2005, it nearly halved its workforce during the said period (Bhaduri, 2009; p: 139). This resulted in concentration of wealth only among a few, which only increases disparity leading to socio-economic destabilisation. The destabilising effect can only be appropriated by redistributing a fraction of the income accrued by those benefited through creation of jobs to those who have been displaced and dispossessed by land acquisition.

This trend, also evident in West Bengal¹⁵, created a sense of suspicion among a large section of the population resulting in popular protests both in the rural and the urban areas. A large section of the people felt left out from the development process and this only re-emphasised the fact that although the LF ideologically believes in class struggle leading to the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, the path it embarked on upheld the ‘politics of exclusion’ (Sanyal, 2008).

4.4 Myopic Vision of Development

Another reason behind the popular unrest stems from the ‘short-sightedness’ of the LF leaders about development in general and industrialisation in particular.¹⁶ One could argue that the instability and decline in popular support following its drive for industrialisation is the price that the party is paying for neglecting the long-term objective of development.

The LF then should have taken the initiative of setting up agricultural cooperatives, local agro-based industries and technical institutes in the countryside immediately after the land reforms programme in the 1970s. Such a move could have trained and accommodated the youth or children of the first generation of beneficiaries of land reforms ‘under a programme of self-reliant advanced socio-economic changes’.

After having ignored this new generation of unemployed rural youth for over three decades now, the LF government, in order to contain a growing dissatisfaction, has now fallen for the readily available option – industrial projects and the SEZs ‘offered by the corporate magnates, which are being palmed off by the CPI-M ministers as the industrial utopia where the rural youth would find jobs’.

This is being done ignoring the fact that these young people, kept untrained in any skills all these years by an ‘uncaring’ LF government, can never be employed in these industrial enterprises, which

¹⁵ According to Annual Survey of Industries, CSO, Government of India, and quoted from the Statistical Handbook, West Bengal, 2004, (published by BAES, Government of West Bengal), by Banerjee & Roy (2007), the number of industries in West Bengal increased from 5,606 to 6,195 during the period 1990-2001-02. The investment for the corresponding period increased from R 12,517.67 crore to Rs 32,752.98 crore, whereas the number of employees in these industries declined from 740,980 to 545,447.

¹⁶ I owe this argument to a personal interaction with Sumanta Banerjee (email, dated: July 2, 2010)

need highly skilled personnel. This sense of neglect also contributed to the popular protest against the CPI-M.

As is being evident from the analysis so far, the LF front, wants to set up industries for creation of jobs but not for the people who formed the core of its support base both in the rural and urban areas. Instead, it wanted to invite private capital to attract the middle class. The emergent middle class are non-ideological and result-oriented (Das, 2002, p: 285). I would argue that like this emergent class, the CPI-M now wants to free itself from the shackles of ideology, which was once thrust upon the people by the party. This antagonism between the ideology and the practice is resulting in conflict, which is being manifested by popular protests.

4.5 Protests by Civil Society

The popular protest that erupted in West Bengal following the move for land acquisition for setting up industries reached a culmination with the intellectuals taking to the streets against the actions of the CPI-M cadres, who carried out raids at Nandigram to drive out their political opponents. As I have stated in the introduction, a huge rally was organised in Kolkata on November 14, 2007, which was attended by intellectuals ideologically and politically supportive of the CPI-M for decades. The intellectuals protested against the high-handedness of the CPI-M, ignoring the wishes of the people of Nandigram.

This rally and the subsequent events portrayed the shift in the positions of a large section of the civil society (intellectuals) in the state. I have argued that this shift in the positions is the manifestation of a crisis engulfing the left in West Bengal. In the earlier chapters I have tried to identify the crisis, find out the reasons behind it and analyse the subsequent protests that followed. My endeavour now would be to illustrate the impact of the action of the intellectuals. However, to begin with one needs to assess the nature of the intellectuals in West Bengal.

Traditionally, the Bengali intellectuals have been politically very conscious and many of them have even been part of the politico-cultural movements in India. As the history of Indian independence

would show, Bengal (undivided then) developed a regional intelligentsia prior to the formation of the Congress Party or the arrival of Gandhi in the political stage. This elite class mobilized Bengali nationalism but didn't fully integrate into the larger movement for Indian independence (Kohli, 1990, pp: 270-271), thus preferring to maintain a distinct identity.

Historically, Congress never had a strong foothold in Bengal and a large section of the Bengali elite overlooked the party to try radical nationalism and militant politics (*ibid*). Even within the Congress many of the radical elements were from undivided Bengal and influenced by the Communist ideology. One could take this as a pointer to the support that the left ideology enjoyed among the Bengalis.

This was enhanced following independence as many Bengalis blame the Congress for the partition in 1947 and the resultant displacement of people. The elites of Kolkata (mostly Hindus), who lost their landed properties following partition were antagonised against the Congress. They were joined by the hundreds of Hindu refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, who didn't have any access to land but were educated and socially conscious (Ray, 1999; p: 50). This tilted the intellectuals and the educated middle class further against the Congress. It helped the left parties to consolidate support among the Bengali population. The identity of Kolkata as a radical and anti-imperialist city was also well known (Guha 2008; p: 163) this along with its anti-establishment and oppositional nature (Ray, 1999, p: 55) matched with the general ideology of the left.

The effect of all this was the creation of an anti-Congress environment, especially in and around Kolkata, where most of the refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan had settled. With the city and its people the Bengali intellectuals, including artists, academics, foreign-educated barristers, were attracted by the left ideology resulting in their proximity first with the CPI and later with the CPI-M. This proximity continued for long and with the Congress still the dominant political force in India then, the backing of the intelligentsia provided the left with the necessary moral and cultural support. This even contributed to the LF attaining power in the 1977 elections.

4.5.1 Intellectuals and Clientelism:

According to Antonio Gramsci, the domain of the civil society is ‘not directly part of the state’ (Forgacs 2000; p: 420). However, in West Bengal the intelligentsia was linked (ideologically, morally and in some cases physically) to the CPI (M) even after it assumed power in the state. One can see this proximity as an outcome of some of the ‘progressive steps’ taken by the government, i.e. land reform, the introduction of the local government structure in the rural areas etc. Many intellectuals also backed the LF because of pure ideological reasons, as anti-Congressism was then the order of the day for the radicals and those who were anti-establishment. The CPI-M benefited from its proximity with the intellectuals as the Bengali middle class was influenced by the actions of the intelligentsia.

As the party remained in power for decades, a ‘patron-client’ relationship developed between the CPI-M and the intelligentsia, with those close to the left nominated to intellectual positions of prestige and fame, especially in areas like education (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Formation of such a symbiotic relation between the party and the intelligentsia and the absence of a viable opposition in the state resulted in the emergence of a new brand of intellectuals. Majority of this new breed of intellectuals, including actors, academics etc, were not ideologically committed to the party but wanted to use their connection with the people in power for career interests (Banerjee, 2010, P: 20). The patron-client relationship became more intense as the party used these intellectuals, many of whom were professional celebrities without ideological inclination, for beefing up popular support in its favour especially following the crisis in the left.

Many observers are of the view that the ‘partisan’ attitudes taken by the LF in areas like culture, education etc. created a class who favoured status quo as they were direct beneficiaries of the left rule. This was also replicated in the rural areas where primary school teachers emerged as the elite and were used to boost popular support for the party in the rural areas (Bhattacharya, 2010, p: 55).

The CPI-M, which used fear and favour to ensure its political domination in the rural areas, also resorted to the same tactics, albeit with lot more sophistication, in the urban political domain.

4.5.2 Hegemony in Urban Politics:

The influence of the CPI-M in the urban political terrain was so intense that Kolkata's political field was considered to be 'hegemonic' (Ray, 1999; p: 11)¹⁷. This implies that in Kolkata there was very little space for others or 'sub-ordinate' elements to establish themselves and survive. The CPI-M utilised its hegemonic presence to control various elements within the urban society.

The nature of Kolkata's political field also contributed to this end as it was marked by the predominance of party politics (*ibid*, p: 52) and hence non-party political formations as well as autonomous interest groups were not left with much space in the city. This resulted in the organisation of various groups under the umbrella of political parties. Such frontal organisations also helped in the expansion of the domain of influence of the CPI-M.

With the presence of the CPI-M as the hegemonic political force in the urban space and the absence of non-party political formations, the new breed of intellectuals had no choice but to maintain their proximity to the party for favours to flourish in their respective fields. I would argue that this could be the reason as to why this breed of intellectuals maintained their proximity with the party (and also the state under the CPI-M), though it's in contradiction with the Gramscian definition of civil society.

4.5.3 Civil Society and Political Society:

The support of the intellectuals to the cause of the rural poor in West Bengal raises an important point at the theoretical level i.e. the coming together of the civil society and the political society. Partha Chatterjee has described 'civil society' as an associational form of the citizens (individuals) originating from Western modernity and based on many things including equality and autonomy (Chatterjee; 2002, p: 172). He has also formulated the concept of 'political society', which represents a domain devoid of citizenship rights. The constituents of the political society demand

¹⁷ Making a comparative analysis of the women's movements in Kolkata and Mumbai, Ray argues that the political culture in the former was more homogenous compared to the latter and this represented a concentration in the distribution of power. (p:20)

(or are dependent on) collective rights based on state welfare and are served through ‘mediations’ (*ibid*, p: 172-173). Chatterjee relates the formation of civil society to Western modernity, while the political society to post-colonial democracy.

One could argue that there is a potential for conflict between the civil and political societies as the former is based on individualism while the later represents majority or identity-based politics.¹⁸ This tension generally keeps the constituents of the two domains apart. However, in the case of protest against land acquisition there was tremendous outpouring of support for the constituents of the political society from those who comprise the civil society. One could even argue that the support of the civil society has provided the moral legitimacy to the demands raised by the political society.

A possible explanation behind the coming together of the civil and political societies can be deduced to the position that the two domains occupy. Those who are part of the political society in this case operate mostly in the rural or semi-urban domain as against the intellectuals (civil society), who are pre-dominantly city-based. The difference in their spatial domain may have contributed in avoiding a potential tension that exists between the political and civil societies.¹⁹ This, however, can in no way be the reason to overlook the moral position that the intellectuals might have taken by protesting against the loss of livelihood of the poor people at the cost of benefits provided by the state to further the interests of private capital.

5. Analysing the Protest in the Theoretical Framework

Why the LF government, which adopted its New Industrial Policy in 1994, went overboard with its drive for industrialisation after 2006 and the reasons behind the popular unrest that followed, is a matter for intense political and economic debate. So far we have tried to analyse this based on empirical evidence. In this chapter we will try to map a theoretical imagery analysing why such

¹⁸ The landless labourers and the sharecroppers, who constitute the majority of the affected people in the land acquisition case, can hardly operate at the individual level because of the socio-economic and intellectual position they occupy in the society. However, as the agitation at Nandigram and Singur has shown they can collectively pose strong resistance even against the organised the state machinery.

¹⁹ The idea behind such an analysis emerged following a personal interaction with Kalyan Sanyal, in August 2010.

unrest followed, despite the LF being in power for almost over three decades.²⁰ However, given the complexity of the situation put forward by the stream of events at Singur and Nandigram it is difficult to posit the analysis within the parameters of a specific theoretical framework.

5.1 Crisis of ‘Hegemony’:

The Gramscian analysis of hegemony has gained prominence in the analysis of the crisis that the LF faces in West Bengal. The events that led to the decline of the left in the state ‘happened in a manner that classically matches the crisis in hegemony in the Gramscian sense²¹ -- ‘when overnight hundreds and thousands of people move away from the party that once represented them’.

Such a crisis, in the authority of the ruling class, happens when they lose the consent of the masses or when there is a mobilisation of the subordinate class (or classes) against the dominant class. According to Gramsci, such a crisis manifests itself when party representatives (the dominant or the ruling class) become detached from the social classes and this often opens the way for ‘all kinds of demagogues and adventurers to come forth and cash in on the discontent’. The ruling class then attempts to reassert its control by quelling any opposition to its authority, which may also lead to violence.

The events that took place at Singur and Nandigram ensemble such an argument. However, one needs to closely look at the developments that may have contributed to such a crisis. This also necessitates an analysis as to whether the dominance that the party enjoyed in West Bengal is similar to the ‘hegemony’ as depicted by Gramsci.

‘Hegemony’ to Gramsci means ‘leadership of the class alliance’ (Forgacs 2000; p: 422). It is more linked to consent (persuasion) as against coercion and direction (leadership) as against domination (*ibid*, p: 423). The dominant class projects its own interest as the universal interest (Sanyal: 2007;

²⁰ One could argue that the popular unrest stemmed from the anti incumbency factor. However, the temptation to rule it out evolves from the fact that the LF has been in power in West Bengal since 1977 and any element of anti incumbency would have been manifested within such a long period of time. While there has been some challenges to the LF rule over the past decades but that was not sufficient enough to destabilise the left domination in the state.

²¹ I owe this argument and the subsequent analysis to a personal interaction with Aditya Nigam (email, dated June 22, 2010)

p: 27). In the context of West Bengal, one could argue that this hegemony of the party was established by the primary allegiance it enjoyed from the poor peasants and the working class. The peasantry mobilised and politicised during the land struggles of the 1960s and 1970s had instilled within the rural poor a sense of loyalty to the CPI-M as its steadfast champion.

As it has been demonstrated earlier, the CPI-M was able to ensure the political support of the rural population by convincing them that the interest of the party, i.e. the LF attaining and remaining in power, would also serve the interest of the poor people in the countryside. Often the party mobilised its political machinery, sometimes leading to use of force, to ensure the support of the rural population. From this perspective, one could see a sense of Gramscian hegemony prevailing in rural West Bengal.

One could also argue that the dominance of the party which is prevalent in West Bengal is also different from the Gramscian hegemony. According to Gramsci, hegemony is rooted in the 'economically dominant', yet it also extends beyond 'economism' (Forgacs 2000; p: 423). However, the policies adopted by the LF in the state for the past three decades were guided mostly by class relations and it includes land reforms as well as the recent drive for industrialisation.²²

The crisis in the Gramscian hegemony can be enumerated on two counts. Firstly, for Gramsci, the subordinated classes accept the dominant class (also) as the intellectual, cultural and moral leader of the society (*ibid* & Sanyal: 2007; p: 27). One could argue that the process of land acquisition in the countryside for industrialisation totally depleted the party of the moral and cultural leadership of the peasant community.

The moral leadership of the party was put to question as there were doubts within the rural society as to whether the industrialisation project that the LF envisaged was at all beneficial to them. One

²² One of the major arguments put forward by the LF government in support of industrialisation is the fact that many people in the rural community now don't want to pursue a career in agriculture for a multiplicity of reasons (explained earlier). One could see an element of class analysis behind the motive for industrialisation, which, according to the left leaders, would ensure that certain section of the population move from one class trajectory to the other i.e. from the agricultural to the industrial terrain.

should keep in mind that for Gramsci, 'hegemony' presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the subordinate groups are taken into account (Forgacs 2000; p: 424).

For the rural community land is of paramount importance and its ownership is seen as a status symbol from the socio-cultural point of view. Taking away that land, or even attempting to do so, irrespective of what the compensation may be, challenged the authority of the party to provide the cultural leadership especially in the rural society.

Secondly, it has been pointed out by many left thinkers that 'arrogance and complacency' within the party also resulted in popular protest, leading to its electoral debacle (Datta Gupta, 2009). One could argue that these (arrogance and complacency) resulted from a sense of domination and not hegemony in the Gramscian sense. Domination is intrinsically related to the use of force and its application for retaining control may lead to violence (*ibid*). This has been a feature of the left rule in West Bengal in the wake of the violence that erupted whenever the supremacy of the CPI-M has been challenged in the state. One could argue that this refers to a theoretical inability to understand the Gramscian distinction between domination and hegemony. This lack of understanding may have triggered the crisis within the left in West Bengal.

5.2 Dominance, Subordination and Resistance:

Under colonial conditions, Dominance was wrongly seen as similar to hegemony (Guha, 1989, p: 228). One could be tempted to interpret the situation at Singur and Nandigram on similar lines. The decision behind land acquisition for industrialisation was taken without the consent of the rural population, who would be directly affected by it. Neither was there any effort to persuade those who would have to part with their means of livelihood, instead coercive methods were used by sending forces to grab agricultural land. Since coercion outweighed persuasion this cannot be construed as a true hegemony (*ibid*, p: 231).

The LF saw the outcome of the 2006 assembly elections as an endorsement for its drive for industrialisation. Now it is almost evident that the poll results in favour of the LF in 2006 were no

endorsement for industrialisation initiated by the party following neo-liberal path and resulting in exclusion. In fact, one could argue that the poll outcome was wrongly interpreted as a popular support in favour of the path followed by the LF for industrialisation

Although the timeframe of our current analysis is distinctly different from the theoretical construct used by Guha yet one could identify some similarity between the situation of colonial India and that which prevailed at Nandigram and Singur.²³

In the framework of such an analysis one could also see the popular protest that followed land acquisition as ‘resistance’ (Haynes & Prakash, 1991; pp 1-3)²⁴. The resistance was the outcome of several reasons such as, loss of livelihood of the rural population, attack on the dominant culture prevalent in the rural society, undemocratic (‘autocratic’, following Guha, 1989, p: 229) attitude of the party, denying citizenship rights to the subordinates and exclusion of the subordinates from the benefits of the expansion of capital.

5.3 Tension in Governability under Post Colonial Conditions

With the emergence of neo-liberalism as a dominant discourse, the predominance of capital over other factors of production is seen to be more than ever before. The compression of time and space under the current project of globalisation has made capital more expansive. Under post-colonial conditions, ‘exclusion’ and ‘marginalisation’ has become integral part of capitalism. (Sanyal, 2007; p: 254).

In contrast to the traditional Marxist political economy analysis of underdevelopment resulting from ‘exploitation’ (by way of extraction and appropriation of surplus), Sanyal identifies the ability of capital to ‘negotiate’ the social and economic terrains of those who are outside the domain of capitalist mode of production and yet continue with the process of primitive accumulation (*ibid*).

²³ The distinction lies in the fact that Guha identifies the dominance-subordination relationship in the context of a timeframe, where the role of capital was ‘marginal’ in the mode of production and in the current context capital is all pervasive.

²⁴ In the context of subaltern studies, when the subordinate groups, by their behaviour and cultural practices, challenge the hegemonic social formations and threaten to unravel the strategies of domination then its called Resistance (Haynes & Prakash, ,1991, p: 3).

The 'dispossessed', those who remain outside the domain of the capitalist mode of production, are confined within, what Sanyal describes as, the 'need economy' (*ibid*; pp: 215).²⁵ He highlights this as strength of the capital, which carries out primitive accumulation despite the presence of a non-capitalist need economy. (*ibid*; p: 254)²⁶. The 'need economy', according to Sanyal, is served by 'welfarist governmentality'.²⁷

He foregrounds the analysis that, in contrast to the historicist analysis of underdevelopment, in a post colonial setting there is a continuous process of primitive accumulation but it is also accompanied by a parallel process of reversal of its effects (*ibid*, pp: 254-55).

Using the theoretical framework used by Sanyal, one could argue that the protest that took place in West Bengal following the drive for industrialisation highlights the failure of governmentality. The inability of the LF government to take care of the people who were vulnerable following land acquisition -- this is failure in 'governmentality' -- has resulted in vigorous protests.

Here one can highlight the debate surrounding compensation and the disadvantage that the agricultural labourers and sharecroppers were subjected to in the process. This can be construed as what Sanyal describes as 'exclusion and marginalisation' i.e. those who are losing their livelihood are denied any substantial benefit that was expected from industrialisation. Within a democratic set up such marginalisation can transform the vulnerable into 'dangerous classes' (Chatterjee, 2008, p: 53-55) and it is also contradictory to the narrative of inclusive development that has been espoused by the Indian left.

5.4 New Social Movements and Antagonism:

Social movements mobilise social power to usher in social transformation. New social movements are new democratic struggles as they seek to ensure equality (Mouffe, 1988, pp: 89-100). Any social relation, which is subjected to subordination, may involve antagonism. In the presence of a

²⁵ Sanyal conceptualises the need economy as an economic space 'constituting an outside of capital.'

²⁶ Partha Chatterjee (2008, p: 55) says that the benefits provided to the poor people either in the form of subsidised food, employment guarantee or easy credit from the government or non-governmental organisations is aimed at compensating for the negative impact that primitive accumulation might have had on them.

²⁷ By 'governmentality', I refer to production of citizens by the state and transferring to them the rights of the citizenry.

new social movement, such antagonism is reflected against the hegemonic formation, which is subversive of democracy. Here I also bring in the ‘multiple subjectivities’ of individuals as envisaged by Mouffe (*ibid*; pp: 89-90) as opposed to class reductionism of the classical Marxists. This entails that the same individual can be part of protests organised under various social movements.

In the backdrop of such a framework, one could argue that protests in West Bengal also emanated from the antagonism of various social movements, (against one or more dominant formations) which are at play at different societal levels. Different social movements may have diverse objectives but one could identify a common string of opposition to the action of the hegemonic formation (here the LF government). (Baviskar, 2005, pp: 165).

The social movements could range from the vulnerable people, various political parties with differing ideologies, activists opposed to growth based on neo-liberalism, environmentalists and the likes. Hence it is difficult to analyse them within the parameters of a single narrative (Nielsen, 2009, pp: 467), rather they need to be understood as ‘overlapping spheres’ within the broader space of movement.

As events in Nandigram and Singur have demonstrated, convergence of these movements could intensify the protest and mutual differences could create tension among the overlapping spheres. However, attributing the popular mobilisation to one single narrative could be detrimental in understanding the real magnitude of such movements (*ibid*, p: 468). I would argue that the way by which the LF put the onus of the instability entirely on the TMC and the Maoists resulted in its inability to comprehend the real scale of the unrest and this also contributed to the strengthening of the popular protest.

6. Conclusion

Paper starts with neo-liberalism political philosophy and the movement of the civil society and the effect of the Left Front embracing neo-liberalism, which is paradoxical with the political doctrine of

the CPI-M. However, the crisis is much deep-rooted and goes beyond the physical space that anti-land acquisition protests occupy.

The paper points out that the crisis within the left stems more from within, i.e. the policies undertaken by the LF government over the years. Paper has analysed how land reform has impeded rural capital formation and also failed to resist marginalisation of the peasantry. The measure, along with the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, however, transformed the nature of the rural society, creating a class which helped the party to retain its domination, through patron-client relationship, despite not being able to deliver the level of economic growth necessary for moving to the next stage of development. A similar class also emerged in the urban space.

With the emergence of a middle class, exposed to world-wide prosperity following globalisation and technological development, and the increased aspirations of those who benefited from the left rule, the LF was under pressure to create jobs in the industrial and the service sectors. This paper has shown how the lack of adequate capital formation in the state in a way forced the LF to lure private capital by providing them with several benefits. This caused resentment among the core support base of the LF, i.e. the rural and urban poor. They protested against the loss of livelihood and dignity of life and subsequently the LF's position of moral authority to represent the poor and the downtrodden was challenged. Lack of adequate job creation, because of technological development, also could not satisfy either the middle class or those who benefited from the left rule. Thus the politics of exclusion and marginalisation came into play as most of the population were left out of the circuit of development that the LF was planning to embark upon. This paper has argued that this led to widespread disenchantment resulting in popular protests, which reached a climax with the violence at Nandigram.

The intelligentsia, who have been traditional supporters of the left, provided the necessary intellectual and moral support to those who were protesting against the exclusionary model of industrialisation. Although the moral authority of the LF to represent the peasantry and the working class was already in question but given the position the intellectuals occupy in Bengali society their

public protests against the LF came in a way as a final endorsement of the criticism that the CPI-M no longer represented the 'proletariats'. The intellectuals thus played the role of a catalyst to expose the crisis which was already brewing within the left.

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