

THE RISE OF OPPOSITIONS
POLITICS OF LAND, PATRONAGE, AND
RESISTANCE IN WEST BENGAL

SUCHISMITA DAS

ENTRY NO. 2016HUZ8181



DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI

Abstract

This thesis explores the rise of oppositions in West Bengal, a state that has been historically known for the uninterrupted rule of the incumbent regime and a lack of viable oppositions. A strong opposition is fundamental to any democracy, but in a state where oppositions are conspicuously attenuated, the very rise of oppositions becomes a cause for sociological enquiry. The politics of patronage, land and resistance are pivotal factors in this rise of oppositions. The CPI(M)'s uninterrupted rule of thirty four years is characterized by a deep entrenchment. The resistance against land acquisition in Singur became emblematic of the demise of this entrenched regime, and the rise of the TMC, a decade ago. A decade later, Singur witnesses the rise of the next opposition, namely the BJP. Thus, the political field of Singur has allowed for the rise of *two* successive oppositions, over the course of just one decade, in a state that has been historically hostile to oppositions. The field work for this thesis has thus focused on the villages of Singur, which reveal the forces that have led to the rise of these oppositions despite this traditional hostility. The TMC's projection as a powerful opposition became associated with its role in resistance to land acquisition. Thus, this thesis also studies the events unfolding in Bhangar, where the TMC tried to acquire land after coming to power. Bhangar was beset with violence over this acquisition and a study of these events show how a party that rose through resistance, came to manage resistance to land acquisition during its own tenure. This also reveals how the state and the protesters responded to land acquisition and resistance under two separate regimes. This thesis explores how state violence plays a paradoxical role of both endangering and engendering oppositions. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'feel for the game' helps to explain why and how people shift allegiances to a rising opposition even before it comes to power. This thesis has engaged with the concept of the state to understand how the state can be located not only in the architecture of the government but also in processes that exist in the opposition – albeit an opposition that has the support of a larger, national government. Some important factors in the rise of oppositions include defiance, and the support of larger structures of power, which in themselves acquire a magnetic quality in West Bengal. Although the need and desire for oppositions may be felt due to various malpractices of the regime, they remain unaddressed till the opposition itself acquires a formidable stature through unabashed defiance and support of larger power structures. This thesis thus studies the rise of this phenomenon, locating it in the political field of Singur as a product of the past decade.