

Singur Movement: The full story - The struggle of Ma, Mati, Manush

The Singur movement, led by Ms. Mamata Banerjee was an epic and exemplary struggle against State-sponsored tyranny and atrocities. The farmers, having their lands taken away forcibly by the then state government, found confidence in Mamata Banerjee, her will and her tenacity. Didi, took up the cause and within 26 days of becoming the Chief Minister, kept her promise. On June 14, 2011, the historic Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Bill passed in Assembly which will lead to the returning of the 400 acres of land the farmers unwilling to part with their agricultural land.



The background

Singur is in Hooghly district, around 45 kilometers from Kolkata. The nearest railway stations are Singur, Kamarkundu and Madhusudanpur. The farmland earmarked for the project stands alongside an arc of the Durgapur expressway near the Ratanpur crossing with NH-1. The six mouzas whose land fell under the Tata project site are Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Bajemelia, Khaserbheri, Singherberi and Joymollarberi. They stand on the other side of the project site completing the expressway's arc into a circle. According to a govt. Statistical Handbook on Singur block, 83% of the land is irrigated and the crop density is 220%. The crops produced are mainly paddy and potato but jute and a variety of vegetables are also grown in the fields.

In May 2006, the West Bengal Government decided to acquire 997 acres (initially 1013 acres were asked for) for the Tata Motors small car factory in Singur of Hooghly district. Almost 6,000 families, including many agricultural workers and marginal peasants were to lose their land and livelihoods. There was no compensation taken for the landless agricultural workers, unrecorded bargadars and other rural households who were indirectly dependent for their livelihood on land and agricultural activities. Almost all the land owners had also expressed their unwillingness to give their land from the inception of the project, but these appeals have fallen on deaf ears.

The Tata Project: The only official document publicly available on the project was the Gazette Notification under sec 4(1) of the Land Acquisition Act 1894 between 19th and 24th July states that the "land as mentioned in the schedule below is likely to be needed to be taken by the Government/ Government undertakings/ Development Authorities, at the public expense for a public purpose viz., employment generation and the socio economic development of the area by setting up a Tata Small Car project".

Year 2006

18 May: In a joint press conference with the then CM, in Kolkata Ratan Tata says that Tata Motors had decided to locate the Rs 1 Lakh small car project at Singur in Hooghly. For the first time, Tata revealed that the project, to be spread over 700 acres with another 300 kept aside for ancillary production

25 May: The struggle of a substantial number of the people of Singur against the land acquisition began from day one when the Tata company representatives and the officials went to see the land. The people refuse to let them reach their fields and blocks their way and the Tata team had to be rescued by the police.

26 May: Angry farmers of Singur demand that the then chief minister should assure them of jobs in it. If their demand is not fulfilled, they will continue their agitation and not let the government take their land.

30 May: The then state commerce and industries minister was greeted with black flags in Singur today by organization of farmers and labourers of Singur.

1 June: About 3,000 villagers stages a demonstration in front of the office of the Singur block development officer against the government's move to acquire farmland for the Tata Motors project.

17 July: Work on acquisition of land for Tata Motors' factory for producing small cars at Singur begins with the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation submitting its proposals to Hooghly DM. The state government was to acquire a little more than 1,000 acres through the WBIDC for transfer to the Tatas. Farmers led by the Trinamool Congress' MLA from Singur, Robindranath Bhattacharjee, lodged protests protesting that the state government was trying to remove them from land they owned. The farmers also submit a memorandum saying they would fight "with all their might" any effort to acquire land.

19-24 July: Ignoring the people's voice the Government issued 13 notices under Section 9 (1) of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to the affected farmers.

24 July: The Durgapur Expressway blocked as a protest.

8 August: Meanwhile, nearly 5,000 locals who had gathered from several villages around Singur, today demonstrated in front of the Gopalnagar gram panchayat office protesting against the state government's decision to acquire land at Singur for Tata's small car project.

18 August: Government issues notice under Section 9 (1) of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894; demonstration held by the farmers of Singur protesting the wrongful acquisition.

22 August: Around 5,000 Singur farmers demonstrate around the block development officer's office and boycott the hearing.

September 27: the land department is to hand over to the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation all the 1,013 acres Tata Motors needs at Singur in Hooghly district to put up its small-car plant.

1 September: More than 100 villagers from Santoshimatola in Singur prevent officials from entering their villages to serve notice to acquire land. Women lead from the forefront in Bajemelia as district authorities flee—work of issuing notices is abandoned.

4 September: An international Fact Finding Mission (FFM) held in Singur to look into the looming eviction of farming communities as a result of the construction of Tata Corporation of a facility in the

area. As a result of this FFM, a report on the situation of the community is drafted. Moreover, an online petition letter addressed to the government of West Bengal and to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights is posted in the PCFS website. The letter urges these offices to look into the planned eviction of the farming communities in Singur, West Bengal.

25 September: Singur Land forcefully acquired. The events showed that the Left Front Government would go to any extent to evict the people and hand over the land to the company officials, more than four hundred people including several women and children are brutally assaulted and about 78 activists are arrested which includes 27 women, MP Mamata Bannerjee and MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharya. At around 1:40 am in the night the RAF and the police attacks a few thousand men-women-children who had been protesting peacefully all day. Few hundred persons are injured. The assembled villagers at BDO Singur were upset that their voice had not been given a platform and that the Government was unilaterally working on this project. About 5000 people including about 2000 women workers had peacefully demonstrated at the Block Development Office at Singur against the distribution of cheques to the farmers. The protest was an all night one. The dissenting farmers wanted the administration to carry out mutation for their land titles too. However, they were told that only if they gave their consent letters would it be carried out.

The struggle of the people nevertheless continued in a democratic and peaceful fashion the next few months. Marches, rallies, public hearings got organized in Singur and Kolkata. They were joined by several organizations and eminent people like Professors from Jadavpur University, Human Rights and other social action groups, trade unions and all political parties other than those of the left front from all over W. Bengal. Former Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and former Prime Minister VP Singh all urged the Government, met the Governor and wrote to the PM and President and Central Government to not evict the people and give the TATA's alternative land.

Ms. Mamata Banerjee announces a 24-hour "general strike on 9 October in protest against land acquisition at Singur.

27 September: As a sign of civil disobedience, other political parties like the Socialist Unity Centre of India calls for a 12 hour bandh in Singur on 27 September. Moreover, a meeting of the NGO's/ CSO's held on the same date protesting against the attack of the police on the peasants of Singur, particularly on the peasant women.

Sonia Gandhi's Congress supports Mamata Banerjee in her bid to get Tata to relocate the project.

28 September: Rajkumar Bhoal who was injured (on 25 September) by the police atrocities at the BDO office died. He is declared as the first martyr of the Singur Agricultural Land Protection Committee. By the initiative of Trinamool Congress there is a protest movement on all roads and railway lines in the state from 11am to 12 noon.

1 October: On the day of Bijoy Doshumi night vigil is observed in the affected moujas of Singur. All the villagers in all the villages of Singur area switched off the lights in their houses in the evening as a symbol of protest. Ex-chief justices of the Supreme Court judges J. S. Verma and Rajendra Babu and retired judge M. N. Rao write letters to Ratan Tata to abandon Singur.

3 October: The people protested by refusing to cook in thousands of village houses in Singur. This is to protest against the police atrocities and as a part of non-violent peaceful movement.

9 October: A 24-hour statewide bandh or general strike is observed by various political parties to protest the eviction of the peasants. The Committee to Assist the Struggle of Singur Peasants against Eviction also supports the general strike. 6211 Bandh supporters arrested.

12 October: A deputation of the Sanhati Udyog is sent to the Hoogly District Magistrate; APDR publishes its fact-finding report on police atrocities at the BDO office and the murder of Rajkumar Bhool.

15 October: Because of police atrocities in Singur on 25 September, Shame Day is observed.

16 October: Unidentified persons damage a water pumping station at Madhyapara in Singur to prevent irrigation of potato farms in the area. The pumping station set up 30 years ago by the state government to facilitate multi-crop farming in Beraberi and Bajemelia moujas had been the only source of water for the farmers. The Congress

17 October: 10 universities of the state and 130 faculty members of IIT request the governor to intervene to stop the forceful eviction of peasants in Singur.

18 October: More than a 1000 women from Singur protest in front of the Tata Center at Kolkata.

21 October: As a protest, no lights are lit in the villages of Singur on the night of Diwali.

27 October: Social activist Ms Medha Patkar warns the state government of a law and order breakdown in Singur if force was exerted to acquire farm land while the well-known litterateur and social activist, Mrs Mahasweta Devi, said CPI(M) workers have no right to call themselves Marxists because they have been “systematically hoodwinking people.” They were addressing a rally organised by farmers at Bajemelia hospital ground.

Public Hearings organized, chaired by Medha Patkar and with Mahashweta Devi, Justice Malay Sengupta and Dipankar Sengupta as members, which are creative and democratic ways of giving a platform to the voices challenging the acquisition.

30 October: Former chief minister Jyoti Basu sounds a note of caution for acquiring multi-crop land by the Left Front government in West Bengal for setting up industries.

3 November: Citizens' Convention by the Citizen's Mancha in Kolkata. Ten complaints are filed against the government.

5 November: Mamata Banerjee asks the Tatas to shift their proposed small car project from farmland in West Bengal's Singur and gave a 12-day ultimatum to the state government to announce that industries would not be set up on agricultural land.

7 November: West Bengal government started deploying huge contingents of armed police and the Rapid Action Force and setting up camps at several places in the area.

17 November: Trinamool Congress activists march on Central Avenue, Kolkata protesting against the acquisition of cultivable land by the state government in Singur for industrial which was scheduled to

start at 1:30 p.m., ultimately commenced around 3:30 p.m. from near the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Mayo Road.

19 November: Farmers opposing land acquisition in Singur takes out a rally against deployment of policemen in five camps, accusing them of “terrorising” villagers to stop them from sowing potatoes. The district authorities had thrown a strong security cover in Singur by deploying more than 800 policemen at five “strategic points” while they fence 997 acres. Farmers allege lack of consent on their part. More than 7,000 farmers including 800 women takes out a procession from Bajemelia hospital demanding “immediate withdrawal” of police from Bajemelia, Chagalveri, Khaserveri and Joymollah villages. They also organize sit-ins before the police pickets.

25 November: Teachers of various universities and premier academic institutes stage protest in Kolkata against the acquisition of multi-crop agricultural land for industrialization. A large number of teachers,

26 November: Ms Banerjee says she would lead an agitation in Singur to sow potatoes. Around 6,000 additional policemen is deployed to withheld Mamata Banerjee to sow potato seeds on the plots.

30 November: Assault on Ms. Mamata Banerjee who is barred by police from proceeding to Singur The government prohibits all assemblies in the Singur area, displaying its Fascist face.

1 December: AITMC calls 12-hour strike in protest of police atrocities

2 December: A memorandum seeking to stop this “persecution” would be given to the governor and if it continues a three-day long bandh would be called as the last resort, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, senior AITMC leader and a spokesman of the Krishi Jami Bachao Committee says in a Press conference.

Farmers of Khaserbheri, Bera Beri and Gopalnagar gather to resist the fencing off of the proposed project land. Severe police force is used against them, several people injured and more than 60 people were arrested. Among them, Jhuma Patra, daughter of Mr. Ashok Patra of village Khaserbheri, 12 years old and a student of class-V in Naraharipara Primary School and Soma Dhara daughter of Sanyasi Dhara of same village, a minor are also arrested. Several women tell that the police not only beat up people at the project site, but had chased them into their villages and dragged them out of their houses and beat them. Verbal sexual abuse was used against the women, and at least one young woman, Deepali Moitra says that she was dragged by her hair from under a bed in Kasherberri where she was hiding. Medha Patkar who went in solidarity is not allowed to enter the affected villages by the officials and her citizen rights of movement in the area were curtailed.

4 December: The Singur agitation intensifies with Ms Mamata Banerjee going on an indefinite hunger-strike. Miss Banerjee began the hunger-strike at Esplanade in central Kolkata after the state government had rejected her demand for stopping fencing work at Singur and withdrawal of police forces from the area. Fifteen farmers, including five elderly women, began a fast-unto-death at Singur in protest against police excesses and land acquisition. Miss Banerjee declared that her party would block roads all over the state for two hours from 12 noon on 6 December and march to Singur on 7 December, “come what may”. West Bengal and Kolkata witnesses an unprecedented assembly of lakhs of people from every walk of life during the 25 day fasting of Mamata Banerjee, Abhash Munsri, Vijay Upadhyaya. The mass gathering shakes the rulers countrywide. The people were highly motivated by the spirited presence and speeches, songs, recitations by eminent personalities some of whom are as follows:

Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi
Mahashewta Devi
Amlan Dutta
Santosh Bhattacharjya
V. P. Singh
Medha Patkar
Debabrata Bandopadhyaya
Sumitra Kulkarni
Prafulla Mohanta
Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi
George Farnandez
Rajnath Singh
Kashikanta Moitra
Saifuddin Choudhury
Mr. Vaico & Dr. C. Krishna (MDMK)
Mr. N. Jyoti & Mrs. S. Indira (AIADMK)
Haradhan Roy
Sunanda Sanyal
Jaya Mitra
Pratul Mukherjee
Kabir Suman
V. B. Cherian
Vilas Sonwane
Sujato Bhadra
and others including many from Trade Union, Social and Political fields.

Activist Ms Medha Patkar was turned back on her way to Singur for the second time in four days. A habeas corpus application moved in Calcutta High Court today complained that Ms Patkar had been illegally detained.

The Singur issue rocked Parliament also.

5 December: People continue to protest in the affected villages. In both BeraBeri and Khaserbheri people were sitting on indefinite fasts.

8 December: People spontaneously shuts down shops and takes out procession of about 500 people when the police forcibly takes away Rabindra Bhattacharya, MLA and 4 others from the Bajemelliya Santoshimatala hunger strike camp.

10 December: The Singur farmers have a press conference in Beraberia Purba para and presents signed letters from farmers where the farmers declared that “We Have Not And Will Not Give Our Land To Tata Motors”.

14 women starts a fast-unto-death near Beraberia Purbapara in Singur in protest against alleged “police excesses” and the state government’s “false claims”.

18 December: At about 6 a.m. the body of a young activist of the Singur Krishi Jami Raksha Samity, Tapasi Malik was found burning in the fenced area. It seemed a clear case of murder. Tapasi had on

the previous day worked hard to mobilize the children and had gone home, had dinner and then slept. An FIR no 156/ 18 December, 2006 was lodged under sections 302 and 201 of the IPC. The girl was reportedly raped and murdered by miscreants who were present within the guarded area. She was about to be buried and fire was set on her body to destroy the evidence of crime. The villagers intervened in such situation as fire and bad smell attracted them. The miscreants involved in the matter fled from the spot. Thereafter, Superintendent of Police of Hooghly swung into action to cover up the crime. It was after a lot of protest by the AITMC and others in Kolkata that the investigation has been handed over to the CBI.

28 December: Letters from President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and former Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee persuades Mamata Banerjee to end the 25 days of persistent fasting.

28 December: An elderly couple, who had parted with their land for the proposed Tata Motors small car factory at Singur, is found dead in their house in mysterious circumstances at Doluigacha near Ghoshpara in Singur this morning.

29 December : Mamata Banerjee's decision to end her 'indefinite' fast on the Singur issue after 25 days of brings considerable relief to West Bengal and beyond.

Year 2007

3 January: Trinamool Congress leadership and members of Singur Krishi Jami Raksha Committee points out discrepancies in the status report that was published by the state government on 22 December and 2 January and gives a 72- hour ultimatum to the state government to publish the list of farmers who have given their consent for land acquisition.

7 January: Farmers of Singur complains that the government has stopped releasing water from 30 deep and the mini tube-wells which fall inside the fenced-off area. As a result, agriculture in almost 743 acres of land in Bajemelia, Singherveri, Khaserveri, Beraberi and Gopalnagar, has been badly hit owing to the non-availability of irrigation water. There are three deep tube-wells and 27 mini tube-wells in the area, which supply irrigation water to almost 1600 acres of agricultural land.

24 January: Intellectuals, academicians and students join the protests against the state government's policy of land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram with a sit-in demonstration at Esplanade.

5 February: Prohibitory order under Section 144 CRPC was re-imposed at the Tata Motors small car project site in Singur

7 February: Police fires teargas shells to chase away activists of Trinamool Congress-led Krishi Jami Raksha Committee.

14 February: Calcutta High Court quashes the prohibitory order issued under Section 144 CRPC at Singur on 4 February and observes that it was an abuse of power and an act of executive highhandedness unreasonably restricting the petitioners' right guaranteed by the Constitution

16 February: Ms. Mamata Banerjee to address a rally near Kamarkundu station, 5 km from the Tata Motors plot and 50 km from Calcutta. It would be the first Opposition rally in Singur in over two

months as she was stopped on her way on November 30 because Section 144 was in force there. The order was in force for 60 days from November 30 and was extended twice till the midnight of February 14.

12 March: Haradhan Bag, a farmer of Singur commits suicide on 11 March. He, according to his family members, refused to part with his land for the Tatas' small car project.

13 March: Trinamool Congress legislators stage a walkout after the Speaker refuses to allot more time during the Question Hour to raise the issue of Haradhan Bag's suicide at Singur.

27 March: The West Bengal government admits that its Advocate General made an "erroneous submission" to the Calcutta High Court on the compensation for farmers whose land was acquired for the Tata Motors' car plant in Singur.

2 May: The High Court says the affidavit submitted by the government on the Singur land acquisition process was "incomplete."

25 May: The state Forward Bloc secretary admits lack of homework before the all-party meeting and says he would meet Mamata Banerjee soon to fix an agenda for the next round of talks. Prasanta Das chose death over compensation. A 45-year-old farmer from Khaserveri mouza in Singur, Prasanto Das, who had refused to part with his land for the Tata Motor small car factory, committed suicide.

27 May: The by-election to two panchayat seats at Singur passed off peacefully with nearly 80 per cent polling being recorded under the watchful eyes of policemen today.

31 May: Speaking at the convention, "No to SEZ" – organised by the All India People's Convention on Nandigram, Narmada Bachao Andolon leader Medha Patkar criticises the Left Front government.

4 June: Jyoti Basu rings up Mamata Banerjee inviting her home to thrash out a solution to the Nandigram-Singur standoff.

23 June: Sankar Das, a 45-year-old sharecropper and the only earning member of a peasant family at Dobandhi village close to the Tata factory site, dies on 1 July of starvation after being rendered jobless because of the land.

11 July: Sixteen-year-old Tapasi Malik didn't commit suicide as the state police had earlier claimed. CBI has no doubt that hers is a case of premeditated murder. Those who burnt the Singur anti-land acquisition activist alive were goons on hire, brought from outside.

12 July: CBI has identified Suhrid Dutta, CPM's Singur zonal committee secretary, as the mastermind behind the murder of Tapasi Malik.

15 September: CPM leader Suhrid Baran Dutta and party activist Debu Mallik, arrested in connection with the murder of Tapasi Malik in Singur, the site of the Tata Motors car plant, were today chargesheeted by the CBI.

21 September: As reported by media today, the CBI claimed that CPM leader in West Bengal Suhrid Dutta, one of the accused in the Tapsi Malik murder case, was involved in infrastructure development work of the Tata Motors' small car project at Singur for "personal gains".

25 November: More than 1,500 farmers, including hundreds of women, took part in a rally in Singur this afternoon to protest against the forcible acquisition of their farm land by the state government and the alleged “mass killing” in Nandigram by the CPI(M) cadres.

Year 2008

10 February: A man rendered jobless after the 1.5 acres he used to share with others was acquired for the Tata Motors plant here died today, allegedly of malnutrition.

21 May: The seventh Panchayat poll results displayed the confidence in Trinamool Congress and its fight against land acquisition. The left parties were shown the door in many a Panchayats across the state.

28 May: The Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee said that she had no objection to the Tata Motors project at Singur if the government returned the 400 acres of land to those farmers who did not accept compensation. “Time and again I have been saying that we are not against industry. It is of vital importance to us. Some people might have sold their land at Singur because they needed money. I have nothing to say regarding this. But I want the government to return the land to other farmers. If that happens the factory may come up,” said Ms Banerjee.

14 June: Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee addressed a rally with the newly elected panchayat representatives of her party today and announced total non-cooperation with the Tatas. Mamata Banerjee also announced a deadline for the government, failing which she threatened to launch an indefinite stir in Singur block. “I mean it. The government should return the land by August 20.

October 3: Tatas declared their decision to move the Nano Project out of West Bengal.

Year 2011

March 28 : Ms. Mamata Banerjee announces before Assembly Election that she her prime agenda is to return 400 acres of land in Singur to the unwilling farmers.

20 May: Trinamool-led Government takes oath with Ms. Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister

14 June: AITMC-led government places the historic Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Bill which is passed in Assembly.