

India has over the past decade been home to thousands of land struggles that have centred crucially on the often forcible transfer of agricultural land from small and marginal farmers or indigenous groups to industrial conglomerates or special economic zones. Yet in spite of the proliferation of such struggles, and the key role they have played in public debates over 'development' in India, few of them have been studied ethnographically 'from within' as they happened.

Kenneth Bo Nielsen's dissertation seeks to fill this ethnographic gap through a study of one of the most talked-about land struggles in Indian in recent years, namely that against the setting up of a Tata Motors car factory on fertile agricultural land in Singur in the state of West Bengal. Drawing on recent theories growing out of the Subaltern Studies tradition, and the works of Partha Chatterjee in particular, Nielsen explores how Singur's anti-land acquisition movement, spearheaded by the so-called 'unwilling farmers', have sought to forge alliances with key actors in civil society and in the organised domain of regional party politics to prevent their farmland from being acquired and, when that proved futile, to have the land acquisition undone. Importantly, the study demonstrates how the unwilling farmers have engaged with hegemonic notions of development *and* the institutions of the developmental state in their struggle. In a similar manner, the unwilling farmers have, through prolonged processes of judicialisation, drawn on the language and institutions of law to stake both moral and legal claims to their farmland. Nielsen's dissertation thus brings out how popular grassroots struggles against land acquisitions in contemporary India engage the state, even as they contest its policies.

Drawing on recent advances in the anthropological study of popular politics and democracy in India, Nielsen's dissertation moves on to analyse the internal dynamics at play within the category of 'unwilling farmers', under which Singur's anti-land acquisition politics was carried out. Rural Bengali society is often divided along caste, class and gender lines, or along the lines of party political affiliation, and by unpacking the notion of 'unwilling farmer' through a carefully grounded ethnographic examination of the everyday politics of land in Singur, Nielsen brings to light how everyday social relations, identities and dynamics influenced the shifting ways in which the Singur movement took shape and evolved. Thus, while the anti-land acquisition movement publicly projected an image of Singur's project affected villages as a microcosmic peasant utopia, or as a unified 'village community', Nielsen documents how interests, aspirations and desires were often sharply divided along multiple social fault lines within the movement itself: Between poor, formerly untouchable

landless agricultural labourers and intermediate caste land owners-cum-supervisors; between party political 'leaders' and 'followers'; between patrons and clients; and between men and women. The shifting ways in which these locally embedded social cleavages and identities were negotiated during the course of the anti-land acquisition movement, Nielsen argues, strongly impacted not only on how the movement organised and operated locally; but also on the claims it raised or failed to raise; the alliances it could build and sustain; and the mobilising symbolism it drew on.

Two important findings emerge from this study. First, Nielsen argues that anti-land acquisition movements such as those in Singur are inherently polysemic phenomena that are home to a multitude of aspirations, ambitions and desires. Their message, meaning and politics cannot therefore easily be subsumed under unequivocal shorthand labels such as anti-industry, anti-globalisation or anti-development. And second, the fact that the Singur movement was deeply shaped and influenced by very localised social relations and dynamics, even as these were transformed over time by the very process of mobilisation, suggests that the movement evolved through a complex interplay between localised factors and public, collective forms of political engagement with civil society, the developmental state, and its institutions and discourses. Based on this, Nielsen's dissertation argues for the need to rethink popular anti-land acquisition movements akin to that in Singur as made and shaped in dynamic interface encompassing multiple domains, rather than as structured around a series of dichotomies.