

# **Singur Ravaged by Tata: An Open Letter Demanding Compensation**

Thursday 16 October 2008, by [MENON Radhika](#) (Date first published: 16 October 2008).

To

Buddhadeb Bhattacharya,

Chief Minister,

West Bengal

CC: Hon'ble Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Governor, West Bengal

Dear Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya,

We hold that the Tatas forced entry into Singur, as well as their recent exit and re-entry into Modi's Gujarat, are blatant examples of corporate irresponsibility.

Tata demanded and got nearly 1000 acres of land in Singur through a process soaked in coercion and violence including brutal doses of police atrocities. The Tatas even went to court to stop people from knowing the terms of the agreement they had signed with the Government of West Bengal and the West Bengal Industrial development Corporation (WBIDC), and the High Court dutifully obliged them by suspending the much-trumpeted 'right to information' in due deference to the wishes of the corporate emperor.

Lies were peddled - about the land being 'barren', about farmers being all too 'willing' to 'consent' to giving up their land; about how the Nano factory would be welcomed as a harbinger of jobs and 'development'. All proved false, and the people of Singur, in the face of all odds, showed the guts to challenge the combined might of the Tata empire and the state, and go on raising awkward demands regarding return of their land and payment of adequate compensation for the losses borne not only by landowners but also sharecroppers and agricultural labourers and other self-employed toilers who depended on the Singur land for their living. As a result, even your West Bengal government was forced into contemplating a negotiated settlement over the issue of land and compensation.

Since the Tatas showed no previous aversion (be it in Kalinganagar or Singur) to doing business under cover of state brutality, their present claim that they left Singur because they could not afford to run the Nano factory under police protection, does not pass muster. More likely, the pullout decision appears to have been prompted by high level political considerations involving the powers that be in New Delhi as well as Kolkata. By all accounts, the pullout is nothing but a cynical corporate political game being played out at the expense of ordinary people and peasants of Singur.

Now, Tata has pulled out. The whole world recognises Narendra Modi as a fascist posterboy and proud perpetrator of the Gujarat genocide and communal fake encounters, but Ratan Tata finds murderous Modi to be 'good M'.

But the fact remains that Nano or no Nano, the people of Singur have already suffered heavily. Many have lost their land; many more have lost their livelihood. In the light of the burning post-pullout questions like the fate of those who lost their land and livelihood in the bargain and the future of the site in Singur, we raise the following concerns and demands:

1. The crucial question of compensation remains: and will still have to be resolved by making adequate provision not only for the land-losers but also for all affected share-croppers, registered as well as unregistered, and labourers, agricultural as well as other self-employed ones.
2. More importantly, the Tatas cannot be allowed to leave behind 1,000 acres of 'scorched earth' in Singur's fertile green belt. In two years the Tatas have transformed 1,000 acres of multi-cropped arable land into corporate wasteland and they must now be forced to bear the entire cost for reclamation of the same. There can be no free exit for the corporate land-grabbers - they must be made to pay the full price for both acquisition as well as reclamation of the Singur land.
3. For the ruling party and Government in West Bengal, the exit of the Tatas from Singur seems to be a loss that merits state mourning. And while bidding a tearful adieu to the Tatas, it seems desperate to teach the 'audacious' and 'recalcitrant' people of Singur a lesson or two on the lines of Nandigram. We warn against any such move. We demand that instead of raising accusing fingers at the protesting people and tilting at so-called 'anti-industry' windmills, the West Bengal Government ought to answer for this pathetic denouement to their much hyped-up 'industrialisation' blitzkrieg. They had raised the simplistic slogan "Krishi amader bhitti, shilpa amader bhabisyat" (agriculture is our foundation, industry our future); now they should explain why, in the state-sponsored corporate wasteland of Singur, the 'foundation' lies shattered while the 'future' has melted into thin air.
4. All the appeasement of the Tatas has fallen through, the Tata party is over, and now it seems that the West Bengal government will have to clean up the table as well as foot all the unpaid bills! The CAG has already found the WBIDC guilty of incurring "excess expenditure of Rs. 2.99 crore towards payment of avoidable interest of Rs. 1.44 crore and delayed 'consent awards' of Rs. 1.55 crore" and dishing out subsidy worth "Rs. 76.11 crore to Tata Motors Limited on leasing of 645.67 acres of land at Singur for ninety years". It is Tata, and not the people of West Bengal who ought to bear this unfair burden imposed on them by their rulers.

We would also like to point out that Nano is not the first 'corporate disaster' of its kind. Bhopal 1984 continues to haunt us with the sordid story of how corporates like Union Carbide-Dow not only walk away from the environmental and humanitarian horrors they cause; but are even welcomed back with no questions asked by governments eager to appease them. Significantly, it was Tata which palled up with Dow to facilitate the latter's comeback bid. Then in the mid-1990s we had Enron. The US told us that the US electricity giant Enron was the answer to our energy crisis and the Congress and the BJP and the governments of India and Maharashtra vied with each other to accommodate all the absurd demands of Enron including an unprecedented provision for a hefty 16% counter-guarantee. Now Enron has simply vanished into the blue in both India and the US and we are left with all the damages. We hope you will appreciate the lesson that Singur has once again taught us: that corporate appeasement is the surest recipe not for industrialisation but for an unpardonable plunder of our natural and human resources.

Sincerely,

Radhika Menon

[radhikamen@hotmail.com](mailto:radhikamen@hotmail.com)