CHAPTER 9

Dispossession, Neoliberal Urbanism and Societal Transformation: Insight into Rajarhat New Township in West Bengal

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1 Introduction

A fact that has become a cliché in context of the neoliberal development in India is that the present form of land-based development largely driven by private capital under the aegis of the state apparatus is against the welfare and benefit of the farming communities. The most 'contentious issue' of development that the country is facing today is 'land' and 'livelihood' of the dispossessed. The critics and activists, nonetheless, consider the shift in development paradigm a symbol of 'the hegemony of predatory neoliberal capitalism in the globalised Indian economy' and an immoral connivance between the state and the capitalists, where the former promotes an intrusion of the latter by dispossessing and displacing peasants (Banerjee and Roy 2007; Nielsen 2010, 146–149). Agricultural land has thus become a central 'locus' of such dispossession in India (Levien 2012) and many other developing countries including China (Walker 2006) and the central and southern African countries (Millar 2016; Arrighi et al. 2010),

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bringing the government and capitalists into conflict and agrarian uprising, popularly dubbed 'land war' (Levien 2013, 352).

Since the 1990s, land happens to be a source of perpetual debate and conflicts between the states and the peasants or the capitalists and the peasants regionally, nationally (Cernea 1997; Fernandes 2007; Roy 2014; Sharma 2010), and subsequently globally (Li 2014; Millar 2016; Walker 2006, 2008). Many recent scholarships attempt to emphasise the gravity and magnitude of these phenomena by phrasing synonymous terms, such as 'land grab' (Li 2011; Levien 2012, 2013), 'land seizure' (Walker 2008), 'land war' (Levien 2012, 2013) and 'land rush' (Millar 2016) which have explicitly entered the lexicon of contemporary land debate, denoting the exercise of the 'eminent domain power' by the state apparatus to expropriate agricultural land from the farmers involuntarily for increasingly privatised industrial, infrastructural and real estate projects (Levien 2013). While one strand across the developing countries argue that the dispossession of farmers from agricultural land results in destruction of traditional livelihoods, deprivation of the property rights and marginalisation (Cernea 1997; Fernandes 2007; Hui and Bao 2013; Millar 2016), the other consider it an engine of oppression that leads to social exclusion, unemployment, and eventually destitution (Sau 2008; Venkatesan 2011). The Marxian 'primitive accumulation' (1976), and the Harveyian 'accumulation by dispossession' (2003)—which is actually a reconstruction and redeployment of the primitive accumulation within the capitalist countries of the Global North (Glassman 2006, 608) in a larger sense have also gained attention in some recent scholarships in the Global South, focusing on the state-driven dispossession of farmers from their land and livelihoods in India, China and the southern African countries (Whitehead 2003; Walker 2006; Samaddar 2009; Arrighi et al. 2010; Banerjee-Guha 2010; Levien 2012; Dey et al. 2011; Millar 2016). To them, the land given to the neoliberal capitalist mode of production by the state at a cheaper rate, by stripping out peasants from their means of subsistence, is an example of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession as it facilitates generating profit and wealth. I would, however, here argue that the land given to the capitalist mode of production at cheaper rate under the aegis of the state apparatus does not always necessarily lead to the primitive accumulation, and furthermore, the accumulation by dispossession should also be distinguished from the primitive accumulation, rather than considering the two 'synonymous' (as assumed by Arrighi et al. 2010), keeping their mechanism and outcome in view. Based on a

longitudinal sample survey, this chapter would, however, illuminate these aspects, keeping the analytical lens focused on Rajarhat in West Bengal (India) a community development block (CDB) adjoining Kolkata Metropolis and the Kolkata Airport that lately witnessed the largest dispossession of farmers from land (6933.72 acres) and livelihoods during the prolonged communist rule (June 1977 to April 2011) in the state and remained unobserved (unlike Singur and Nandigram) by a majority of the citizenry in the country. Rajarhat was destined to develop a major hub for Information Technology (IT) parks, business centres, institutions and dwelling units now recognised as 'Rajarhat Newtown'. It would, however, exhibit why a large-scale dispossession of farmers from land for a planned urban centre (Rajarhat Newtown) adjoining a metropolis (Kolkata) does not corroborate what generally happened in other development ventures in faraway rural areas.

The process of proletarianisation that lies at the core of primitive accumulation has long been central to discussions in development studies (Glassman 2006). However, the notion and suitability of implicating the Marxian primitive accumulation and the postulation of marginalisation and destitution in the neoliberal land-based development in several states in India, especially in West Bengal (see Samaddar 2009 and Dey et al. 2011) where landholdings are highly fragmented with an average landholding size of 1.95 acres (Chakravorty 2013; Roy 2016) and the income from agriculture 'under WTO rules' (Harvey 2003, 161) is no more lucrative and substantial (Gupta 2005; Chakravorty 2013), call for a serious empirical concern and theoretical debate. This is because the extent, mode, context, purpose, location (adjacent or away from a large city), and the political economy of dispossession of farmers from land and subsequent livelihood opportunities (direct or indirect) vary across states and the development ventures. In what follows, I portray a brief elaboration on 'primitive accumulation' and 'accumulation by dispossession', which would help comprehend their intelligence and fecundity in West Bengal, and Rajarhat in particular, in the later part of discussion.

Marx's primitive accumulation is etymologically connected to the enactment of the 'Enclosure Acts'[1] in England in the seventeenth and

[1] 'Enclosure' refers to the consolidation of farm land. The British Enclosures Acts removed the prior rights of peasants to rural land cultivated for generations. The dispossessed peasants were compensated with an alternative land of smaller scope and inferior quality, and eventually migrated to manufacturing industrial cities. The lands seized by the acts were then con-

early eighteenth centuries that led to the development of large commercial farms and 'set free' a large number of peasants as proletarians and created a new organisation of classes (Marx 1976, 725) with capitalist class relations (Walker 2006, 6). It refers to the historical process of creating two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into free wage labourers (Marx 1976, 874). Accumulation by dispossession, on the other hand, involves various forces of commodification, corporatisation and privatisation that turn the land and other resources (water, forest, sea coasts and air) into capital (Harvey 2003, 147). It implies to 'a panoply of contemporary forms of dispossession' (Levien 2012, 938) of private and common property resources for stock promotions, *ponzi* schemes, large-scale agricultural plantations, agribusiness, dams, real estate development, infrastructure projects, SEZs, slum clearances and privatisation of educational institutes and other public services (Harvey 2003). It focuses more on the *means* (multiple forces) of conversion of resources into capital (Marx's first transformation) than the *result* (Marx's second transformation: proletarianisation).

Rajarhat is a 'fluid and dynamic' space (Kundu 2016, 94). The spatial restructuring of the acquired agricultural land into a planned township has sprung an outburst in socio-economic transformation of the dispossessed people characterised by a dramatic change in the erstwhile livelihood activities. The societal complexity deepens with the advent of non-traditional actors, especially realtors and speculators, of rural land in the post-acquisition stage, originating a 'subaltern phase of land conversion', social differentiations and rural transformation. This chapter, however, illuminates how a planned township adjoining a metropolis through a large-scale dispossession of land gives birth to numerous new forms of livelihoods to the dispossessed households and contravenes the fundamental axiom (proletarianisation) of primitive accumulation. It also attempts to analyse how post-acquisition real estate escalation develops a subaltern degree of conversion of existing land and leads to social differentiations and inequalities.

solidated into individual and privately owned farms, with large, politically connected farmers receiving the best land. Often, small landowners could not afford the legal and other associated costs of enclosure and thus were forced out (see Stromberg 1995 for detail).

2 Data, Sample Design and Methodology

The data and information for this study had primarily been obtained from a longitudinal sample household survey carried out in two points of time (2009 and 2016) in two revenue villages of Rajarhat: Rekjuani and Chandpur-Champagachhi. While Rekjuani is a project- affected revenue village, Chandpur-Champagachhi is an unaffected revenue village.

The sampling design was planned on the basis of an assumption that acquisition of agricultural land and its conversion into non-agricultural land has substantially changed the livelihood and economic status of the dispossessed households. Because the longitudinal sample survey was conducted in the post-acquisition stage, two different sets (strata) of sample households were purposively selected. The first set comprised only dispossessed households that lost agricultural land partially or completely in the acquisition, and the second set (the control samples) included unaffected farming households that did not lose any land and were engaged in agriculture with cropping patterns that resembled those of the dispossessed households before acquisition. In other words, both sets of samples (dispossessed and unaffected farming households) were identical before acquisition. Until the commencement of the first phase of household survey, Rekjuani being the top acquisition-torn revenue village in terms of the magnitude of land loss was chosen for drawing the first set of samples. However, the control samples were drawn from Chandpur-Champagachhi revenue village.[2] One hundred and seventy-seven households were randomly drawn for the first phase that included 117 dispossessed households and 60 unaffected farming households. The dispossessed households were surveyed first, and based on their mean size of landholdings (1.95 acres) in the pre-acquisition stage, they were 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) households. Now, to keep the parity and derive unbiased results, control samples were drawn, such that the shares of large, medium, small and marginal households in the control

[2] Rekjuani was not chosen for drawing control samples because of two reasons. First, only a handful of farming households, as informed by the sample dispossessed households during the survey, remained unaffected by acquisition. Second, the unaffected households were mostly actuated with the speculative rise in land prices caused by the post-acquisition real estate escalation and sold off their land in part or full. They thus lost the 'identical characteristics', and based on the testimonials of the concerned panchayat *prodhan* (head), Chandapur-Champagachhi was selected for drawing control samples.

set remained nearly equal in proportion to those of dispossessed households. Also, in 2016, a third set comprising 104 partially dispossessed households[3] that sold a part or whole of existing agricultural land in the post-acquisition stage was surveyed and was drawn (through snowball/referral sampling) from two project-affected revenue villages: Rekjuani and Patharghata. The rationale behind its inclusion was to excogitate the impact of the exigency of urban development-driven real estate escalation. The information of the dispossessed households collected through a questionnaire-based sample survey was also complemented by observations and informal discussions with the fellow villagers, and other local key informants: panchayat members, school teachers and a few government officials at their homes or tea stalls. T-tests have been used to compare the economic status of different sample sets in terms of monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) in rupees estimated for some selected food items, education, transportation and other essential stuffs[4] at household. The inflation on MPCE estimated for 2016 had been adjusted with the consumer price index for West Bengal provided by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Gini coefficient simplified by Angus Deaton (1997) has been used to examine the level of inequality in terms of MPCE between the dispossessed households and farming households unaffected by acquisition. The simplified formula for the Gini coefficient is:

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

[3] Third set, to be noted, contains those 18 dispossessed households of the first set that sold off their existing land after acquisition.

[4] The food, other consumable items, education and transport expenses which had been selected for the estimation of consumption expenditure at household level were: (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 and other citrus fruits; (vii) education—books, journals, newspapers, 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, clothes and footwear.

where 'N' is the total number of households and 'u' is the average per capita consumption expenditure among the households. Pi is the per capita consumption expenditure rank 'P' of ith 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.

3 Context: Planned Urban Centre in Rural Rajarhat, West Bengal

Following the post-liberalisation growth model that de-prioritised agriculture while rendering greater leniency towards a 'knowledge-based economy', in 1993–94, the LFG of West Bengal under the chief ministership of veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu adopted a bypass approach to urbanisation, attempting to decongest its only post-colonial metropolis Kolkata by developing a new planned township on its north-eastern rural periphery: Rajarhat. The planned township in Rajarhat was destined to be a new economy of knowledge-based activities, businesses and residential apartments largely driven by the national and global private capital, and was officially recognised in 2010 as 'Rajarhat Newtown'. The master plan was excogitated for five different purposes, namely IT hubs (6.50 per cent), new business district (7.60 per cent), residential apartments (50.50 per cent), roads (9.70 per cent) and open space and water bodies (25.70 per cent) over a spatial dimension of 13,343.40 acres. However, the government could acquire only 6933.72 acres of agricultural land from about 15,000 landowners and registered tenants of 26 revenue villages (Table 9.1). Acquisition, unlike Singur, was not executed at one go, rather it was attained with a piecemeal, step-by-step method over a span of 16 years between April 1995 and March 2011 (Roy 2016). To eliminate the potential of speculative appreciation in the market value of land in the following years, the available sales agreements for 1995 in the locality were considered as base data for calculation of the market rate with an annual premium of five per cent for 1996 and thereafter (CAG 2007). The compensation for an acre of land in 1995, regardless of its type and quality, was rupees (Rs.) 0.32 million. However, in 2003, the rate was revised and raised to 0.78 million. In 2001, Rajarhat was predominantly inhabited by

Table 9.1 Revenue villages in Rajarhat C.D. block wherefrom land was acquired

Panchayat	*Project affected revenue villages*	*Mouza J.L. No*	*Area acquired (acre)*	*Duration in which land acquisition continued*	*Revenue villages unaffected by acquisition*
1. Patharghata	1. Patharghata	36	948.97	2001 to 2009	1. Ganragari
	2. Akandakeshari	55	267.59	2003 to 2006	2. Kalikapur
	3. Baligari	34	34.61	2002 to 2009	3. Kasinathpur
	4. Chakpachuria	33	724.32	1998 to 2006	
	5. Chapna	35	176.14	2003 to 2011	
	6. Kadampukur	25	342.265	2002 to 2007	
2. Jyangra-Hatiara-II	7. Ghuni	23	473.29	1998 to 2002	—
	8. Jatragachhi	24	537.797	1998 to 2005	
	9. Sulanggari	22	26.83	1998 to 2001	
	10. Hatiara	14	249.624	1998 to 2002	
3. Mohisbathan-II	11. Tarulia	15	157.06	1998 to 1999	—
	12. Mohisgot	20	196.77	1995 to 2001	
	13. Thakdari	19	314.01	1998 to 2002	
	14. Mohisbathan	18	85.54	1998 to 2003	
	15. Dhapamanpur	21	42.44	2003 to 2004	
4. Rajarhat-Bishnupur-I	16. Rekjuani	13	945.52	1998 to 2003	4. Bhatenda 5. Kalaberia 6. Khamar

5. Chandpur	17. Hudarait	54	n.a.	2006 to 2009#	7. Arbelia 8. Bagdobamachhi 9. Bagu 10. Chandpur-Champagachhi 11. Jalgachhi 12. Mubarekpur 13. Nawabad 14. Panapukuria
6. Rajarhat-Gopalpur @	18. Atghara	10	8.581	1996 to 2005	—
	19. Chandiberia	15	23.54	1998 to 2000	
	20. Dashdron	4	n.a.	1998 to 2000#	
	21. Gopalpur	2	193.95	2000 to 2006	
	22. Kaikhali	5	1.76	1995 to 2002	
	23. Krisnapur	17	1.95	1995 to 1999	
	24. Raigachhi	12	204.02	2000 to 2003	
	25. Noapara	11	150.466	1998 to 2003	
	26. Tegharia	9	8.349	1995 to 2002	
Total	26 Revenue villages		6933.72	1995 to 2011	14 Revenue villages

Source: WBHIDCO, 2011 and Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

Note: (1) @ – Municipality; (2) n.a. – not available. (3) # – Panchayat/municipality office information

a rural population (95.37 per cent), whereas in 2011, 52.81 per cent of its total population was recognised as urban population. The total size of population also increased from 0.15 million to 0.19 million over the same time period (Primary Census Abstract 2001 and 2011).

Agriculture was never highly developed in Rajarhat (Roy 2016, 35). Due to relatively lower location of the cultivable land, and a regular deluging in the rainy season, a major portion of the acquired agricultural land used to be cultivated by the farmers with two types of paddy, namely *aman* and *boro* successively during the rainy and summer seasons. Only some dispossessed households could cultivate several vegetables, such as cabbage, cauliflower, potato, radish, brinjal, carrot and some leafy vegetables only on the higher land adjoining their homesteads in the winter season. Despite being close to the Kolkata metropolis, the majority households earned their living solely from cultivation before acquisition. The cultivable land is, however, now almost vanished from the project affected villages, and is undergoing a utilitarian transformation due to rapid real estate boom.

4 Land Dispossession and the Changing Agrarian Status

Agricultural land is the 'pre-eminent asset' (Bardhan et al. 2011, 1) to the farming households. Hence, size of landholdings among the dispossessed households in the pre-acquisition stage had been considered an important indicator to assess the agrarian status. While a large proportion of dispossessed households (44.44 per cent) in Rekjuani (Rajarhat), as per our categorisation, belonged to small farming households in the pre-acquisition stage, a little more than a quarter and close to one-fifth of sample households successively reported themselves as medium and large households with landholding sizes above 1.65 acres (Table 9.2). However, acquisition of land on a large-scale trimmed down their agrarian status. Nobody claimed the status of a large or medium farmer in the post-acquisition stage. In the pre-acquisition stage, no sample household was landless, but the state-driven acquisition made 81.20 per cent (95) households agricultural landless (completely lost), implying thereby that 18.80 per cent (117−95 = 22 households) lost their agricultural land partially, and therefore, possessed some land after acquisition (Table 9.2). The share of small farming households also declined substantially while the marginal

Table 9.2 Household size category wise land acquired and change in mean size of landholdings among the dispossessed households

Category of farming households	*Before acquisition*				*After acquisition*		
	Households	*Land (in acre)*	*Mean size of landholdings (in acre)*	*Land acquired (in acre)*	*Households*	*Land remaining (in acre)*	*Mean size of landholdings (in acre)*
Large (above 2.65 acres)	22 (18.80)	103.00 (45.17)	4.68	101.17 (44.37)	–	–	–
Medium (1.65–2.65 acres)	31 (26.50)	64.93 (28.47)	2.09	62.12 (27.24)	–	–	–
Small (0.65–1.65 acres)	52 (44.44)	55.04 (24.14)	1.06	52.81 (23.16)	4 (3.42)	5.19 (2.28)	1.30
Marginal (below 0.65 acres)	12 (10.26)	5.05 (2.21)	0.42	4.92 (2.15)	18 (15.38)	1.81 (0.83)	0.10
Sample household without agricultural land	–	–	–	–	95 (81.20)	–	–
All sample households	117 (100.00)	228.02 (100.00)	1.95	221.02 (96.93)	117 (100.00)	7.00 (3.07)	0.06

Source: Household Survey, 2009

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate per cent of total

households witnessed a marginal increase in share due to a truncation of all other landholding categories. The average size of landholdings at household sharply dropped from 1.95 acres to 0.06 acre.

5 Land Dispossession and the Changing Livelihood of the Dispossessed Households

Alternative livelihood of the affected by acquisition projects has long been central to the contestation of development ventures on land expropriated from the farmers. It would, therefore, be crucial to analyse how effectively dispossessed households of agricultural land in Rajarhat took hold of the post-acquisition livelihood opportunities under the neoliberal urbanism.

Acquisition of agricultural land on a large scale almost eradicated cultivation from the project affected sample village (Rekjuani). Private capital-intensive urbanisation lodging IT parks, business centres, institutions and gated multistoried housing colonies in Rajarhat Newtown opened up diverse employment possibilities. Consequently, the livelihood activities of the dispossessed households underwent a dramatic transformation in the post-acquisition stage. In a rapidly changing and urbanising social milieu, a large section of dispossessed households, regardless of their agrarian status in the pre-acquisition stage, established their foothold in non-farm economic activities (Table 9.3) that include employment as mason, carpenter, e-rickshaw driver, taxi-driver, conductor, contractor, security guard, salesman in malls, grill-maker, cycle and motorbike mechanic and so on. On the other hand, one-third preferred to be engaged in self-employed activities, which included both petty and flourished businesses. While the former included vegetables and fruit shops, tea and betel shop, snacks on the trolley, and small restaurant and grocery shop run mainly by the small and marginal dispossessed households, the latter comprised garment shops, mobile and electronic shops, selling and supplying construction materials (household hardware shop), motorbike service centres, motorbike and car accessory shops, packaged drinking water plants, real estate agents and renting out properties. Establishing a foothold in petty business by the smaller dispossessed households was more of a ‘compulsion’ than a ‘priority choice’. Faster pace of urbanisation and changing market structure with a growing population in the newly constructed multistoried apartments and their daily demands encouraged them to undertake these employment opportunities. Working as real estate brokers,

Table 9.3 Landholding size category *w*ise change in prime economic activity of the dispossessed households

Change in prime economic activity after acquisition	*2009*					*2016*				
	Large	*Medium*	*Small*	*Marginal*	*Total*	*Large*	*Medium*	*Small*	*Marginal*	*Total*
No change in occupation	–	1 (3.23)	–	–	1 (0.85)	–	–	–	–	–
Cultivator to non-farm worker	6 (27.27)	10 (32.26)	25 (48.08)	6 (50.00)	47 (40.17)	6 (27.27)	7 (22.58)	24 (46.15)	7 (58.33)	44 (37.61)
Cultivator to business	9 (40.91)	12 (38.71)	16 (30.77)	2 (16.67)	39 (33.33)	9 (40.91)	13 (41.94)	16 (30.77)	2 (16.67)	40 (34.19)
Cultivator to others (driver, e-rickshaw driver, conductor, security guard etc.)	5 (22.73)	6 (19.35)	7 (13.46)	3 (25.00)	21 (17.95)	5 (22.73)	9 (29.03)	10 (19.23)	3 (25.00)	27 (23.08)
Cultivator to agricultural labourer	–	–	2 (3.85)	–	2 (1.71)	–	–	1 (1.92)	–	1 (0.85)
Cultivator to jobless	–	–	1 (1.92)	1 (8.33)	2 (1.71)	–	–	–	–	–
Cultivation was not a prime activity in pre-acquisition stage	2 (9.09)	2 (6.45)	1 (1.92)	–	5 (4.27)	2 (9.09)	2 (6.45)	1 (1.92)	–	5 (4.27)
Total	22 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	52 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	117 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	52 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	117 (100.00)

Source: Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate per cent of total

some younger men are making a sound fortune, earning commissions of 2–3 per cent on each sale agreement (Roy 2016; Kundu 2016). The cross-category analysis, however, brought forth three reservations (Table 9.3). First, although a section of dispossessed households from each category chose business as their primary activity in the post-acquisition stage, the share of dispossessed households belonging to the large category (40.91 per cent) has surpassed all others. Second, the proportion of dispossessed households engaged in low profile non-farm activities reflected an increasing trend with a decreasing size of landholdings. Third, the share of medium and small households engaged in business, driving commercial vehicles (taxis: Ola, Uber and Radio cabs) and e-rickshaws and sentinelling has increased over time.

Thus far, many global IT giants and corporates have set up their enterprises in Rajarhat Newtown to generate profits and accumulate capital, and a handful are yet to take off. However, the employment generated by these enterprises (knowledge-based economy) has been hegemonised by the well-educated and well-skilled workers, the 'immaterial labour' who design programming and simulations, and provide logistics and supply chain management. No one from the sample dispossessed households succeeded to take hold of the benefit of such employment avenues. However, some men and women with low level of education were absorbed as security guards. Dey et al. (2011, 237–8) viewed the dispossession of farmers from their lands in Rajarhat, where the neoliberal urbanism is coinciding with an increasing market-oriented capitalism, as 'historically a demonstrable case of primitive accumulation' free of protest and repression. However, I argue that such a proposition was nuanced neither adequately nor carefully, because the study covered only an unfinished phase of acquisition, and therefore, could not capture the employment possibilities of urban development. In a recent study, Kundu (2016, 98) contrarily argued that the various new livelihood activities of the dispossessed households and their entrepreneurial spirit, an emerging sense of wealth and competition, and constant efforts to improve one's property (wealth generation) have percolated the atmosphere of the project affected villages in Rajarhat. Now, one should recall here that proletarianisation, which is often viewed as the most important form of downward social mobility, is an inherent component of Marx's 'two-fold' elements of primitive accumulation. However, the present employment scenario of the dispossessed households in rapidly urbanising Rajarhat in the post-acquisition stage does not exactly corroborate primitive accumulation.

Because the majority lost agricultural land completely and the land-holding size among the remainder trimmed down substantially (Table 9.2), cultivation lost its importance as a staple source of household income. No dispossessed household reported cultivation as its sole source of income in the post-acquisition stage (Table 9.4). The restructuring of rural space by building the Rajarhat Newtown that has opened up various new employment avenues have led the dispossessed households to diversify their sources of income to a greater extent. Also, our longitudinal observation establishes an increasing trend in the share of dispossessed households earning income from more than two sources over time (Table 9.4). Such a diversification in economic activities was, as explained by the dispossessed while asking during the second phase of survey in 2016, a conscious and vehement livelihood strategy to maximise the opportunity and gain in the newly burgeoning market economy, and to cope with the stresses and shocks of such a large-scale land loss.

Table 9.4 Sources of household income in the pre- and post-acquisition stage

Sources of household income	*Before acquisition*		*After acquisition (2009)*		*After acquisition (2016)*	
	Households	*Per cent*	*Households*	*Per cent*	*Households*	*Per cent*
Cultivation is only source of income	90	76.92	–	–	–	–
Two sources, cultivation is one of them	19	16.24	4	3.42	–	–
Three or more sources and cultivation is one of them	8	6.84	–	–	–	–
Single source but not cultivation	–	–	66	56.41	53	45.30
Two sources but cultivation is not among them	–	–	30	25.64	47	40.17
Three or more sources but cultivation is none of them	–	–	15	12.82	17	14.53
No source of income (jobless)	–	–	2	1.71	–	–
Total households	117	100.00	117	100.00	117	100.00

Source: Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

6 Dispossessed Vis-`a-Vis Unaffected Farming Households: A Longitudinal Profile of Household Consumption

Under the doctrines of neoliberal economy, all major constituent states, including West Bengal, have promoted market-oriented private capital-driven development, in which land acquisition has played a central part. The ability of the states to render land for development activities on a large-scale has become the most important factor in inter-state competition for investment (Levien 2012, 946). One strand of scholars (Banerjee-Guha 2010; Arrighi et al. 2010; Samaddar 2009) argue that acquisition of agricultural land for development activities under the neoliberalism strips out one class (farmers) for another (capitalists) in order to serve the capitalist class's interests and leads to accumulation by dispossession or/and primitive accumulation. Guha (2004) and Fernandes (2007) contend that the dispossessed farmers are not able to establish a foothold on direct or indirect employment opportunities of the development ventures, and are more likely to be marginalised by losing their means of production. However, all these scholarships have largely studied those development ventures (e.g. large dams, highways, mining, thermal plants and industrial enterprises without a substantial urbanism) that, unlike the Rajarhat Newtown project, took off in a faraway rural setting without yielding substantial indirect or direct possibilities for the dispossessed to earn alternative livelihoods.

The two important indicators by which the economic status of a family or society is well measured are: per capita income and monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE). However, because getting a correct figure on total or per capita income of farming households in rural India is very difficult and also prone to be underreported, the MPCE estimated for last 30 days from the day of survey in a sample household had been chosen to analyse the economic status. The quantity of selected food and other items consumed by a household in this period was multiplied by the per unit local market price prevailing at the time of survey, and total monthly consumption expenditure in rupees (Rs.) at each sample household was estimated. The longitudinal field study, however, shows that the MPCE of the dispossessed households, by landholding size category, is greater than that of the farming households unaffected by acquisition for both the base and latest years (Table 9.5). Although each household category of both sample sets has enjoyed an increase in MPCE over the study period, the incremental rate of the former has exceeded the later, and it is

Table 9.5 Landholding size category-wise MPCE (at real price, base year: 2009) of dispossessed households and farming households unaffected by acquisition

Sample category	*Household category (by landholding size)*	*Households*	*Mean MPCE (Rs.) of households*		*Change (%) in mean MPCE*
			2009	*2016*	
Dispossessed households	Large	22 (18.80)	1125	1692	50.40
	Medium	31 (26.50)	815	1205	34.67
	Small	52 (44.44)	514	720	18.31
	Marginal	12 (10.26)	268	293	2.22
	All households	117 (100.00)	684	988	27.11
Farming households unaffected by acquisition	Large	11 (18.33)	846	972	11.20
	Medium	16 (26.67)	796	862	5.87
	Small	27 (45.00)	502	566	5.69
	Marginal	6 (10.00)	255	272	1.51
	All households	60 (100.00)	619	690	6.31

Source: Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of their respective total

Table 9.6 Results of two independent samples T-test on MPCE (Rs.)

Year	*Sample category*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
2009: Phase –I	Dispossessed households	117	683.5385	288.23669	1.737	0.008
	Farming households unaffected by acquisition	60	618.8667	201.43969		
2016: Phase-II	Dispossessed households	117	987.7521	442.60787	4.892	0.001
	Farming households unaffected by acquisition	60	690.0167	224.8964		

Source: Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

positively related with the size of landholdings. The average incremental rate of the estimated consumption expenditure of the dispossessed households has been four times greater than that of the farming households unaffected by acquisition. The T-test results for two independent samples establish that the mean MPCE of the dispossessed households is significantly greater than the unaffected farming households (Table 9.6). Now, one could argue that the financial illiteracy and lack of managerial capacity would lead the dispossessed households to squander the compensation money in the post-acquisition stage. Chakravorty (2013), however, argues

Table 9.7 Simplified Gini coefficient values of MPCE (Rs.) of dispossessed households and farming households unaffected by acquisition

Year	*Dispossessed households*	*Farming households unaffected by acquisition (control sample)*
2009: Phase -I	0.23	0.174
2016: Phase- II	0.26	0.175

Source: Household Survey, 2009 and 2016

that the land losers today keep more information and knowledge than what they had in earlier decades, and the information asymmetries of the past are now dissolved by the media, civil society organisations and political parties. Ghatak et al. (2013) also reported otherwise five years down the year of acquisition in Singur (2006), where a majority of the dispossessed households deposited the compensation money (though it was claimed to be undercompensated for a substantial fraction) in the bank and the interest on it exceeded the loss in crop income, which is indirectly denotative to the idea of eminent sociologist Dipankar Gupta's 'agriculture in the villages today is an economic residue'. The idea of economic residue is again reinforced by an estimation of Sanjoy Chakravorty in his outstanding scholarship '*The Price of Land: Acquisition, Conflict, and Consequence*', showing a meagre annual income (only Rs. 5472) from an acre of agricultural land in West Bengal (2013, p. 158. Table A4). The simplified Gini coefficient values of MPCE among the dispossessed households for both the base and latest years are, however, larger than that of the farming households unaffected by acquisition (Table 9.7), which implicates a higher degree of economic inequality among the former. And the higher inequality is an effect of the heterogeneity in livelihood activities of the dispossessed households in the rapidly transforming urban milieu, leading to varying propensities to consume. The inequality among the dispossessed households has, however, increased over time while it has remained almost steady among the control sample.

7 Real Estate Intervention, Changing Land Market and the Changing Social Scenario

The market liberalisation and privatisation, and the subsequent policy reforms in 1993–94 by the LFG with a master plan of Rajarhat Newtown in the north-eastern rural periphery of Kolkata sprouted the speculative real estate surge.

Rajarhat is a 'space in transition' a place which is in the process of transforming from a largely rural and agrarian space to a globalised knowledge-based urban centre. Rapid urbanisation on agricultural land acquired from the farmers in the form of a planned township is dramatically changing the characteristics of rural areas, and the relationship of traditional farmers with land. Apportionment of plots from the acquired land among the global IT firms, such as IBM, Genpact, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL), Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys and Wipro, and the large commercial real estate developers by the LFG to set up their enterprises and business centres (shopping malls, luxury star hotels, private hospitals etc.) triggered the subsequent conversion of existing agricultural land. The development venture on a large scale in the rural periphery has thus attracted the non-traditional actors such as realtors, speculators and local housing developers who consider agricultural land to be more consumptive than a productive good. The price of land, as argued by Chakravorty (2013), is determined by its utility. These actors have led to an escalation in the existing land price many folds and are purchasing the left-over agricultural land, particularly from the partially lost households, to whom agriculture happened to be less of an attractive activity in the post-acquisition stage due to acquisition-induced downsizing of landholdings.

The data on transactions of agricultural land in the post-acquisition stage rendered by the partially lost households (sellers) reflects a phenomenal increase in land price. In 2004 that immediately followed the completion of acquisition in Rekjuani, the average price for an acre of agricultural land was Rs. 6.6 million, which increased to 31.90 million in 2016, a growth of 383 per cent. To be noted here, in 2003, the total compensation for an acre of land received by a dispossessed household was only Rs. 0.78 million (Household Survey 2009). This rapid rise in land price in the post-acquisition stage was, however, an upshot of the master plan to reorganise and transform rural spaces into an urban one—the economic value of any given piece of land is contingent upon the development ventures in the vicinity (Morris and Pandey 2009); an increase in demand motored by, as Chakravorty (2013, 14) argued, the high economic growth in the 2000s; growth in size and income of the middle class (in which implementation of the sixth pay commission played a central role); availability of the housing credit;[5] and the black money that led to the real estate sector

[5] Chakravorty argued that the access to housing credit by the middle class was of paramount importance. As recently as the mid-1990s, almost all sales in the housing market bore cash transactions. A buyer without the necessary cash could not enter the market. However, since 2000 the credit market in housing grew rapidly and by 2009 it was over 7 per cent of the country's GDP.

grow faster. Alongside them were the active land market, involvement of many agents (heterogeneous buyers and sellers, unlike monopsony) and the up-to-date information about land prices among the farmers. The sudden rise in land value in the post-acquisition stage perhaps reached the 'reservation price' (Chakravorty 2013, 143) a price at which an owner is willing to sell that played a catalytic role in actuating partially lost households to alienate their remaining land, and facilitated capturing its potential benefits. It is these benefits that made a section of partially lost households with comparatively larger existing landholdings very prosperous and led to transform their lifestyle completely by constructing sybaritic houses and acquiring luxury goods like cars, motorbikes, light emitting diode (LED) televisions, washing machines, microwaves, and so on resulting in growing social differentiations within the dispossessed households which used to be homogeneous to a larger magnitude in the pre-acquisition stage characterised by the houses with walls mostly made of mud, bamboo or woods and roofs made of thatch, tin or fired clay tiles (Roy 2016; Kundu 2016). In other words, the partially lost households undertook the new opportunities to navigate the post-acquisition land market, which in turn produced the new forms of social differentiations and asset inequalities. The unheard-of sums involved in the post-acquisition land speculation has produced the basis for 'inequality of a magnitude' (Levien 2012) that was never possible in rural Rajarhat without the restructuring of rural spaces into an urban one. The newly established market economy has brought city life to the dispossessed households. According to a large dispossessed farmer in Rekjuani, 'the Newtown project has emerged as lotteries (chances of events), whereby many erstwhile poor farmers with smaller landholdings outside the project have become owners of mansions, cars and motorbikes'.

Realtors and speculators have turned the erstwhile rural land market in their favour. 56.08 per cent of the total land plots sold by the partially lost households had been possessed by the realtors while the speculators purchased a one-third (Table 9.8). However, the former with a wide leeway of capital and an easy access to financial institutions had mostly purchased the larger plots (0.33 acre and above). Unlike realtors, speculators act as short-term owners who buy and sell land to only maximise profit, and to them, land is less a factor of production than a commodity to be traded. Speculative buying delivers higher disposable income (Chakravorty 2013). Individuals had played a little role in the post-acquisition land market in Rajarhat. More than two-third (67.37 per cent) of the total land sold by partially lost

Table 9.8 Scenario of land parcels purchased by different buyers from partially land lost households between 2004 and 2016

Parcel of land (acre)	*Households sold land*	*Land sold (acre)*	*No. of parcels sold*	*No. of parcels purchased by*						*Land area (acre) purchased by*		
				Realtor	*Per cent*	*Speculator*	*Per cent*	*Individual*	*Per cent*	*Realtor*	*Speculator*	*Individual*
Above 0.50	14	19.31	30	24	16.22	6	4.05	–	–	15.81	3.5	–
0.33–0.50	24	15.83	35	25	16.89	10	6.76	–	–	11.2	4.63	–
0.17–0.33	34	13.19	48	30	20.27	16	10.81	2	1.35	8.76	4.1	0.33
Below 0.17	32	5.45	35	4	2.70	17	11.49	14	9.46	0.46	2.62	2.37
Total	104	53.78	148	83	56.08	49	33.11	16	10.81	36.23 (67.37)	14.85 (27.61)	2.7 (5.02)

Source: Household Survey, 2016

Note: (1) Figures in parentheses indicate per cent to total land sold. (2) Categorisation is made by considering the median value (0.42 acre) of the acreage sold by the partially lost household

households was purchased by the realtors alone who accumulate capital through its commodification by developing it with modern infrastructures and 'making it available by the 'square foot' in a fully capitalist land market' (Levien 2012, 948). Contrarily, Kundu (2016) discovers that the capital formation is also visible among a section of affected villagers who are investing in rental properties as a strategy to establish a foothold in the game of land and real estate market in Rajarhat. I, therefore, argue that the ongoing mechanism of commodification, corporatisation and transformation of non-capitalist means of production (land) into capital through acquisition of land on a large-scale in Rajarhat may be considered an instance of accumulation by dispossession, not primitive accumulation. This is because the former intrinsically focuses on the *means* of conversion of resources into capital, whereas the latter includes *means* as well as its *result* (proletarianisation) that expands reproduction. The diversified livelihoods of the dispossessed households, and their entrepreneurship in business ventures and wealth creation in the post-acquisition stage under the neoliberal planned urbanism does not equate with the Marxian proletarianisation.

8 Conclusion

Dispossession of peasants from the land has long been identified a condition of successful capitalist development (Arrighi et al. 2010). Over the last two decades under neoliberalism, the land-based development ventures initiated by the Indian states in the form of industrial enterprises, new townships and infrastructure projects have predominantly, unlike the Nehruvian development model called 'modern temple' (Sharma 2010), been private capital-intensive. In West Bengal until today, land required for such activities has mostly come from agriculture which has always been considered a coveted and preeminent resource substantially shaping the rural livelihood.

The case studied here, however, reveals that acquisition of agricultural land on a large-scale for the establishment of business hubs, IT parks, institutions and dwelling units in the form of a planned township in Rajarhat adjoining Kolkata Metropolis has touched off a process of socio-economic transformation of the dispossessed households, expunging the traditional mode of production (cultivation) and opening up various livelihood possibilities that include employment as garment shops, mobile and electronic shops, selling and supplying construction materials (household hardware shop), motorbike service centres, motorbike and car accessory shops, packaged drinking water plants, real estate agents and renting out properties,

lodge and restaurants, vegetables and fruit shops, tea and betel shops, snacks on the trolley and grocery shops. Given these possibilities, a substantial proportion of dispossessed households have established their foothold in two or more economic activities as a conscious and vehement livelihood strategy to maximise the opportunities in the burgeoning urban market as a process of economic change. In terms of MPCE, the dispossessed households are found to be significantly better-off compared to the farming households unaffected by acquisition. However, the magnitude of inequality is greater among the former, in which diversified livelihood activities play a central role.

The real estate driven speculative land value and unprecedented sums involved in the post-acquisition land transactions catalyse the partially lost households to sell off their remaining land and help capture the potential benefits. In other words, the partially lost households get hold of new opportunities to navigate the active land market after acquisition, which in turn produces new forms of social differentiations and asset inequalities among the dispossessed households. Accumulation of capital by the real estate and corporate in Rajarhat is about commoditising agricultural land as an object of financial investment and speculation, not the exploitation of labour force of dispossessed households. The diverse livelihood activities and 'entrepreneurial spirit' (Kundu 2016) of dispossessed households, especially in business ventures in Rajarhat in the post-acquisition stage, therefore, do not corroborate the Marxian 'proletarianization' and nullify an instance to be considered primitive accumulation. This chapter, however, does not attempt to freeze off the merit of 'primitive accumulation' under the neoliberalism. Instead, it argues that not all capital-intensive development ventures on land acquired from the farmers in India lead to primitive accumulation, especially a large geographical space acquired for and destined to a planned urban centre adjoining a large city that emerges as a potential genitor of various non-farm employment possibilities for the dispossessed households in a process of economic change and helps raise household income (Roy 2016) and consumption.

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