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Impact of Land Acquisition on Women: An Anthropological Case Study on Gokulpur, Paschim Medinipur (India)

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Abstract

The acquisition of agricultural land for industrialisation leads to a number of socio-economic consequences. The Paschim Medinipur district in the state of West Bengal is chiefly an agricultural district where more than seventy per cent of the population lives in the rural area and among them majority depends on agriculture and agriculture related occupations. In this paper, we have presented some empirical data on the socio- economic consequences of women of the establishment of the industry on the fertile agricultural land in the Kharagpur subdivision of Paschim Medinipur district in the early 1990s with the cooperation of West Bengal government. The findings revealed that acquisition of agricultural land for industry leads to change among the women as well as children of landloser families who depended on agriculture for their livelihood. Field data showed that the school dropout rate among female members of landloser families have been increased than non-landloser families. This study has also showed that after the acquisition, livelihood pattern have been changed among the female members of landloser families. Moreover the “age at marriage” have been decreased among the girls of landloser families than non- landloser families.

Keywords: Land acquisition, Industrialisation, Landloser, Women, Gender, dropout, Age at marriage.

Introduction

In this paper, we have conducted a field-based study on the impact of land acquisition among a group of women of the peasant families in a rural area of Kharagpur subdivision in Paschim Medinipur district in West Bengal. The fieldwork for the study was done during the months of January 2008 to June 2012.

Area and the people :The villages of the study area come under the administrative jurisdiction of Kharagpur-I block of present Paschim Medinipur district. The Kharagpur-I block is situated in the western part of the district and is bounded in the north by the Kasai river. On the west and the south of the block lies the Jhargram sub-division while the Kharagpur Township is located in the east. Although the two major townships of the district are situated almost at the vicinity of this block, is chiefly an agricultural area with few patches of Sal forest. The area is characterized by vast open cultivable lands interspersed with village settlements connected by unmetalled roads. According to a survey conducted by Block Development office in 1997- 98, the block has an area of 201 sq. km. or 27,979.21 hectares within which 18,500 hectare are under cultivation (66.12 per cent). The same survey has also found that out of the total cultivated area at about 6,905 hectares are under more than one crop, which turns out to be 37.32 per cent of the cultivated land of the block. The total population of the block is 1,21,685 of which the males outnumber the females (male 62,314 and female 59,364), and there are 22,666 scheduled castes (18.62 per cent) and 29,974 (24.63 per cent) belong to the scheduled tribes. Among the scheduled castes, the females (11,683) outnumber the males (10,983) while within the scheduled tribe population the sex

ratio is in favour of the males (15,528 males and 14,448 females). The population density of the block turns out to be a little more than 605 persons per sq. km. while the average household size is slightly above five persons. The district statistical handbook, which is based on 1991 census data, however differs from the survey conducted by the Kharagpur-I Block Development Office. According to 1991 census figures the total population of the block had been recorded as 1, 21,659 while the area of the block was 281.94 sq. km. and this gave a population density of 432 persons per sq. km. with 268 mouzas of which 225 were inhabited¹.

Methods and Techniques

This study is mainly based on direct, indepth observation and interviews with the villagers affected by land acquisition. The demographic and economic surveys were conducted among all the households of the Gokulpur village with the help of structured and open-ended questionnaire schedules. The qualitative information regarding the feeling and attitude of the acquisition affected persons were collected through repeated conversations with those persons over long period of time. The stories of hardship and economic crises have been collected from individual family members by the case study method.

Dependence of the villagers on agriculture: The name of the village, which has been studied specifically, is Gokulpur and it is a multiethnic farming village. The village is situated at about seven kms from the Medinipur town, which was the District Headquarters of erstwhile Medinipur. This village is located very near to the river Kasai on the east and in the west laid the south- eastern railway track, which runs between Medinipur and Kharagpur railway station. On the east of Gokulpur, lies the village Borkola. At the south side of this village, there are Chunpara and Nimpura. In the west and north lie the villages Amba and Ajobpur respectively. Except Chunpara, all the other villages that surround Gokulpur are agricultural villages in which most of the inhabitants depend on agriculture and agriculture related economic pursuits. In Gokulpur too, the majority of the villagers are depended on the cultivation of paddy and various kinds of vegetables.

There are mainly two types of land in Gokulpur. They are termed as 'Jal Jami' and 'Kala Jami' in local parlance. The villagers call those lands as 'Jal Jami', which are low lying, and hold water during the rainy season while the 'kala Jami' is located near the house sites and at higher elevations than the 'Jal Jami'. In the rainy season, people cultivate mainly paddy in the 'Jal Jami'. On the other hand, 'Kala Jami' is used for vegetable cultivation, in the winter season. In Gokulpur, 48.26 per cent land belongs to the category 'jal' out of the total amount of land under cultivation. This has been calculated from the data collected by our household census survey^{3,4,6,7,7a}.

We would now summarise the scenario of pre-acquisition and post acquisition agricultural landholding scenario of the landloser families of the village in Table 2.

Table 2 shows pre acquisition and post acquisition agricultural land holding scenario of the landloser families in Gokulpur. After land acquisition, five families among the total number of 99 families became landless which constitutes 5.05 percent of the total landloser families. The families having less than 0.5 acres of land dramatically increased from 10 (10.10%) to 28 (28.28%) after land acquisition. It was noticed that even after land acquisition the number of families having 0.5- 1.5 acres of land increased from 38 (38.38%) to 39 (39.39%). However, the families having 1.5-2.5 acres of land decreased from 23 (23.23%) to 19 (19.19%). Similarly a good decline was noticed in the number of families having 2.5 acres to more than 5.0 acres of land the number of families decreased from 28 (28.28%) to 8 (8.08%) after acquisition. On the other hand, the numbers of households within the size category 2.5- 5.0+ acres have declined from 6.53 to 4 only^{4,5}.

In Table 3 the category 'non- worker' contains the children and the old age persons who could not take part directly in agricultural and other productive activities, although this does not mean that these sections of the population is inactive. Many children and old age males and females were found to provide various sorts of help and cooperation in the agriculture related activities. Under the category, owner cultivator we have included the women members of landowning families, since

except ploughing and harvesting, the women members of those families were found to perform all kinds of activities related to the processing and storage of paddy and vegetables. Our data show that even after the land acquisition majority (34.25 %) among the working group population is engaged in agriculture and agriculture related activities. The non- agricultural laboures constitute only 5.67 percent of the working population. The vegetable sellers and agricultural laboures constitute nearly 15 percent of the total working population of the village. All the above facts and figures clearly reveal the predominance of agriculture and agriculture related activities for earning livelihood among the villagers of Gokulpur after the acquisition of land of these families in the wake of industrialization in Paschim Medinipur district.

Land acquisition for Tata Metaliks: Tata Metaliks is a heavy industry, which was established within the jurisdiction of the Kalaikunda Gram panchayat during 1992. This is a pig- iron manufacturing plant, which was found to produce about 290 tonnes of pig- iron per day in 1995- 96. After the establishment of Tata Metaliks, the company has built up a metal road on the western side connecting the plant with the national high way 6 in a place named Sahachawk. The south- eastern railway station line runs on the eastern side of the industry. The Kharagpur railway station is only about 5 kilometers and the Medinipur district headquarters is 7 kilometers from this place. In this connection, we can recall that in his answer to a question on 1.6.1992 in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly the land and Land Reforms Minister mentioned that 217.23 acres land was acquired for the Tata Metaliks². The land acquired for the pig- iron industry belonged to “jal some” class according to the age- old system of classification made by the Land and Land Reforms Department. The possessions on these lands were given to the company on different dates in the month of August 1991 and declaration notifications were published from November 1991 to January 1992. The Land Acquisition Department approved a rate of Rs. 20,686 per acre. The cases of Land acquisition for Tata Metaliks have shown that the Government of West Bengal desired a quick acquisition of land for the company and that is why Act-II was employed for the said purpose². The area lies on the bank of the river Kasai that is the largest river of the erstwhile Medinipur district. Cultivation of paddy (staple food of the district) in the villages under study depends primarily upon rainfall and no systematic irrigation facilities have yet been developed by the government. The villagers residing on the south- eastern bank of the river cultivate a variety of vegetables on the land adjoining their homesteads (‘Kala Jami’) owing to a very good supply of groundwater tapped through traditional dug wells. However, just west of the southeastern Railway track the groundwater level is not very congenial for cultivation of vegetables. The main agricultural activity on this side of the railway track is rain fed paddy cultivation for about 4 to 6 months of the year. Land had been acquired for the two big private industries by government on this side during 1991-96.

Impact Land Acquisition on Women: In this study, I have found that the women of the Gokulpur village are severe economic and social hardships under land acquisition. In a traditional patrilineal rural society, the women mainly working in the non-earning sector of the domestic group and the women of Gokulpur village is no exception to this general pattern. The acquisition of land caused sudden and drastic changes in the livelihood pattern of the women in the village. In this section, we have identified three important areas of socio-economic life in which the women of the landloser families were found to suffer under the impact of land acquisition. These three areas were: (i) education, (ii) age at marriage and (iii) occupation. Now I shall describe these aspects in the following subsections.

Deprivation of the girl child from schooling: At the time of our fieldwork, I have seen that although the educational achievement of the women in Gokulpur was lower than the men, but more women of the younger age groups were attaining primary and upper primary levels of school education. Under this general trend of educational achievement, I have collected data through interviews and case studies regarding the educational scenario of the landloser families in the village. One of the most adverse effects of land loss was reflected in the discontinuation of education of the children by their parents. It was shown that the girl child was deprived most in this process of dropping out from school education. In the following table, we

have made a comparison of the dropout of the girl child among the landloser and non-landloser families from primary, upper primary and secondary levels of education. The table shows that irrespective of the level of education the number of girls who discontinued from school education is higher among the landloser families than the non-landlosers. The comparative scenario is stark at the primary level in which more than 26 percent of the enrolled girls dropped out from school after the acquisition of land while there was not a single case of dropout among the non-landloser families, which means that the parents of non-landlosers continued the education of their girl child at the primary level. The comparative figures however showed that a sizeable section of girls dropped out from school education at the upper primary and secondary levels both, among the landloser and non-landloser families but the percentage of dropouts among the landlosers were much higher than the latter. The overall picture showed that land acquisition had caused a greater number of dropouts among the girls in Gokulpur village.

Declining age at marriage :Age at marriage is regarded as one of the important parameter to assess the degree of freedom enjoyed by the women in a particular society. It is often considered as one of the essential socio-demographic feature to measure the degree of modernization in a society. In traditional societies, women were usually married off at a much lower age, which gave them very little opportunity to obtain education and forced them to undergo the hardships of childbearing and motherhood from very early age. With advancement of societies, the scope of female education increased and the women began to compete with men in the job market. Broadening of economic and educational opportunities have changed the value systems, various social reform measures and governmental legislations had gradually caused an upward trend regarding the age at marriage among women both in the rural and urban areas of India. Under this general background we have made an attempt to observe whether land acquisition, which caused dropout of girl child from school education, had any effect on the age at marriage of the girls or not. In order to look into the relationship between age at marriage and land acquisition we have collected the age at marriage of those women who were married off by their parents within two years after the acquisition. In the following table, I have compared the number of girls among the landloser and non-landloser families at different categories of age at marriage. It was interesting to see that the percentage figures of women who were married below the constitutional age were much higher among the landloser families than the non-landlosers. I have enquired about the matter in the field and found that one of the reasons that the women were married off among the landloser families at a lower age because the fathers were anxious about the future of their daughters and the compensation money was spent to pay the dowry in their daughter' s marriage. A typical case study described in "case I" has revealed the ground realities.

Case I

Bishnu Santra is a Sadgope farmer who has lost 2.75 acres of land out of 4.75 acres of fertile land. He received about Rs. 57, 000/- as compensation for his acquired land. The amount left was not sufficient for his family consisting of five members. Immediately after acquisition, his wife also started working as a day labourer along with him. After a period of six months, they decided to look for a well-settled groom for their eldest daughter who was just 15 years old at that time. They engaged a traditional matchmaker (Ghatak) but it turned out to be a difficult task for him since no landowning farmer family belonging to Sadgope caste agreed to accept a bride whose parents have lost most of their agricultural land and worked as day labourer. Ironically, a family belonging to a lower caste (Duley, Bagdi) agreed to accept the daughter of Bishnu since they thought that Bishnu also belonged to the Duley, Bagdi caste. It was not possible for Bishnu to marry of his daughter to a lower caste groom. Finally, Bishnu had to spend a portion of his land compensation money to pay Rs. 25,000 in cash as dowry to get a suitable groom from his own caste. He had to marry off his daughter at the age of 15, which was far below the average age at marriage for girls of the village. The average age at marriage of girls in the village is..... Furthermore, the rest of his compensation money was spent for meeting the cost of the marriage ceremony.

Changes in occupation of women and increasing workload:Traditionally, the Sodgope women in a peasant family performs all kinds of domestic work, like cooking, cleaning of the house, washing utensils and clothes, feeding the domestic animals, caring for the children and the old age persons. The Sodgope women also helps their men in the storage and processing of the paddy after harvest but they usually do not move out of their houses to do extra-domestic work, like sowing paddy seeds, harvesting of paddy selling vegetables etc. For a Sodgope woman working outside the house is considered to be dishonourable and it is a shameful act on the part of a woman of this caste to work outside the domestic domain for earning money. I have not found any Sodgope woman belonging to a family having sufficient land to feed the members of her family to work outside the household. The acquisition of land of the Sadgope peasant families however brought a change as regards the participation of women in extra-domestic work. In the village Gokulpur, I have seen that many Sodgope wives, widows and unmarried daughters have moved out of their traditional domestic activities to work outside the household for earning money to provide economic support to the family. The economic crisis created by land acquisition forced the women of these families to do a variety of jobs, which had earlier done by the men only. These extra-domestic jobs included selling of vegetable in the nearby market, working as daily labourers in brick kiln factories and also as agricultural workers in the fields of other landowning families of the village. We have not however found any Sadgope woman who migrated as agricultural labourers to distant villages like the tribal and lower caste women of the region. Engagement in extra-domestic work by the women of the land loser families however did not mean that the women were released from their heavy domestic tasks. Land acquisition in Gokulpur village has imposed the double burden of workload on the women of the affected families.

In Table 6 table and the bar diagram, I have made an attempt to quantify the work participation of women within and outside the domestic domain under the impact of land acquisition. The table shows that even before the acquisition some of the Sadgope women (11.03%) were already doing extra-domestic work to provide economic support to their families but the percentage of women doing extra-domestic work nearly up to 50% of the total number of women after the acquisition. The table also shows that vegetable selling in the market became an important extra-domestic job for the women of the land loser families. Some of the women were also found to engage themselves in both vegetable selling and daily agricultural work to earn money. The typical case study of one housewife of a land loser family who is now engaged in extra-domestic work is given below to depict the condition of women under the impact of land acquisition.

Case II

Archana Ghosh (Age 53 years) is a Sadgope housewife who used to help her husband in the cultivation of vegetables in the homestead land of their family. After two months of her marriage, her father-in-laws lost 3 acres of land. At that time, there were seven members in the household. After acquisition, they had only 0.5 acre of agricultural land, which was not at all sufficient to feed the whole family. She had advised by her husband to work outside the home for earning money. However, being a newly married bride she could not do it. During that time, her mother-in-law started to sell vegetables that they grew in their homestead land. Nevertheless, in course of time, she along with her three sisters-in-law also started vegetable selling in the Kharida Bajar in the nearby Kharagpur town. At present, she lives in a separate household with her husband and two children. Her elder son had to leave school two years ago and she lament for this tragic event. She also felt bad since she did not get any chance to look after her son and daughter properly because she had to spend considerable time outside her house to earn money for the family.

Utilisation of money earned by women :In traditional peasant families, the women do not have much access to cash money. In the village Gokulpur also the women did not spend or save much cash money since they were not engaged in the service or petty business. The only source of income for the village women were selling of eggs of the domestic poultry birds and surplus straw and cow dung cakes over which the men of the peasant household did not exercise any control or ownership. Usually the older women of the family used to spend and save the money earned from the sale of the aforementioned items. The older women used to give some money to the children of the family for their entertainment and during family feasts on the occasion of religious festivals. The scenario has been changed after land acquisition since many women also earned money by doing extra-domestic work. In the following table, I have made an attempt to compare the pattern of utilisation of money earned by women among the landloser and non-landloser families through quantification. The data show that more women have saved cash money through bank deposits, which they have earned by doing extra-domestic work in order to meet future economic crises. Spending of cash money earned by acquisition, affected women constituted the second highest category of utilisation. Interestingly, the spending of money earned by women for domestic purposes has declined considerably among the women belonging to the landloser families indicating a poorer allocation of funds for domestic merrymaking (e.g. giving some pocket money to the children of the family).

Case III

Lalita Choudhury (age 70 years) is a Sadgope widow. At present, she lives with her elder son (Age 48 years), daughter-in-law and grandson in a joint family at Gokulpur village. Her son has passed class X and her grandson also studied up to class X. Her son and his grandson both are engaged in the agricultural activity. Lalita also helped her daughter-in-law for their household works. Her husband lost 1.0 acre of land out of 2.5 acres. According to Lalita, land acquisition has not only caused food shortage in the family but it also forced his son to sell out their domestic cattle. In the earlier time, she used to collect a lot of cow dung of their bullocks and cows, which were six in number. Quite a good number of cow dung cakes could be made and sold to the neighbours as fuel. Lalita could then give her grandsons some pocket money for entertainment. She even purchased goats and poultry birds out of the money earned from the sale of cow dung cakes. She also narrated how she used to sell the surplus of the non-edible portion derived from the outer layer of the paddy beneath the husk of the cereal as cattle-feed and earned some cash money. In rural households, women have exclusive control over these petty earnings, which have immense value. 'But gone are those good old days' lamented Lalita 'when I could buy some valuables for my family and bring joy to my grandsons and granddaughters.'

Conclusion

The major finding of the paper shows that land acquisition in a rural area does not only lead to landlessness but also like the male members, children as well as female members of the landloser families have been affected in the different aspects. Beside this, our data shows that the school dropout rate among female members of landloser families have been increased than non landloser families. This study also shows that after the acquisition, livelihood pattern have been changed among the female members of landloser families. Moreover, the "age at marriage" have been decreased among the girls of landloser families than non- landloser families.

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Table 1. Land Type in Gokulpur

Land Type		Total
Kala Jami (in acres)	Jal Jami (in acres)	
61.89 (51.74)	57.73 (48.26)	119.62

Figures in parentheses represent percentage out of column total

Table 2. Pre-acquisition and Post-acquisition Agricultural Landholding Scenario of the Landloser Families in the Village

Size category of landholdings in acres	Before land acquisition	Mean household size	After land acquisition	Mean household size
Land less	-	-	5 (5.05)	3.60
≤ 0.5	10 (10.10)	1.90	28 (28.28)	4.21
0.5 – 1.5	38 (38.38)	3.97	39 (39.39)	6.21
1.5 – 2.5	23 (23.23)	6.80	19 (19.19)	5.16
2.5 – 3.5	17 (17.17)	7.80	03 (03.03)	9.66
3.5 – 4.5	04 (4.04)	8.20	03 (03.03)	9.33
4.5 – 5.0	-	-	1 (01.01)	14.00
5.0 +	07 (7.07)	9.40	1 (01.01)	11.00
Total	99	5.63	99	5.63

Figures in parentheses represent percentage out of column total.

Table 3. Occupational Pattern in Gokulpur After Land Acquisition

Occupation	Male	Female	Total
Non- worker	412 (39.65)	314 (35.60)	726 (37.79)
Owner cultivator	207 (19.92)	451 (51.13)	658 (34.25)
Agricultural labourer	101 (09.72)	43 (04.88)	144 (07.50)
Vegetable Seller	110 (10.59)	27 (02.60)	137 (07.13)
Non-agricultural labourer	104 (10.01)	05 (00.57)	109 (05.67)
Other occupation	105 (10.10)	42 (04.76)	147 (07.65)
Total	1039	882	1921

Figures in parentheses represent percentage out of column total.

Table 4. Distribution of girl child dropouts among landloser and non- landloser families

Educational level	Landloser		Non- landloser	
	No.of dropout	Total no. of enrolled girl child	No.of dropout	Total no. of enrolled girl child
Primary	7 (26.92)	26	-	83
Upper primary	35 (67.30)	52	26 (35.13)	74
Secondary	27 (93.10)	29	35 (52.23)	67
Total	69 (64.48)	107	61 (27.23)	224

Figures in parentheses represent percentage out of the total number of enrolled girls among landloser and non-landloser families under each category of educational level.

Table 5. Age at marriage of girls of the landloser and non-landloser families

Age categories (in years)	Landloser		Non-landloser	
	No. of girls married off	Total no. of daughters	No. of girls married off	Total no. of daughters
Below 18	7 (47.05)	10	3 (23.08)	13
18- 20	3 (17.64)	7	9 (33.33)	27
20- 23	4 (23.52)	5	7 (87.5)	8
23- 26	-	2	2 (22.22)	9
26- 29	2 (5.88)	5	2 (25.00)	8
29- 32	1 (5.88)	3	1 (14.28)	7
Total	17	32	24	71

Figures in parentheses represent percentages of column total

Table 6. Working women engaged in domestic and extra domestic work among the land loser family

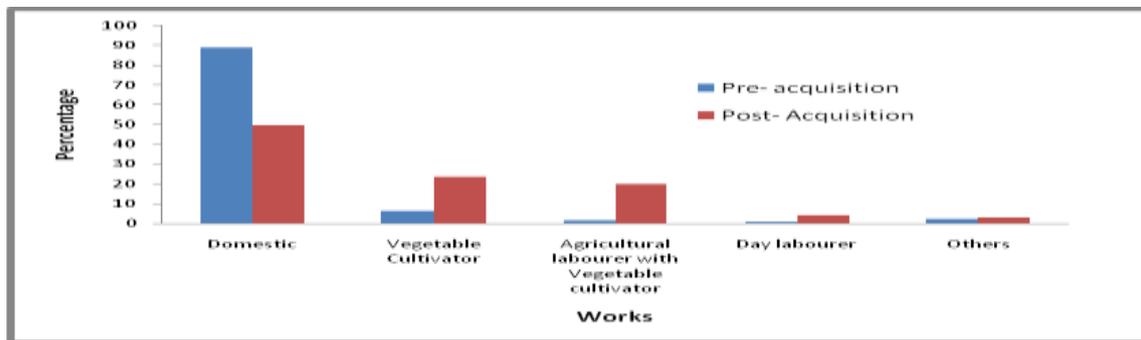
Periods	Domestic and extra-domestic work						Grand Total
	Domestic	Extra-domestic				Total (extra-domestic)	
		Vegetable selling	Agricultural labourer with Vegetable selling	Day labourer	Others		
Pre- acquisition	113 (88.97)	8 (6.29)	2 (1.57)	1 (0.78)	3 (2.36)	14 (11.03)	127
Post- Acquisition	83 (49.70)	39 (23.35)	33 (19.76)	7(4.19)	5 (2.99)	94 (50.30)	161

Figures in parentheses represent percentages of row total

Table 7. Utilisation pattern of money earned by women

Utilisation Category	Number of women	
	Landloser	Non-landloser
Bank deposits	63 (52.06)	42 (35.00)
Loan repayment	45 (37.19)	27 (22.50)
Household purposes	13 (11.74)	51 (40.83)
Total	121	120

Figures in parentheses represent percentages of column total



Graph 1 Bar diagram showing the working women engaged in domestic and extra domestic work