

## **DEVELOPMENT, LAND ACQUISITION AND CHANGING FACETS OF RURAL LIVELIHOODS : A CASE STUDY FROM WEST BENGAL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper has been written on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from a needful household survey carried out in four villages of Rajarhat Block, where the Government of West Bengal acquired 6933.72 acres of land under Part-II of Land Acquisition Act, 1894 with the aim of developing a new business centre (IT Hub) and dwelling units in the name of public purposes in recent past. The study, however, finds that acquisition of agricultural land has not only bowdlerised the agriculture based economic activities by dispossessing farmers from their land but also forced them to diversify their livelihood activities. Interestingly, this change in livelihood activities has appeared in the scene with two major characteristics: first, there has been a sudden increase in the share of non-farm workers to total labour force and second, the bulk of this increase in non-farm activities has been mainly casual and inferior in nature. The temporary job opportunities provided by the government to dispossessed households are not inclusive, and unable to absorb majority of the working population of land loser households. Comparatively well-off households with their well tie-up with the local authority and political leaders have achieved greater extent in gaining these opportunities. There has been a substantial change of lifestyle of these native people in rapidly transforming social milieu. The study further identifies that the disparity in terms of estimated per capita monthly consumption expenditure within the project affected households is greater than the farming households unaffected by acquisition.*

### **Introduction**

The government of India has always attempted to uphold a commitment to the paradigm of higher industrial growth and accelerated infrastructure development after the end of colonial rule (Bapat, 2009). This commitment has even become stronger in recent years with liberalisation and globalisation of Indian economy which have given birth to an emergence of new growth opportunities. The

neoliberal economy has led many states including West Bengal to compete with each other for pulling in industries and infrastructure developers by providing lucrative incentives. With enormous expansion of the states' role in promoting public welfare and economic development in 1990s, acquisition of land has become far more numerous than ever before. Over the past few decades, vast tracts of agricultural and forest lands have been acquired

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by the various state governments in India in the name of industrialisation, employment generation and infrastructure development under the purview of public purposes. In absence of public scrutiny, such land acquisition has mostly been carried out without the consent of tenants and a large section of land owners. These phenomena result in deprivation of their property rights and make them sacrifice their conventional livelihoods by eliminating their inherited source of livelihoods for the sake of so called larger public interests. Agricultural land holds a special value to farmers and their families (Sau, 2008). It is the prime source of their livelihoods and provides reliable security to the farming families in their hard time. However, acquisition of it has become an engine of oppression (Venkatesan, 2011) and social exclusion (Mahapatra, 1999; De Wet, 2001; World Bank, 2004; Council for Social Development, 2008; Fernandes, 2009 and Sharma, 2010).

In last two decades, the government of West Bengal acquired (or tried to acquire) agricultural land in several places (Rajarhat, Kharagpur, Baruipur, Singur, Nandigram, Bhangor, Uluberia, Dankuni, Puruliya etc.) in the State. Among them Singur and Nandigram are the two places which seemed to have drawn much attention of politicians, social activists, intellectuals, scholars and policy makers due to strong protest raised by the farmers and became the central places of debate in the context of acquisition under the Land Acquisition Act-I of 1894. Several research works (Sarkar, 2007; Banerjee et al, 2007; Banerjee and Roy, 2007; Bhattachariya, 2007; Fernandes, 2007; Mohanty, 2007; Chandra, 2008; Sau, 2008 etc.) had been published on these two places. Most of these papers were conceptual and factual, and did not reflect sufficient primary data. However, a noteworthy instance of land acquisition accomplished by the same government in the name of development remained unnoticed by many. During this period, the place in West Bengal where the largest number of farmers got compelled to change their primary activities

completely due to coercive acquisition of agricultural land by the government is Rajarhat in North 24 Parganas district. Notably, the quantum of land acquired by the government in Rajarhat (6933.72 acres) happened to be about seven times higher than the extent of land acquired for Tata Motors in Singur (997.11 acres). Despite that, Rajarhat did not come to limelight as Singur and Nandigram. Perhaps, one of the prime reasons behind it was that unlike Singur the acquisition of land in Rajarhat on massive scale did not take place at once; rather it was albeit slow and gradual. Therefore, the protest raised by the unwilling farmers could not take place at large scale. Nevertheless, conversion of acquired agricultural land into non-agricultural land with rapid urbanisation has evolved a process of social and economic transformation leading to drastic change in livelihood activities, structures of houses, tendency of using luxury goods and to some extent food habit of the affected farming families of erstwhile agriculture based society. The dispossessed farming families are now passing through a transition phase that comes immediately before rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. Hence, the instance of land acquisition in Rajarhat has been taken up as a case study to bring these changes in light. The aim of this research paper is to examine the change in agrarian status of dispossessed farmers/households in terms of landholding size in post-acquisition stage and to assess the pattern of change in livelihoods of dispossessed farmers caused by the conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural land. An attempt has also been made to examine the logical consequence of land acquisition and urbanisation on change in structures of houses and use of luxury goods among the dispossessed farming households. Finally, the paper has sought to assess the level of inequality (in terms of per capita consumption expenditure) among the dispossessed households in post-acquisition stage with the farming households unaffected by acquisition and currently engaged in cultivation.

### Methodology

The necessary data and information for this study had been gathered from a heedful household level sample survey. The key informant for every sample was the head of the household. The sampling design was chalked out based on the assumption that acquisition of agricultural land and its conversion into non-agricultural land had changed the livelihoods of dispossessed farming households and their economic status in post-acquisition stage. Two sets of sample households had been purposively selected for this study. First set comprised those households which had lost agricultural land due to acquisition and second set included those farming households which were unaffected by acquisition (did not lose any land), currently engaged in agriculture and practising a cropping pattern that resembled the first set before acquisition (control sample). The first set of sample households (dispossessed households) had been drawn from three villages, namely Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur of Rekjuani mouza<sup>1</sup> in Rajarhat where agricultural land had been acquired by the government in recent past and cultivation was almost eradicated. On the other hand, second sets of sample households (control samples) had been drawn from a nearby village named Gobra<sup>2</sup> in Gobra mouza where land acquisition did not take place. Though households had been randomly<sup>3</sup> surveyed for both sets of sample households, a careful attempt was made to draw the samples from every pocket of the above mentioned four villages. In total, 177 households (117 households for the first set and 60 households for the second set) were surveyed. The household survey data gathered from the first set of samples was complemented by a discussion with some important persons associated with the study area, such as Panchayat Proddhan and members, local school teachers and some state government employees including concerned Block Development and Block Land Revenue Officers.

On the basis of mean size of agricultural landholdings in pre-acquisition stage, the first set of sample households has been grouped into large, medium, small and marginal categories. The sample households have also been divided into five categories of economic status (very low, low, medium, high and very high) in terms of per capita monthly consumption expenditure (in rupees) estimated at each sample household. This categorisation has been done with the help of mean (M) and mean deviation (MD) of per capita monthly consumption expenditure of all sample households under first and second set of samples for some selected food items, education, transportation and other necessary stuffs<sup>4</sup>. The ranges or class intervals of high, medium and low economic status categories has successively been taken as {(M+1.5MD) to (M+0.5MD)}, {(M±0.5MD) = (M+0.5MD) to (M-0.5MD)} and {(M-0.5MD) to (M-1.5MD)}. In other words, class interval is 1MD. The very high category has been determined as {above (M+1.5MD)} while very low category as {below (M-1.5MD)}. Gini coefficient simplified by Angus Deaton (1997) has been used to examine the level of inequality in terms of per capita consumption expenditure within the dispossessed households (first set) and households unaffected by acquisition and currently engaged in cultivation (second set) separately. The simplified formula for Gini coefficient is:

$$G = \frac{N+1}{N-1} - \frac{2}{N(N-1)u} \left( \sum_{i=1}^n P_i X_i \right)$$

Where, 'N' is the total number of households and 'u' is the average per capita consumption expenditure among the households.  $P_i$  is the per capita consumption expenditure rank 'P' of  $i^{\text{th}}$  household with 'X' per capita consumption expenditure, such that the household with the highest per capita consumption expenditure receives a rank of 1 and the poorest a rank of n. The value of Gini

coefficient (G) ranges between 0 and 1. Zero corresponds to perfect equality (i.e. every household has same per capita consumption expenditure) and one corresponds to perfect inequality.

**Study Area:** Rajarhat block in North 24 Parganas district is situated successively in the north-eastern part of Kolkata city and east side of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. According to the Primary Census Abstract (2001), Rajarhat block consisted of population size of 1.45 lakhs, predominantly (95.37 per cent) inhabiting in rural areas. Though urbanisation process started here several years ago, a large rural part of Rajarhat block had been officially transformed from its rural status to urban status in 2010 and now it comes under the jurisdiction of Rajarhat-Gopalpur Municipality. Rural Rajarhat mainly included agricultural land and fishing embankments along with settlements. The government of West Bengal acquired 6933.72 acres of agricultural land and fishing embankment from twenty one mouzas<sup>5</sup> in Rajarhat block between April 1996 and March 2007 (CAG- Comptroller and Audit General of India, 2007) under Part-II of Land Acquisition Act, 1894 to develop a new business centre (Information Technology Hub) and dwelling units in the form of a planned township. The land was acquired from more than 25000 land owners and 5000 registered tenants. Agriculture was never much developed here. Major portions of acquired agricultural land used to be cultivated by the farmers with two types of paddy, namely aman and boro successively during rainy and summer season. The aman crop was often damaged by flood during rainy season<sup>6</sup>. A section of farmers used to cultivate vegetables, such as potato, cabbage, cauliflower and some leafy vegetables on the higher land adjoining their homesteads in winter season.

#### **Backdrop for Land Acquisition: a Paradigm Shift in Government's Development Policy**

West Bengal is indeed a unique State in India. It is the only Indian State that had been

ruled by the Left Front for about three and half decades (June 1977 to April 2011) at a time. From its inception in 1977 through 1980s, this government was truly inspired by a vision of political, economic and social change to reduce the poverty and suppression of the poor and backward class in rural areas. It also initiated the bridging of various divides among different social classes by implementing land reforms and decentralisation of power through three-tier Panchayati System (Banerjee et al, 2002).

Since Independence through 1970s, there was stagnation in agricultural production in West Bengal and it was termed as 'agrarian impasse' by Boyce and several other scholars (Rawal, 2001). The State had a very slow growth rate of agricultural production in 1970s (Saha and Swaminathan, 1994). But interestingly, with sufficient acceleration in implementation of land reforms and active involvement of Panchayati Raj Institution, the previous government of West Bengal transformed the State's status from lagged in 1970s to star performer in 1980s. The loopholes of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 were plugged during this period in order to abolish the abuse of landowners' right to take the leased-out land back from sharecroppers on the ground of 'self-cultivation'. Surplus ownerless land was successfully distributed among the landless poor farmers and the rights of sharecroppers were secured through 'Operation Barga' (1978-81) by this government (Bose, 1981; Dasgupta, 1984; Lieten, 1990). Therefore, land reforms provided the poor farmers an incentive to work harder (Sarkar, 2007). All these policies enforced by the government led to the prosperity and growth in rural West Bengal in 1980s. The growth of Net State Domestic Product (at 1993-94 prices) in West Bengal increased from 3.1 per cent per annum in 1970s to 4.7 per cent annum in 1980s and the share of agriculture to total NSDP increased by four per cent during 1980s (Planning Commission: West Bengal Development Report, 2010). However, in 1990s, the growth in agriculture in terms of crop

production (Roy, 2007 and Khasnabis, 2008), NSDP (Planning Commission: West Bengal Development Report, 2010) and employment (Development and Planning Department: West Bengal Human Development Report, 2004) slowed down sharply. Khasnabis (2008) termed this deceleration in agriculture as another 'agrarian impasse'. Low net returns<sup>7</sup> from major crops in West Bengal were also noticed in 1990s (Roy, 2007). Agriculture became a relatively non-rewarding profession (Gupta, 2005). Although the previous government became able to establish the political stability in 1980s immediately after coming to power in 1977 through decentralisation of power among the rural poor by offering positions in panchayati system, it indeed failed to bring substantial positive growth in large and medium scale industries which witnessed a growth-sluggishness after Independence due to the transfer of ownerships of many large industries from the British to Indian hands, crisis in managerial skills and capital, poor work culture, political will of the government, strong trade union, rising labour militancy in 1960s and 1970s and prevailing license permit raj (Bagchi, 1998; Sen, 2009). In 1980s, West Bengal experienced a significant downsizing in manufacturing employment (Banerjee et al, 2012) along with several other major States in the country; and shockingly West Bengal held the first position among them with a loss of 1,77,000 factory jobs (Parikh & Radhakrishnan, 2002). This incident wreaked an acute unemployment situation in the State (Sen, 2009). The government was looking for an alternative path of development to mitigate this crisis. Meanwhile, the adoption of neoliberal economic policy by the Central government in Delhi provided an immense impetus to the government of West Bengal to bring industrial policy reforms in 1994 that promoted foreign technology and investments and private sector investments in upgradation of industrial infrastructure (Commerce and Industries Department, Government of West Bengal, 2008: p3). The previous government

contended that growth through industrialisation would not only increase labour productivity but also diminish the rearing unemployment and underemployment situation in the State. Hence, in 1990s, the government began a substantial stride toward industrial development and setting up business centres through acquisition of agricultural land in the State. A group of eminent economists (Banerjee, Bardhan, Basu, Dutta Chaudhury, Ghatak, Guha, Majumdar, Mukherjee and Roy, 2007) also argued that with growing population pressure on the limited land and almost stagnant yields in agriculture in the State since 1990s, there was no better alternative than industrialisation.

### **Portrayal of the Execution of Land Acquisition in Rajarhat**

As stated earlier, the acquisition of 6933.72 acres of agricultural land and fishing embankments in Rajarhat had been accomplished under Part-II of Land Acquisition Act, 1894 to develop an IT Hub and dwelling units under the purview of public purpose. The acquisition of land actually went on in different phases over a period twelve years between 1996 and 2007. In 1993-94, the government of West Bengal planned to initiate this development venture<sup>8</sup>. In view of the commencement of land acquisition process in those identified mouzas, in the beginning of 1996 under the Land Registration Act (West Bengal Amendment) 1981, the government imposed restrictions on 'registration of land' which virtually stopped all sorts of private selling and buying of land. Moreover, this restriction kept all real estate agents, housing developers, land mafias and speculators away from these villages until the acquisition was over. To obviate the possibility of speculative appreciation in the market value of land in subsequent years, the available sales proceeds for 1995 was considered as base data for calculation of market rate with annual premium of five per cent for 1996 (CAG, 2007). Although the process was initiated in 1996 with the acquisition of land in Teghoria *mouza*, it

began in Rekjuani *mouza* in 1998 with the publication of preliminary notifications under section 4(1) of the LAA and completed in 2003. Acquisition was first started in village Nawabpur, followed by Gururite and Rekjuani. The notices to the persons interested (i.e. owners and registered tenants) in notified lands were issued by the collector under sub-section 1 and 2 of section 9. The respondents of sample households informed that the collector paid only rupees 3.60 lakh per acre of land as total compensation in 1998 irrespective of its type and quality, whereas in 2003 the total compensation per acre of land was increased to rupees 7.80 lakh. The collector paid twenty five per cent of it to registered tenants separately. The collector even acquired the notified land from those owners who did not accept the compensation award by giving their consent in writing to him after the date of declaration of award under section 11(1). In such cases, he deposited the amounts of compensation awards to the court under section 31(2) of the LAA. During the course of interaction with the dispossessed farmers, a few of them who went through these experiences bemoaned that the retrieval of compensation award from the court was an extremely difficult and painful task. These farmers were not assisted by the officers of the land acquisition cell; rather they were harassed by them in every step of the legal proceedings. However, the difficulties in retrieval of compensation award from the court made many farmers frightened in successive phases of acquisition and they gave up their land in despair. In several meetings with local people, the then minister of Housing and Public Health Engineering of West Bengal and several politicians from ruling party promised an assured job for at least a member of each dispossessed household in upcoming industries on acquired land. Some years already went by but no one from the sample households got permanent job in Rajarhat Newtown. Only the construction of multi-storied apartments, corporate offices, IT parks, hospitals etc., is going on. And it is for sure that corporate bodies and IT giants would not

absorb the local dispossessed farmers for higher profile jobs.

### **Acquisition of Agricultural Land and Change in Agrarian Status of Farmers**

Size of landholdings among the sample households has been considered as an important indicator to determine the agrarian status of farmers/farming households. However, the standard categorisation<sup>9</sup> of sample households into large, medium, small and marginal farming households in terms of landholdings size would not be desirable in present study area and perhaps in any other part of West Bengal. This is because of two reasons: first, there is a very little proportion of farmers with more than 4 hectares (4 hectares = 9.884 acres) of cultivable land in the study areas due to rigorous implementation of land reforms and redistribution of ownerless land among the landless poor in end of 1970s and in 1980s by the previous government; second, gradually increasing population density in the State and division of joint family into nucleated family in rural areas have even led the farms to be fragmented; consequently the landholding size at household level has been steadily declining since the Independence (Basole and Basu, 2011). Therefore, for the present study, agrarian status of farmers/farming households has been determined by considering the mean size of landholdings of the sample households at pre-acquisition stage and all the sample households have been grouped into four categories: large (more than 2.65 acres), medium (1.65 to 2.65 acres), small (0.65 to 1.65 acres) and marginal (less than 0.65 acre) farmers/farming household.

Acquisition of agricultural land has significantly brought a downward change in agrarian status of affected farming households in terms of size of landholdings in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur in post-acquisition stage. Though there was not even a single sample household without cultivable land in pre-acquisition stage, more than eighty per cent of

the sample households have become agricultural landless in post-acquisition stage (Table 1). The obtrusive fact is that not even a single sample household has claimed the status of large or medium category in these villages of Rajarhat in post-acquisition stage. The average size of landholdings at household level has sharply reduced from 1.95 acres in pre-acquisition stage to 0.06 acre in post-acquisition

stage (Table 2). This sudden change in agrarian status caused by the government interference has become a matter of great worry among a section of farmers in the locality. The active involvement of the government for acquiring agricultural land has been identified as a reverse process of its land reforms and land redistribution measures in late 1970s and early 1980s by the farmers in West Bengal (Banerjee and Roy, 2007).

**Table 1 : Change in Agrarian Status of Farming Households Due to Acquisition**

Study Area	Status of Farming Households (Category)	Before Acquisition		After Acquisition	
		No. of Households	% to Total	No. of Households	% to Total
Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur: Rajarhat	Large (More than 2.65 acres)	22	18.80	0	0.00
	Medium (1.65 – 2.65 acres)	31	26.50	0	0.00
	Small (0.65 – 1.65 acres)	52	44.44	4	3.42
	Marginal (Less than 0.65 acre)	12	10.26	18	15.38
	Households without any cultivable land	-	-	95	81.20
Total Sample Households		117	100.00	117	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

**Table 2 : Distribution of Cultivable Land and Change in Mean Size of Landholdings at Household in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur**

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

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

### Pattern of Livelihoods Before Acquisition

Agricultural land is a valuable natural resource that plays a key role to shape up the pattern of rural livelihoods in West Bengal. Unlike Singur, though agriculture was not very developed in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur of Rajarhat due to low lying nature of the major portion of their vast agricultural field, the working population of dispossessed households of these villages was predominantly engaged in

agriculture based livelihood activities before acquisition (Table 3). Noticeably, in spite of being closely located to Kolkata metropolitan city and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, a meagre proportion of working population of the sample households was engaged in non-agricultural activities. The lack of technical skills and lower level of education among majority of these working people seemed to be responsible factors for it (Table 4).

**Table 3 : Change in Livelihoods of Working Population of Land Loser Households in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur**

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

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

Note : Here those workers have been considered whose age was above 15 years and below 60 years at time of acquisition and who were engaged in economic activities.

\* '*Anganwadi* helper' or '*Sahayika*' is one of the main actors of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The Government of India launched the ICDS programme on 2 October 1975. This programme seeks to provide a package of 'integrated services' (supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring and promotion, nutrition and health education, immunisation, health services, referral services and non-formal pre-school education) keeping the focus on children under six. ICDS services are provided through a vast network of its centres known as '*anganwadi*' or '*anganwadi* centre'. An *anganwadi* is a village courtyard where the above mentioned services are being delivered. The main duties of *anganwadi* helper are: bringing children to the *anganwadi*, cooking and serving food for them, fetching water for *anganwadi* and cleaning the *anganwadi* premises daily.

**Table 4 : Level of Education Among the Working Population of Dispossessed Sample Farming Households in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur**

Level of Education	Count (working population)	Per cent
Illiterate	21	7.98
Class I to IV	14	55.89
Class V to IX	74	17.87
Class X to XII	74	16.35
Graduation and Above	35	1.90
Total	263	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

Note: Here those workers have been considered whose age was above 15 years and below 60 years at time of acquisition and who were engaged in economic activities.

#### **Pattern of Livelihoods After Acquisition**

Even after the completion of land acquisition in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur, some land loser households could cultivate crops on acquired land for few years because entire acquired land was not used by the government for urbanisation and infrastructure development at a time. The filling of low lying land with infertile soils and subsequent urban development through construction of roads, buildings etc., started progressing from the south toward north and cultivation was stopped on acquired land in these villages at the end of 2007. As a result of that, livelihood of the working population of dispossessed farming households in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur underwent a tremendous transformation within few years. The eradication of cultivation, conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural land and rapid urbanisation compelled and led majority of unskilled working population of the dispossessed sample households towards diversified non-farm economic activities that included security guard, taxi driver, mason, carpenter, rickshaw and trolley puller, construction labour, domestic servant and both petty and flourished businessmen<sup>10</sup> (Table 3). A

few working population of land loser households turned into real estate brokers and contractors who are now making good amount of money working as middlemen between the land/flat/house sellers and the buyers by fixing the deal at 2 to 3 per cent commission on sales agreements from both the parties<sup>11</sup>. Rapid urbanisation in Rajarhat at large scale has developed a new and unique source of employment. Since massive construction works for buildings and infrastructure development are being carried out in Rajarhat Township, there is a huge demand of raw materials like sand, bricks, iron rods, cement and other necessary materials. To supply these materials a number of cooperatives with 10 to 20 members or more from land loser households have been formed in consent of concerned village panchayat. These cooperatives are locally known as 'syndicates'. Most of the members of a syndicate are comparatively from better-off land loser households and are having very good connection with the local authority and politicians. Though a single person is not entitled to be the sole owner of a syndicate, there is no fixed share for a member in it. Therefore, a large proportion of the capital invested in a syndicate is primarily

contributed by the better-off land loser households. And the profit earned by a syndicate is distributed among the members according to their share to the total. Though the syndicates are temporary in nature, they have emerged as important sources of income among the dispossessed households in post-acquisition stage. A considerable proportion (17.49 per cent) of working population from the sample households in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur has become jobless in post-acquisition stage. This group of working population is of two categories. First category includes those jobless workers who belong to the lower end of working age limit and are from comparatively well-off dispossessed households. Majority of them are literate but not well skilled and well educated. They are pretty ambitious for their work and conscious about the status of menial jobs, such as construction labour, domestic servant etc. Second category includes unskilled jobless workers with comparatively lower physical strength and they have reached the upper end of working age limit. Majority of them are either

illiterate or with very low level of education. Therefore, it has become a very difficult task for them to find optimal non-farm livelihood activities in rapidly changing economic milieu in post-acquisition stage.

### Diversification in Sources of Household Income

Acquisition of agricultural land and conversion of it into non-agricultural land has not only changed the pattern of livelihood of the dispossessed households but also diversified the sources of household income (Table 5). More than three-fourths of the total sample households earned their livelihood solely from cultivation before acquisition but none of them are entirely dependent on cultivation for their livelihood in post-acquisition stage. Although 56 per cent of the total sample households still generate their household income from a single source, it would be worthy to mention that none of them has reported cultivation as the source of household income. The proportion of sample households having more than one source of

**Table 5 : Sources of Household Income in Pre and Post-acquisition Stage**

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

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

income has also increased substantially in post-acquisition stage.

### **Land Acquisition and the Changing Lifestyle**

'Lifestyle' can simply be defined as the way of living of individuals, families or/and societies, which they manifest in coping with their physical, psychological, social and economic environment on day-to-day basis. Like the other rural part of West Bengal, most of the villagers in Rajarhat had typical agrarian and traditional life style until the completion of land acquisition. However, rapid urbanisation on acquired agricultural land and penetration of Kolkata metropolitan city culture has been changing that traditional lifestyle of dispossessed farmers and their family members in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur of Rajarhat since several years. In pre-acquisition stage majority of the sample households lived in katcha houses with walls made of mud or bamboo and covered by a roof made of thatch or tin or fired clay tiles, whereas a reversed scenario has been noticed among them in post-acquisition stage (Table 6). About 61 per cent dispossessed households (families) are now living in pucca houses (buildings) and most of which they have made recently with the compensation money collected from the government in lieu of their land. During field survey it was noticed that some small dispossessed farming households started constructing concrete houses in places of old katcha structures but they could not complete it even after spending the entire amount of compensation money. This could perhaps happen due to inefficiency of these erstwhile agriculturists in estimating the quantity and cost of construction materials. The tendency of using luxury goods like car, washing machine, refrigerator and especially motorbike among the land loser households has considerably increased after acquisition (Table 6). During the course of field survey, a large farmer of Nawabpur informed that there were only two motor bikes in his village before acquisition but after

acquisition the count became more than a hundred and many land loser households bought more than one bike in their families. Cultivable land acquisition and subsequent rapid urbanisation have also changed the food habits of the villagers to some extent. Earlier the members of the dispossessed farming households used to have rice in both lunch and dinner as the main food. However, in the absence of cultivation in post-acquisition stage, wheat flour has replaced rice as the main food in dinner among many land loser households. Many households have sold off their cows, bulls, goats and sheep due to lack of fodder.

The change in lifestyle has become more prominent among those land loser sample households which had some amount of land in their possession after the completion of acquisition. In post-acquisition stage, majority (63.64 per cent) of these sample households have sold their remaining cultivable land completely to speculators and realtors at much higher price (between rupees 90 lakh to 1.5 crore per acre<sup>12</sup>) than the price offered by the government. With a part of this money some households have bought cars and taxis. Now in weekend the young male population of these households often hang out in world class luxury malls which have come up on the acquired land in Rajarhat. On the other hand, a proportion of better-off dispossessed households have kept their entire remaining land intact to make 'better deals' in future (Table 7). The sharp boom in land price in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur is primarily the outcome of increasing demand of land by different users with varying motives. IT giants like International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), Genpact, Tech Mahindra, Hisdustan Computers Limited (HCL), Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys etc., are now on the acquired land. Multi-storeyed apartments with swimming pools, parks and community halls, shopping malls, educational institutes, hospitals, luxury hotels etc., are also coming up here. These entire phenomena make a point evident that

land acquisition and rapid urbanisation at large scale have evolved a process of social and economic transformation in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur in Rajarhat. Rapid development, on the other hand, has become a nightmare, threat and matter of great worry to many

dispossessed small and marginal farmers to live in as the land brokers and land mafias are directly approaching them for their homesteads now. Therefore, in given changing socio-economic scenario in Rajarhat, it would not be surprising if a part of dispossessed marginal farmers goes away from their native place by selling their

**Table 6 : Nature of the Houses and Luxury Goods Used by the Households Before and After Acquisition in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur in Rajarhat**

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

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

**Table 7 : Nature of the Selling of Remaining Land by Sample Households in Post-acquisition Stage in Rekjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur**

Nature of selling in post-acquisition stage	No. of Households	% to total households owned agricultural land in post-acquisition stage
Sold remaining agricultural land completely	14	63.64
Sold remaining agricultural land partially	4	18.18
Held entire remaining agricultural land intact	4	18.18
Total sample households that owned some agricultural land in post-acquisition stage	22	100.00

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

homesteads off to interior rural areas in near future to be the survival of the fittest.

### **Economic Status of Dispossessed Farming Households and Households Unaffected by Acquisition and Engaged in Agriculture**

It is true that 'per capita income' is considered as the most important indicator for measuring economic status of a family or society across the world. However, getting actual data regarding total or per capita income generated by farming households in rural areas in India is very difficult. Hence, per capita consumption expenditure (in rupees) at household level (for some selected essential food items, education, transportation and other necessary stuffs) had been selected as a potential alternative indicator for measuring the same. Per capita consumption expenditure was calculated for last thirty days from the day of survey in a sample household. The quantity of each and every food and other items consumed/used by a household for the above mentioned period was multiplied by the per unit local market price prevailing at the time of survey (rupees per kg or rupees per piece). Thus, total monthly (last thirty days from the day of survey in a household) consumption expenditure (in rupees) per sample household as well as per capita monthly consumption expenditure at household level was estimated. It was found that while more than one-fourth of the dispossessed sample households (first set of samples) came under higher categories (high and very high) of economic status, only a meagre

proportion (3.33 per cent) of farming households unaffected by acquisition (second set of sample) belonged to high category (Table 8). However, majority of households from both sets of samples belonged to the categories of low and moderate economic status. Interestingly, no one from farming households unaffected by acquisition reported its economic status as very low, as it has been evidenced by a tiny proportion (1.71 per cent) of dispossessed households. This tiny proportion of dispossessed households happened to be in the category of very low economic status due to the incapability of some small and marginal farming households to establish their foothold in rapidly changing socio-economic environment with scanty financial and physical capitals or to find suitable jobs in post-acquisition stage for their unskilled family members with very low level of education. The degree of inequality had also been estimated within the dispossessed households (first set of samples) and farming households unaffected by acquisition and currently engaged in cultivation (second set of samples) with the help of simplified Gini coefficient (Table 9). It substantiated that the extent of inequality in terms of per capita consumption expenditure within the dispossessed sample households was higher (Gini ratio 0.27) than that of households currently engaged in cultivation (Gini ratio 0.12). This could be possible perhaps because of the diversification in livelihood activities of the working population of dispossessed households in post-acquisition stage.

**Table 8 : Economic Status (in terms of per capita consumption expenditure) of Dispossessed Households and Farming Households Unaffected by Land Acquisition**

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

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

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

**Table 9 : Gini Coefficient of Dispossessed Households and Farming Households Unaffected by Acquisition**

Sample households	Dispossessed households from land (Sample set-1)	Households engaged in cultivation and unaffected by acquisition (Sample set-2)
Gini coefficient	0.27	0.12

Data source: Household survey, 2009.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that acquisition of agricultural land has turned into a crucial factor for downward change in agrarian status of affected farming households in terms landholding size in Rajarhat. The mean size of landholdings at household had reduced sharply from 1.95 acres in pre-acquisition stage to 0.06 acres in post-acquisition stage. With low level of education and technical skills majority (about 90 per cent) of the working population

of dispossessed sample households in Rajarhat were engaged in agriculture based livelihood activities before acquisition. However, in post-acquisition stage 17.49 per cent of total working population became jobless. The eradication of cultivation through conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural land has compelled and led majority of the remaining working population of dispossessed sample households towards diversified non-farm economic activities that include security guard, taxi driver, mason,

carpenter, rickshaw and trolley puller, construction labour, domestic servant and both petty and flourished businessmen. The construction work for urbanisation and infrastructure development in rural Rajarhat at large scale has developed a new and unique source of employment in the form of cooperatives locally known as syndicates. Though the syndicates are temporary in nature, they have emerged as important sources of

income among a section of dispossessed households in post-acquisition stage. Acquisition of agricultural land and its conversion into non-agricultural land has not only changed the pattern of livelihood of dispossessed households but also diversified the sources of household income in post-acquisition stage and evolved a process leading to social and economic transformation in erstwhile agriculture based society in Rejjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur of Rajarhat in West Bengal.

### Notes

1. 'Mouza' refers to a revenue collection unit in a district. A *mouza* consists of one or more settlements or villages in a particular area.
2. Village Gobra comes under the jurisdiction of Gobra Gram Panchayat. Since all villages under the jurisdiction of Rajarhat-Bishnupur No. 1 Panchayat were affected by the acquisition and consequently cultivation was almost uprooted, none of them was chosen for drawing control samples. Therefore, nearby village Gobra had been selected for drawing control samples on the basis of the testimonials about the cropping pattern given by the Panchayat *Proadhan* (Head) of Rajarhat-Bishnupur No. 1 Gram Panchayat as well as many land loser farmers of Rejjuani, Gururite and Nawabpur who were well aware of the cropping pattern practised by the farmers in Gobra village.
3. The sample households were randomly drawn because of two reasons. First, the list of land loser households could not be collected from the concerned offices (panchayat office, block development officer's office, block land revenue office, district land acquisition cell or West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited Office). Second, not every dispossessed farmer was ready to provide necessary information about land acquisition. Many dispossessed farmers were very much suspicious about the political affiliation of strangers (whether the stranger belongs to then ruling Communist Party or the opposition Trinamool Congress Party).
4. The foods, other consumable items, education and transport expenses which were selected for the estimation of consumption expenditure at household level are: (i) cereals- rice, wheat, suji/sewai, bread, muri, and other rice product; (ii) pulses- arhar, moong, masur, soyabean and besan; (iii) milk and milk products- milk, milk powder, curd and butter; (iv) egg, fish and meat; (v) vegetables- potato, onion, carrot, pumpkin, papaya, cauliflower, cabbage, leafy vegetables, tomato, capsicum, lemon, garlic and ginger; (vi) fruits- banana, coconut, guava, orange fruits, litchi, apple, grapes & other citrus; (vii) education- books, Journals, newspaper, stationery, tuition and institution fees; (viii) telephone/mobile, transport and domestic servants (ix) others- sugar, salt, chillies, tea and coffee, cold beverages, smoking, kerosene and dung cake, LPG and coal.
5. Twenty one *mouzas* are : Rejjuani, Raigachi, Jatragachi, Tarulia, Chakpachuria, Patharghata, Gopalpur, Hatiwara, Aatghora, Koikhali, Teghoria, Noaparaha, Dashdron, Mahishgoth, Sulanguri, Mahishbathan, Ghuni, Baaligorhi, Chowk-pachulia, Thakdari and Kadampur.

6. The agricultural land of these three villages laid in a vast field called 'Dhupir Bil'. Due to lower location, it was often flooded during rainy season.
7. Net return or net income had been defined by the author as the surplus of gross value of output over paid out cost only. With the inclusion of the cost of family labour, the net return would be extremely low or might go negative for some crops.
8. Rajarhat Township was planned to make a major hub for business, trade, IT parks, institutions and culture. Another aim of it was to provide sufficient land for the construction of dwelling units for all income groups, with particular emphasis on the low and middle income segments. However, it has now become the main attraction for wealthy families. Getting house or flat in this area has become entirely beyond the reach of low income group.
9. The standard categorisation includes large farm (more than 4 hectares or 9.884 acres), medium farm (2 to 4 hectares or 4.942 to 9.884 acres), small farm (1 to 2 hectares or 2.471 to 4.942 acres) and marginal farm (less than 1 hectare or 2.471 acres).
10. Petty businesses included vegetable seller, hawker, plastic bottle seller, green coconut seller, and tea and cigarette seller at open space; whereas flourished business included property dealer, garment shops, taxi service and grocery store in Rajarhat market.
11. Broker may fix the deal in two ways. First, broker can bargain for his commission with both sellers and buyers. The price of the property will be determined by the seller only. Broker will find the buyer. Accordingly, sales agreement will be made between seller and buyer and the broker will earn his commission on the total value of the sales agreement from both parties. Second, broker himself first fixes the selling price with the seller and looks for the buyer. But the broker will always keep higher price before the buyer than the price desired by the owner and the excess amount over the price demanded by the owner (seller) will go to the broker's pocket and buyer will be ignorant about it.
12. Information on sales agreement had been obtained from those sample households which sold their land in post-acquisition stage.

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#### Appendix

**Table 1A : Categorisation of the Sample Households**

Category	Formula	Range of Values
Very High	Above (Mean + 1.50 MD)	Above 1125
High	(Mean + 1.50 MD) to (Mean + 0.50 MD)	1125 to 815
Moderate	(Mean ± 0.50 MD) = (M + 0.50 MD) to (M - 0.50 MD)	815 to 505
Low	(Mean - 0.50 MD) to (Mean - 1.50 MD)	505 to 195
Very Low	Less than (Mean - 1.50 MD)	Below 195