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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

PAN AP Pesticide Action Network
Asia and the Pacific

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From Singur to Sompeta: People's resistance against land grabbing gaining power in India

By Ms. Ujjaini Halim

Introduction: Learning from Singur & Sompeta

In early 2006, Singur in West Bengal became the epitome of peasants' struggle against neo-liberal expansion in land and livelihoods in India. Meanwhile, in 2010 the struggle in Sompeta exposed politics of 'power' in the name of energy production in Andhra Pradesh. Villagers and fishers there resisted the development of a government-backed private thermal power plant, which caused State-wide protest and raised the question of development effectiveness as a whole.

'No to power plant,' says Sompeta fisherfolk Jayamma. She and her son were badly beaten by the police on July 14, 2010. Photo taken on September 2010.



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This publication of PAN AP aims to provide in-depth stories from communities asserting their food sovereignty. It is a tool for marginalised communities to speak out on issues that affect their lives and livelihoods. It hopes to raise awareness and seek solidarity actions from the readers. If you have comments or have taken solidarity actions as a result of this publication, please share them with us at panap@panap.net.

Following these events, Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) supported local movements and organised international fact-finding missions (IFFM) in both Singur and Sompeta in order to highlight actual scenarios of the cases world-wide. As an impact of the IFFM, local movements received world-wide support from various groups and pressure was built up on the government to revise their plans, as per peoples' demands. In both cases the movements were strong and sustained. They carried out demonstrations and other activities in support of their demands for several years.

In the end, the proposed development projects in Singur and Sompeta were abandoned. However, no official statement has been issued to date, of complete seizure of the projects, and redistribution of land among the affected persons, have not taken place. Today in Singur (and to some extent in Sompeta) people have very little hope of having their livelihoods restituted, as the media spotlight has shifted from these cases to other 'breaking' news, while politicians have also lost interest as the elections in both places were over a few years back. However, the people's resistance groups are still alive, active and vigilant in both places.

As a civil society organisation (CSO) actively supporting Singur and Sompeta movements, PAN AP feels it is high time to revisit the battles of Singur and Sompeta, to highlight lessons learnt, to find out the present strategies of the peoples' resistances, and learn their current status. Looking back at Singur and Sompeta is a process of understanding dynamics of peoples' struggle against neo-liberal privatisation agenda and accepting the reality that sometimes, the process of resistance may be more important than the final outcome of it. Hence, this attempt of recollecting the past, understanding the present and looking into the future of these two very significant land grabbing cases in India, which immensely affected land politics and policies in the country.

A. Saga of Singur

1. Land Grabbing in Singur and Peoples' resistance

Singur is located in Hooghly district, around 45 kilometres from Kolkata. In May 2006, the West Bengal Government decided to acquire 997 acres (403.47 hectares) fertile multi-cropping agricultural land for the Tata Motors small car factory in Singur. The farmland earmarked for the 'Nano' project stands alongside an arc of the Durgapur expressway near the Ratanpur crossing with NH-1. The six *mouzas* (administrative district) whose land came under the Tata project site are Gopalnagar, Beraberi, Bajemelia, Khaserbheri, Singherberi and Joymollarberi.

According to available official data, Singur block belongs to a highly fertile agricultural area. In Singur block, 83 per cent of the land is irrigated and the crop density is around 220 per cent. The crops produced are mainly paddy and potato, but jute and a variety of vegetables were also produced in the fields. Almost 6,000 families, including many agricultural workers and marginal peasants, faced eviction threats and dealt with subsequent loss of land and livelihood because of this land acquisition.

The land acquisition process was marked with a series of violations, e.g., no Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC);



Singur youth blow their conch shells to welcome the IFFM team. September 2006.

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It was paddy season and farmers showed to IFFM team and local media how fertile their lands were. September 2006.



Local police in Singur showed their force as they followed the IFFM team around Singur. September 2006.

higher authority turning down Gram Sansad's decision to reject the project; no adequate compensation and or rehabilitation packages offered to project affected people; etc. In particular, no compensation was offered to the landless agricultural workers, unrecorded *bargadars* (share-croppers) and other rural households who were dependent on acquired land and related agricultural activities for their livelihoods. That a large number of land owners in Singur were absentee owners and that the land was actually tilled by the share-croppers/agricultural labourers, made the situation very complex, as whatever little compensation offered by the government went to absentee landowners to a great extent.

As livelihoods of real tillers were lost, the people of Singur refused to give up their struggle against land grabbing. The movements of peasants faced State-led repressions, when police entered the villages and viciously attacked the leaders of the movements. They also brutally handled all villagers, including women, elderly and children, and arrested more than a hundred villagers on false charges. Local goons of the ruling party raped and burnt alive the young activist, Tapasi Mallik in Singur, who was only 16 years old. She played an important role in mobilising the youth of Singur in support of the movement.

Gradually, the Singur movement got the support of larger CSOs and human rights organisations. Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE) and FIAN West Bengal (WB) were two pioneering organisations who extended their support to the movements, and FIAN WB filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in

Kolkata High Court. After a long battle, Tata Company decided to leave Singur because of the *“failure of the State to give protection to the company workers.”* However, Tata has retained Singur land to date and when the newly elected government of West Bengal demanded that land back from Tata, the company asked for an exorbitant amount of compensation for the same land, which it received almost for free from the previous State government.

2. Celebrating the victory: Is it too soon?

After a relentless fight against 'state-sponsored' violence, the farmers-turned-rebels of Singur today eagerly await the return of their land and livelihood even as a legal tussle is on between the Tata Motors and the newly elected West Bengal Government (Trinamul Congress with Ms. Mamata Banerjee as the new Chief Minister) over the Singur land return issue. In keeping with its pre-election commitment, Ms. Banerjee's government had resolved to return 400 acres (161.87 hectares) of the 997 acre-Nano site to the original owners, from whom land was acquired by the previous Left Front Government.

As the land was still with Tata under a lease agreement, Ms. Banerjee's government passed a bill in the State Assembly in 2011 to take possession of the entire area. On 21 June, the West Bengal government had issued a notification to turn the Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Bill into law following Governor M.K. Narayanan's assent. The Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011 came into effect on 20 June 2011 and the land which stood vested with the state government became free from all encumbrances.

On 21 July 2011, Chief Minister Banerjee said that her government had already identified the plots to be returned to the original owners of the disputed 400 acres. She had also announced that her government would withdraw police cases against those who took part in Singur movements. However, the legal battle did not end here. Tata filed a case in Calcutta High Court challenging the new Act, while the Calcutta High Court soon declared the Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011, unconstitutional. The division bench, headed by Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghosh, observed that the Act is void as no Presidential assent was taken. Chief Minister Banerjee, reacting on the Singur verdict, said, *"I have no comments to offer on Singur Verdict. Throughout my life, I have struggled for the cause of the farmers, working class, poor and under-privileged. Our commitment to be with them will remain, whether I am in power or not. I will continue to fight for this cause. Finally, the people's choice in democracy will prevail."*

It may be mentioned here that the state government has moved to Supreme Court, challenging the decision of the High Court but the verdict of the Supreme Court is yet to come.

Hundreds of farmers and small food producers gathered in front of a makeshift community centre in Singur to share their thoughts on the looming eviction. September 2006.





Land is life and Singur farmers are willing to give their lives for it. September 2006.

3. Visiting Singur after the court verdict

On a fine morning in April 2013, members of a research team comprising senior journalists of West Bengal drove to the verdant greenery of Singur after hearing a true story of a battle well-fought. The place evoked the images of peoples' resistances in Singur that appeared as a collage of pieces that communicated a key message: peoples' struggle can't be repressed forever with violence and elite power. The visiting team had a brief meeting at Kolkata with CSOs prior to their visit to Singur.

During that meeting, Shri Debobrata Bandyopadhyay, former land and land revenue secretary and architect of Land Reform in West Bengal (who is currently Trinamool Congress Member of Parliament of Upper House) who had been with the Singur movement since its inception said that the "Policy of 'Operation Barga'¹, initially geared to erase intense inequality in rural areas through a very limited version of the 'land to the tiller' programme, saw in later years a return to power by the substantial farmers and rich people in the villages." According to him, in the subsequent years that followed, there has been a reversal of the land reforms

as the ruling party then became satisfied with parliamentary success. He further mentioned that the policy of land acquisition and neo-liberal policies of industrialisation had alienated agrarian constituencies from Left parties, which finally resulted in the massive electoral losses for the Left government in 2010.

Blowing of conch shells, ululation and an overwhelming sense of gratitude welcomed the journalists upon reaching Singur. The upbeat mood of the villagers celebrating their temporary victory against forceful land acquisition – after three and a half years of relentless fight – was palpable. Though the entire matter of land transaction has become a long legal battle and presently is in Supreme Court (due to Tata's win at Calcutta High Court), in Singur, there was an overall air of positivity among people.

"We have already won the battle. Chief Minister has kept her words and we will get our land back," said Juthika, one of the victims of land acquisition, her eyes alight with hope and determination.

"Like me, many of us (referring to village girls) were forced to fight the Tata to save our home and hearth. It was not easy but we refused to give up," she said, treating the group with sweets, perhaps indicating their journey towards 'victory'.

Village women also shared how they chalked out the strategies to combat the state forces during the days of active resistances.

¹ Operation Barga was a drive to officially register the name of the sharecroppers so that they could not be arbitrarily evicted by land owners.

“I used to call all men and women in this room and sit for hours to chalk out future plans for carrying on the struggle,” said Paromita, a young housewife. *“The moment any villager got the slightest hint that police had entered our village, we started blowing conch shells and alerted all the other villagers so that we could gather and put up a fight against them,”* she narrated.

“Previously, I have been associated with similar other movements but never knew that a movement could topple a government and change power equation,” Juthika explained.

Juthika and Paromita were not alone. Basking in the glory of a battle well fought, many of the villagers-turned-rebels of Singur now fondly remembered how they waged a daily war against ‘State-led violence’ to protect their homes and hearth. Villagers seemed exuberant and confident that the new government would take all measures so that their land is returned and they could start life afresh.

“I want to fight till the end. Like others, I also consider land as my mother, which has been forcefully taken away from us. We will never sell our mother at any cost,” said an elderly woman in Singur.

She also said that they have no respect for those who gave away their land for money (referring to the willing farmers², absentee land owners).

“We have no respect or sympathy for those who gave away their land for a pittance. We pity them,” she told the visiting team.

However, under the jubilant mood of the villagers, an underlying frustration could be observed, too. Their long battle over land made everyday life tougher for the affected families. Since the beginning of the battle till today, five peasants committed suicide due to unemployment and hunger. Many other families in Singur are counting days to see the end of this legal battle while they continue suffering from hunger. At one point (after the new Act was enacted by the State) the block office started accepting claims from the peasants for returning the land. The lists, which included the names of farmers who would get back their land, were still hanging on the wall of the office as if mocking the situation.

The visiting team met the prominent leader of Singur movement Mr. Becharam Manna (presently member of Legislative Assembly) and Mr. Mahadeb Das, who were very hopeful about the final outcome of the legal battle. Iterating his faith in the people, Mr. Das said that it was the unity and strength among the people that could sustain the movement for so long and people would again fight for their rights if the land was not given back to them.



Singur folks welcomed the IFFM team with their sentiments. September 2006.

² A few farmers gave their land to the government under pressure and accepted meager compensation.



Why would the West Bengal government and Tata Motors evict us from our land? Women in Singur asked. September 2006.

4. Keeping the hope alive

The Singur movement testifies that the rural subalterns in West Bengal did not accept the profit-based neo-liberal paradigm of governance pursued by the former left government. The Singur movement became a source of inspiration for the villagers across India. From Nandigram to Noida³, villagers resisted against land grabs in the name of development. Singur movement is not just a peoples' movement against development-induced displacement and other insecurities. It is peoples' uprising, which has carved a niche in the history of peoples' struggle, and has set an example against land grabbing and ignoring the rights of the poor. From an economic point of view, the people of Singur suffered huge losses and violations of their right to employment in their chosen field of activity.

The visiting team observed under the jubilant mood that this sense of uncertainty was palpable. Though the peasants were handling the situation bravely, with the huge hope of getting back their land as per the new Singur Act (now in court), they were also eagerly waiting for the court judgment, which would determine their fate. As this report was being finalized, the peasants in Singur were still deeply frustrated as there is no clear signal regarding the fate of their land -- whether and when they might get their land back, despite the goodwill of the state government.

³ **Noida**, short for the **New Okhla Industrial Development Area**, is a city in India under the management of the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (also called NOIDA). Noida came into administrative existence on 17 April 1976 and celebrates 17 April as "Noida Day". It was set up as part of an urbanization thrust during the controversial Emergency period (1975–1977). The city was created under the *UP Industrial Area Development Act*.

Though the new progressive Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act is a source of solace and indicates a political willingness of the new government to adopt pro-poor policies, the matter is currently *sub judice*, and normally in India, court proceedings take several years. In particular, being a strong opponent with immense influence in Indian politics, Tata would not make the court battle easy for the people.

The jubilant mood of peasants in Singur gave way to confusion, frustration and even anger as they feel helpless and as they are forced to wait for court decisions for an indefinite period of time. Even if after some years they get their land back, no one will compensate their crop loss or their land's loss of soil fertility due to construction works done by Tata. Thus, it was generally strongly felt that even after winning a hard battle, the people of Singur failed to enjoy the fruits of it. If they do not get 'justice' from the court, the peoples' movement of Singur would have to face the biggest challenge: what's next?

B. Sompeta Challenged the Power balance

1. Sompeta revolted against Power Plant

Sompeta, a tranquil coastal town of North Srikakulam district of the Indian State Andhra Pradesh, witnessed unprecedented violence on 14 July 2010, when Indian company Nagarjuna Construction Company Limited (NCC) tried to acquire fertile multi-cropping agricultural land with the help of local authorities and armed police force for construction of a Merchant Power

Women farmers of Sompeta on their way to their farm. Behind them is fertile land that was declared "waste and unproductive" by the government. September 2010



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The IFFM team visited D. Gavaraya, a 58 year-old peasant whose leg injury was so severe. He was not able to work for months. September 2010.

Plant in that area, which as per the proposal would supply some faraway grids.

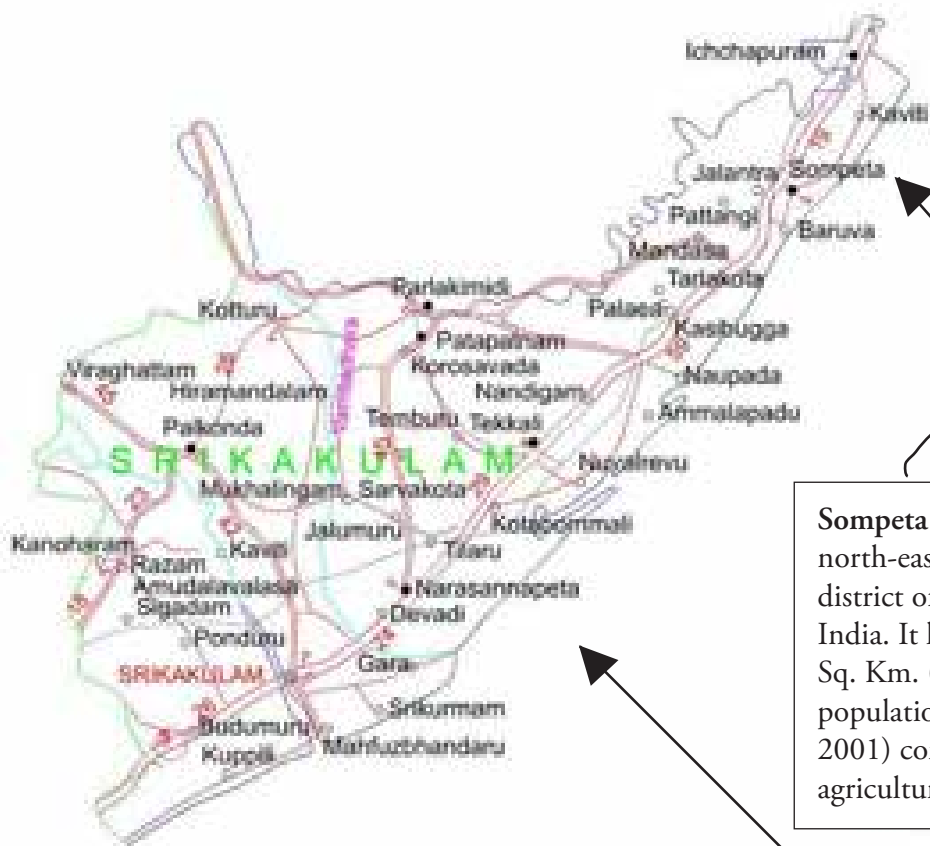
The spontaneous and non-violent resistance of local people met with planned violent attacks of the police goon combined, leading to death of two peasants and leaving hundreds of men and women villagers wounded, among which 15 persons suffered severe bullet injuries. One victim succumbed to his injuries, which increased the death toll to three. The Sompeta incident stunned the people in India as neither the rationale behind acquiring fertile common land for the power plant nor the brutality of police force to repress peoples' movement could be justified by the State authority.

Sompeta has a land area of 732.96 Sq. Km. (73,297 hectares), with a population of 17,390 (India census, 2001) composed mostly of small agricultural workers and fisher folks. Rushikudda, Gollagunda, Baruvapeta and Benkili villages were the worst affected due to the proposed project. The proposed power plant would generate more than 10,000 tonnes of ash daily, which would immensely pollute local water bodies known as *beela*, and would eventually destroy the livelihoods of the villagers. Inhabitants of Sompeta are small and marginal peasants and fisher communities who are residing in this area for generations. They derive their livelihoods from small-scale agriculture and fishing in *beela* and *tampara*, thus access to these natural resources determine their livelihood security. Moreover, *beela* and *tampara* (bodies of water) form unique ecological

zones which, as per environment laws of country, should be protected with highest priority.

In 2008, the State government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) gave permission to a private company NCC to construct a Thermal Power Plant in this prosperous rural belt. The State government took unilateral decision to hand over 1,046 acres (423.3 hectares) of fertile land to NCC for its power project. This power plant has a capacity of producing 1,980-megawatt energy. As mentioned above, the project affects Rushikudda, Gollagunda, Baruvapeta and Benkili villages which are inhabited by both peasants and fishing communities.

Out of required 1,905 acres (770.9 hectares) of land to build its power plant, NCC was awarded with 1,046 acres (423.3 hectares) of government land which in reality was common property resources. In a move to deceive the locals, the company further bought some private lands anticipating that the owners of the remaining lands would be forced to sell their lands once the power plant started production, as pursuing agriculture would then be impossible for peasants in the adjacent areas of the project due to generation of high level of pollution. The plant would burn 34,245 tonnes of coal, generate around 14,380 tonnes of ash and deposit 226 tonnes of sulphur daily. NCC entered into an agreement with an Indonesian company for importing coal for this project. The project would also lead to generation of toxic and radioactive pollutants like



Sompeta is a town located in the north-eastern part of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh in India. It has a land area of 732.96 Sq. Km. (73,297 hectares), with a population of 17,390 (India census, 2001) composed mostly of small agricultural workers and fisher folks.



Maps of Andhra Pradesh and Srikakulam District, AP
Sources: www.srikakulaminfo.com and <http://www.topnews.in/files/andhra-pradesh-map.jpg>

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whole nation. Along with police in uniform, hired goons of NCC in blue scarves and head bands were seen attacking the villagers. It was further shown in electronic media how para-medicals, who came to take the wounded villagers to hospital, were ferociously attacked by police and by the goons of NCC. After a while, media was also attacked by police and goons.

Just after this incident at the initiative of PPS and APVVU (Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Workers Union), the IFFM team visited four villages in Sompeta and interviewed many affected people. The economic backgrounds of affected people were not exactly the same but a strong consensus emerged among them-- they would not give up the lands and water bodies that sustained their lives for generations.

2. The struggle in Sompeta has entered into fourth year

Sompeta resistance entered its fourth year in 2013. While PPS activists are quite positive about the future of their struggle, the victims of Sompeta firing and eviction are yet to receive justice from the state. On 8 December 2012, PPS conducted a local meeting there to remember the important milestone. *“We will fight till the government cancels permission to the plant. In the name of the development, the government has been trying to impose its order on the people. We don’t need any development that paralyses the lives of the people,”* PPS president Dr Y Krishna Murthy said. (Source: Times of India)

People of Sompeta have been fighting a long battle and waiting peacefully for justice. The inquiry over the firing incident, which took place at the proposed plant site in June 2010, was officially

A fishing village in Sompeta, Ramayapatnam depends on fishing. They explain to the IFFM how they fought the police to defend their water from possible contamination if the power plant pushes through. September 2010.



completed by the inquiry officer and Joint Collector P Bhaskar in 2012. However, this investigation was boycotted by the villagers as despite protests from them, the site (called Tekkali) of evidence taking was located far away from the villages, making it difficult for elderly and wounded people to appear before the commission for recording witnesses.

As per Times of India report not a single person attended the magisterial inquiry of Sompeta police firing at the RDO office on 18 July 2012. PPS, which is spearheading the agitation against the thermal power plant at Sompeta, boycotted the final phase of the inquiry. Then joint collector E Sridhar conducted two phases of the inquiry and the last phase was slated for 18 July. But not a single person either from the proposed power plant-affected villages or representatives of PPS turned up for the inquiry.

The PPS representatives had demanded the authorities to conduct the inquiry at Sompeta so that people or the anti-power plant protestors would attend the proceedings. But with the government deciding to hold it at Tekkali, inquiry officer and JC Pola Bhaskar had to sit idle till afternoon as no villager, farmer or protestor turned up to depose before him, reported Times of India. In response to this unique protest the authorities have changed their decision:

"We have now decided to conduct the enquiry in Sompeta on 31 July 2012 as no person has bothered to come and register his/her version before us," Bhaskar told Times of India. He said he would conduct the inquiry at the tehsildar's office at Sompeta. The inquiry officer issued orders to the police, revenue, representatives of the private power plant managements and medical staff who treated the victims to be present before the inquiry committee and give their written versions on the firing incidents.

3. People in Sompeta are united against land grabbing

Rahul Gupta of Green Peace visited Sompeta in early 2013 on the occasion of 'Bhumipuja' organised by PPS as a symbol to establish rights of local people on land. In his word, *"The day started with the traditional ritual of bhoomi puja or the worship of the land by a certain tribe of Andhra Pradesh. Then there were traditional songs and lectures..."*

He further highlighted the seriousness behind the jovial mood of the villagers, saying, *"I was slowly beginning to realise the seriousness behind the entire festival. This was not another fun-filled weekend festival but one held with a view to bring into light the fight that the people of Sompeta have put up in order to protect not just their livelihoods and homes but also the environment."*

In Sompeta, even today, one will find anti-NCC posters, messages and wall writings everywhere. The villagers are united under the leadership of PPS and they have vowed to protect their land, livelihood and environment.

The movement of Sompeta has once again forced us to face the frequently raised question: what is the definition of 'development'? The peaceful peoples' movement in Sompeta has taught communities a lesson - if united, peoples' power can peacefully resist invaders who try to capture natural resources belonging to the community and who attempt to mercilessly destroy human rights of commons with the help of powerful elite. A significant success of Sompeta is that PPS-led struggle is owned by common villagers and it is sustaining, braving all odds. Also the entire movement was peaceful despite repeated provocation from the government and killing of defenders of rights in Sompeta.

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mercury, lead, zinc, cadmium, arsenic, etc., which apart from increasing pollution in general would also highly contaminate ground water and nearby water bodies. The proposed plant would need 250 million cubic metres of water drawn from the sea to operate (Sharma 2010).

Concerned people of Sompeta came together to resist the decision of the State to allow the construction of a power plant in their area. Local resistance group 'Paryavarana Parirakshana Sangham' (PPS) was formed in which women took a very active role. The villagers under the banner of PPS met several times and adopted their strategies of non-violent protests and resistances.

With the initiative of the local group, villagers started a relay hunger strike in nearby center of Sompeta town, which drew some media attention. Amidst all these protests, a big platoon of police flag marched in Sompeta on 13 July 2010, distributed pamphlets in which villagers were asked to stay away from the proposed project site, and threatened the villagers with dire consequences if they dared protest against acquisition of land for NCC's project. The villagers were surprised with this new development but hurriedly decided their future course of action.

In the morning of 14 July 2010, thousands gathered near the proposed construction site, anticipating that the land acquisition process would be carried out by the local authorities and Nagarjuna representatives, in the presence of armed police forces. The villagers who gathered near the proposed construction site were unarmed, and many women and children were present in the crowd. They were shouting slogans against NCC and urging the government authorities not to take away their lands and livelihoods. All of a sudden, without any slightest provocation and without any notice, the police started beating the villagers brutally, targeting women and elderly people. When the villagers scattered, the police randomly opened fire, claiming three lives while 15 other villagers suffered severe bullet injuries. The entire firing happened in the presence of media. Television channels covered this blood-curling brutal incident 'live' which shocked the

Baddi Viswanathan, a 40-year old peasant of Sompeta shows his bullet injury to the International Fact Finding Team. He was one of the protesters violently attacked by the police and hired goons of the power plant. September 2010.



Today, Sompeta is synonymous with peoples' protest against land grabbing, in particular for polluting industries like Thermal Power Plants which destroy environment and displace people in India.

Conclusion

Way Forward: Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Bill as a result of people's resistance against land grabbing in India

For any battle to become a movement, it requires unity and determination to achieve a common goal. The Singur and Sompeta movements against forceful land acquisition had all the ingredients of a successful resistance against land grabbing. External support from different sectors might have helped to fan the flames of discontent which was already brewing, but it was primarily a peoples' movement against neo-liberal forces.

Following steps of Singur, peasants all over India started protesting against land grabbing. It has become evident that the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 has to be scrapped and sensing the discontent among larger section of common people, the government of India has tabled a new Draft Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Bill 2010/2011. The bill, however, has various shortcomings and it is a new initiative to intensify privatisation of land and common resources further. The only significant difference between the two bills is that the new bill proposes minimal intervention from the government in any land transfer and also proposes 'appropriate' compensation package.

Human rights activists, peasant leaders and other social activists have raised their concerns regarding the bill highlighting probable severe consequences on the lives and livelihoods of small farmers, if the LARR Bill becomes an Act. Various loopholes of the draft bill such as poor definition of Public Purpose, no safe guard against conversion of agricultural land, selective implementation of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and poor compensation and R&R packages, are highlighted in the public debate. In fact, the LARR Bill has perceived land as commodity and not as means of livelihoods of millions.

The bill has proposed to give freedom to private companies for buying land directly from the land owners. CSOs expressed concern that this would expose small and marginal peasants to the threats of unfair negotiations dominated by money and muscle power of big investors. They were of opinion that the need of the hour is to protect small holders and to control mindless privatisation and conversion of productive land. It was further suggested that labour intensive industries should be promoted and SIA should be made compulsory for all land acquisition processes.

As always the government has not paid much attention to the concerns raised by the civil society and it is trying to place this bill soon in the parliament this year. On behalf of IMSE, a national consultation was organised to discuss this bill, in which peasants from Singur were present. The peasant leaders of Singur, shared their experiences and demanded that conversion of all agricultural land should be banned and reiterated the fact that the State has the obligation to ensure livelihoods of small holders, which would be endangered further, if LARR is adopted.

It is clear that the struggles of Singur and Sompeta have set the scene for large-scale battles against land grabbing in India. As mentioned earlier, process of the struggles are equally important like their outcomes. The struggles against land grabbing are not easy. In both cases, i.e.. Singur and

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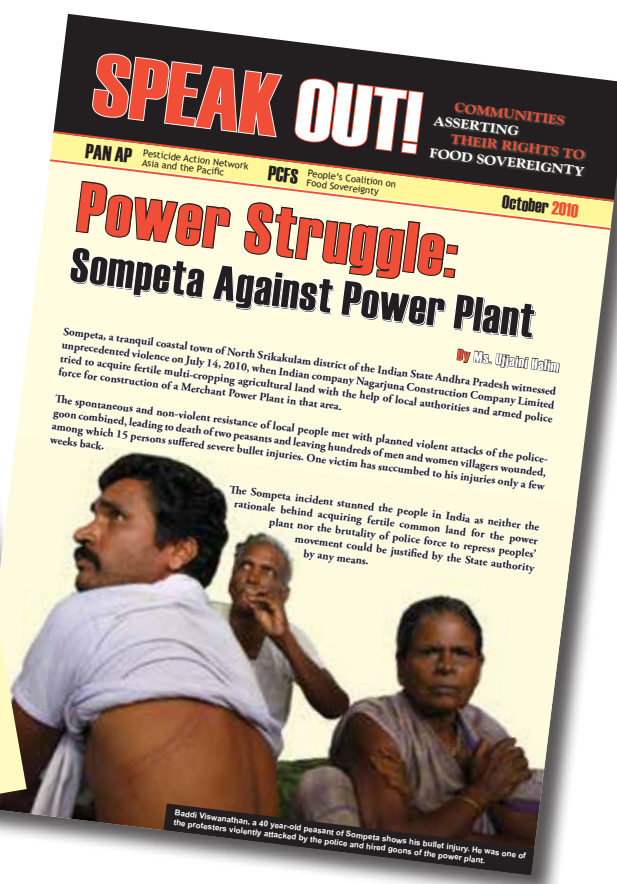
Sompeta, the projects have been abandoned but the contested lands have not been given back to the affected families. Therefore, violations of rights have taken place and it is continuing.

However, the battles of Singur and Sompeta have once again proven the truth that the peoples who are united would always prevail. It has also become clear that genuine political will is a precondition to bringing substantial policy changes. But in today's neo-liberal regime, even that is perhaps not enough. Nobody knows how long the State government of West Bengal will have to fight the legal battle against Tata at court and what the consequences will be. But one thing is clear: policy reforms cannot ensure the realisation of rights in the absence of peoples' power and demands behind it, which are well established in Singur and Sompeta.

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The Power of Fact-Finding Mission as Collective Action



International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) is one of the tools that PAN AP uses in conflict situations that require urgent action. This tool was used for Singur and Sompeta.

IFFM aims to provide a platform for local communities to bring their issues to and gather support from international organisations and individuals. It hopes to build solidarity and bring immediate solution to a conflict that arises as a violation of rights to food sovereignty.

An IFFM team is usually composed of activists from various organisations around the globe who have expertise on rights to productive resources particularly land, ecological agriculture, gender justice, customary land law, etc. Their mandate includes building solidarity with the local communities, probing through interviews, documenting and coming up with recommendations.

While local communities warmly welcome IFFM teams, local governments and corporations involved in land grabbing and other human rights violations are not happy to be visited and probed. In Sompeta for example, the IFFM team was harassed and barred from continuing its work by the local police. This kind of action usually leads to more agitation from local communities. While the team was eventually allowed to continue its work, some of them were barred from entering India in the future.

The documentation of an IFFM is powerful information that both PAN AP and local organisations use for campaigns that follow a mission. Local organisations use it to build power through awareness-raising and organising and hopefully, to bring change through campaigning and advocacy.

Speak Out! Communities Asserting Their Rights To Food Sovereignty

For PAN AP, the documentation is presented through a publication called Speak Out that accompanies an online petition. The online petition letter aims to put pressure on specific target individuals and institutions. These include companies involved in land grabbing and other violations that led to the conflict in the communities, government agencies that are supposed to look after the welfare of the communities, UN Special Rapporteurs, etc.

PAN AP then systematically sends an e-mail alert to its partners and friends around the globe to support Singur or Sompeta (or other issues) and asks them to sign the online petition and share the information with their networks. The online petition automatically sends in real time the appeal letter to various recipients.

Both Singur and Sompeta received an enormous number of online supporters. Singur touched the heart of many people around the globe. It received a total of 1,649 online supporters from 70 countries. As for Sompeta, 202 online supporters signed the petition from 27 countries. Both campaigns were also widely shared by PAN AP partners through their websites and e-groups.

Throughout the months and years that follow the IFFM in Singur and Sompeta, PAN AP consistently monitored the campaigns and provided follow-up interventions (e.g. on-site research, local strategy meetings, etc) through partners Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE, West Bengal) and Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union (APVVU, Andhra Pradesh).



The IFFM team from the Philippines, India, Nepal and Indonesia with the fisherfolks of Ramayapatnam village in Sompeta.

Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) is one of the five regional centres of PAN, a global network dedicated to eliminating the harm caused to humans and the environment by pesticides and promoting biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

PAN AP's vision is a society that is truly democratic, equal, just, and culturally diverse; based on the principles of food sovereignty, gender justice and environmental sustainability. It has developed strong partnerships with peasants, agricultural workers and rural women movements in the Asia Pacific region and guided by the strong leadership of these grassroots groups, has grown into a reputable advocacy network with a firm Asian perspective.

PAN AP's mission lies in strengthening people's movements to advance and assert food sovereignty, biodiversity-based ecological agriculture, and the empowerment of rural women; protect people and the environment from highly hazardous pesticides; defend the rice heritage of Asia; and resist the threats of corporate agriculture and neo-liberal globalisation.

Currently, PAN AP comprises 108 network partner organizations in the Asia Pacific region and links with about 400 other CSOs and grassroots organizations regionally and globally.

EMPOWERING PEOPLE FOR CHANGE



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