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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conflict politics at the margins of the neoliberal state in the postcolonial context: the case anti-power grid movement of Bhangar in Kolkata

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ABSTRACT

The hegemonic identity of neoliberal development is prevalent in the postcolonial world, where the state maintains an ambiguous identity of being a proponent of welfare and simultaneously dispossesses people at the margins through capital accumulation. This article draws on the empirical case of Bhangar's anti-power grid movement in Kolkata to show multiple relationships and conflict politics strategies that exist between the neoliberal state and the civil society formed by people at the margins. To counter the capital accumulation by the state, civil society sometimes co-opts with the state, at other times it negotiates with the state and often resists the state through specific strategies. The paper defines these heterogeneities of relations as conflict politics. It argues that such a framework of conflict politics not only facilitates the right to resist as an important principle for developmental politics but also helps to unpack different subjectivities of developmentalism in the postcolonial context.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Conflict politics, power grid, land politics, developmentalism, neoliberal state, postcolonial context, capital accumulation

摘要

后殖民语境下新自由主义国家的边缘冲突政治——以加尔各答邦加尔反电网运动为例 *Area Development and Policy.*

新自由主义发展范式在后殖民世界展现出霸权性特征，国家在其中扮演着双重角色：一方面以福利供给者自居，另一方面又通过资本积累过程剥夺边缘群体的权益。本文基于印度加尔各答邦加尔地区反电网运动的实证案例，揭示了新自由主义国家与边缘群体构成的公民社会之间存在的多重关系及冲突政治策略。研究发现，为应对国家主导的资本积累，公民社会在不同情境下采取合作、协商与抗争等多样化策略。本文将这种异质性关系界定为"冲突政治"，并论证该框架具有双重理论意义：一是将抗争权确立为发展政治的重要原则；二是为解构后殖民语境下发展主义的多重主体性提供新的视角。

关键词

冲突政治，电网，土地政治，发展主义，新自由主义国家，后殖民语境，资本积累

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RESUMEN

Políticas de conflictos al margen del Estado neoliberal en un contexto poscolonial: El caso del movimiento contra la red eléctrica de Bhangar en Calcuta *Area Development and Policy*.

La identidad hegemónica del desarrollo neoliberal es frecuente en el mundo poscolonial, donde el Estado mantiene una identidad ambigua de ser un defensor del bienestar y, a la vez, despoja a las personas marginadas mediante la acumulación de capital. En este artículo se analiza el caso empírico del movimiento contra la red eléctrica de Bhangar en Calcuta para demostrar las diferentes relaciones y estrategias de políticas de conflictos que existen entre el Estado neoliberal y la sociedad civil formada por personas marginadas. Para contrarrestar la acumulación de capital por parte del Estado, la sociedad civil a veces coopta con el Estado, otras veces negocia con el Estado y con frecuencia se resiste al Estado a través de estrategias específicas. En este artículo se definen estas heterogeneidades de relaciones como políticas de conflictos. Se argumenta que esta estructura de políticas de conflictos no solo facilita el derecho a resistirse como un principio importante para las políticas de desarrollo sino también ayuda a analizar las diferentes subjetividades del desarrollismo en el contexto poscolonial.

PALABRAS CLAVE

política de conflictos, red eléctrica, política del suelo, desarrollismo, Estado neoliberal, contexto poscolonial, acumulación de capital

АННОТАЦИЯ

Конфликтная политика на окраинах неолиберального государства в постколониальном контексте: кейс движения Бхангара против электросетевого хозяйства в Калькутте *Area Development and Policy*.

Гегемонистская концепция неолиберального развития преобладает в постколониальном мире, где государство занимает неоднозначную позицию сторонника всеобщего благосостояния, допускающего обездоливание людей, находящихся на периферии общества, в ходе накопления капитала. Эта статья опирается на эмпирический пример движения Бхангара против электросетей в Калькутте, чтобы показать многочисленные взаимосвязи и стратегии конфликтной политики, которые существуют между неолиберальным государством и гражданским обществом, сформированным людьми на периферии. Чтобы противостоять накоплению капитала государством, гражданское общество иногда сотрудничает с государством, в других случаях ведет переговоры с государством и часто противостоит государству с помощью определенных стратегий. В статье эти неоднородности отношений определяются как конфликтная политика. В ней утверждается, что такая структура конфликтной политики не только способствует реализации права на сопротивление как важного принципа политики развития, но и помогает выявить различные субъективные аспекты девелопментализма в постколониальном контексте.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

конфликтная политика, энергетическая сеть, земельная политика, девелопментализм, неолиберальное государство, постколониальный контекст, накопление капитала

1. INTRODUCTION

Peri-urban areas in the postcolonial world are often subject to contested forms of developmentalism. These contestations are the result of the speculative nature of the land, territorial management efforts by the neoliberal state and differential place-making claims by the local population (Kundu, 2016; Sood, 2021; Sood & Kennedy, 2020). Harvey's (1989) analysis

highlights how this type of state, in fact, actively participates in entrepreneurial ventures and transforms socio-spatial relations at the local level by creating new pathways for capital circulation and accumulation. By doing so, it shifts its position from a managerial entity (or a nightwatchman state) to an entrepreneurial entity (Harvey, 1989). This has enabled the neoliberal state to promote risk-taking as a political strategy (Papaioannou, 2020a). At this juncture, peri-urban areas in the postcolonial context became a hotspot for the complex neoliberal politics of land. On the one hand, this neoliberal politics creates opportunities for the state to extract higher values from land through speculation (Goldman, 2011b; Rouanet & Halbert, 2016; Sood, 2019). On the other hand, it generates a complex and unique form of micro-politics at the local level where various interest groups share heterogenous relationships of contestation which cannot be explained through the binary formulation of dominance and resistance.

Due to the volatile nature of the land and the multiplicity of actors, peri-urban areas in the postcolonial era often showcase complex developmental politics. While acknowledging this complex developmental politics, we introduce the framework of conflict politics to analyse this beyond the binary framework of dominance by the state and resistance against capital accumulation by marginalised groups. To do so, in this paper we analyse the heterogeneity of relationships between a sub-national neoliberal state and the political society in India, drawing on an empirical case study of such politics in a peri-urban area near Kolkata, named Bhangar. As a location Bhangar is unique as it is in close proximity to the Kolkata airport (approximately 30 km) and the newly planned township of Rajarhat New Town (approximately 23 km). The spatial fabric of Bhangar represents some newly developed condominiums along with paddy fields, brick kilns and village settlements. As the location is close to many amenities in Kolkata, the land market is very much speculative in nature. Discussions with locals reveal land transformation in Bhangar started in early 2000 after the opening of Vedic Village, a luxurious spa resort nearby. Due to its locational advantages and inflow of real estate capital, land value in Bhangar skyrocketed where the appreciated value was nearly three to four times the previous market rates (discussed in detail in Section 4). Many other high-end real-estate projects like Tapovan and Shantivan were also proposed during this time. Due to this volatile land market and continuous speculation, Bhangar becomes an interesting case to unpack the complex nexus between conflicting local political classes, land developers, farmers, and the civil and political society of the locality. By doing so, this paper reveals the volatile nature of land politics in the peri-urban areas of the postcolony and how the neoliberal state engages with that.

By analysing empirical evidence from the anti-power grid movement, in Bhangar, Kolkata we propose a framework of conflict politics which not only goes beyond the binary formulation of dominance vs resistance but also shows the heterogenous relationship that the neoliberal state, civil society and political society shares in the postcolonial context. By doing so, we also unpack the relational nature of the neoliberal state, which oscillates between its entrepreneurial role and its welfare rhetoric. The argument we put forward is that conflict politics is an essential aspect of progress in development as it holds the possibilities of emancipation and social change. Our argument not only decentres the modernist idea of development but also defends the 'right to resist' as a counter-hegemonic framework within which the human capacity to achieve freedom and social justice can be effectively enhanced. In this sense, the transferability of our theorisation of conflict politics goes beyond the case of Bhangar and towards defending the idea of radical democracy grounded on the discursive political field of local activism.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 defines the concept of conflict politics in the postcolonial world. In doing so, it goes beyond the normative formulation of dominance and towards understanding the emergence of resistance of civil society.

Section 3 presents the research methodology of this paper. Section 4 contextualises the study by discussing the case study of Bhangar. Sections 5 and 6 provide an analysis of empirical data by identifying the conflict politics strategies of civil society and the counter-conflict politics strategies of the neoliberal state. Section 7 discusses the importance of power, networks and actors in understanding the case of Bhangar and the outcome of conflict politics. The concluding Section 8 summarises the central argument of this paper.

2. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF CONFLICT POLITICS IN THE POSTCOLONY

In modernisation approaches to development, the postcolony represents a subjugated category of the Western world. Catching up with the West is a one way neoliberal developmental process for the postcolony. The focus is on economic growth or on progress that is legible to the West (Brett, 2009). Robinson (2006) argues this condition is related more to the West's self-characterisation in contrast to the 'otherness' and 'elsewhere' of the postcolony, rather than the postcolony's self-characterisation of itself. The notion of 'otherness' has its roots in the colonial imagination, which undermined contextuality and differences along with the hegemonic appropriation of power (Robinson, 2006). The colonial and postcolonial hegemony has been justified by Western neoliberal values of private property and free markets, sustaining the subordination of the non-Western world. Hence, modernisation theorists and neoliberals insisted that the postcolonial world would not develop unless key institutions such as the state, private property rights and markets operated according to neoliberal values of individual freedom and equality before the law. For this reason, they demanded actions by the modernising elites of postcolonial countries, including political elites which were involved in developing neoliberal state institutions. However, as Roy Chowdhury and Kipgen (2013) observe in the case of India,

> . . . the anxiety of the postcolonial Indian nation to consolidate its territory and to establish its sovereign rights is constantly contested by the multiple identity and ethnicity-oriented movements that emerge from this 'contextual messiness.' (Roy Chowdhury & Kipgen, 2013, p. 197)

In this paper, we adopt a postcolonial framework to capture some of this 'contextual messiness' which not only helps us to mobilise a framework which goes beyond the binary formation of dominance vs resistance but also enables us to critique Western theorisation of developmental politics by making it more grounded in the postcolonial context of India. A postcolonial framework, as such, serves the purpose of explaining these developmental and political tensions in Indian peri-urban areas after the removal of the British state's political control or rule of the people. The politics of developmentalism is conceptualised by looking at civil society's participation in decision-making; production and distribution of resources as well as changing power relations between the state and civil society (Leftwich, 2010). However, when we situate this in the postcolony, it is far more complex. Chatterjee (2011) sees this as a discursive political space where the state creates zones of exception within which political society operates and continuously challenges the state. Whereas civil society for him is an extension of the state where rights are mutually constituted by citizens and the state (Chatterjee, 2011).

Certainly, over the years, the idea of Western modernity and associated politics of neoliberal developmentalism have been challenged by critical thinkers, especially by postcolonial scholars (Escobar, 1992b; Robinson, 2006). The dilemmas of developmental discourse have become more prominent in recent days with the increasing challenges of post-COVID

-19 pandemic crises, climate change, refugee crisis and the political and economic transformation of the state. Development, being a political project, often finds itself at the crossroads of 'development alternatives' and 'alternatives to development'. As a discourse, development is often criticised for reproducing hegemonic political norms through new forms of domination and subordination and underestimation of 'local' civil societies (Escobar, 1992a; Gibson-Graham, 2007; Ziai, 2004). Li (2000) defines development as a 'project of rule' where actual accomplishment happens through disciplinary power. For her, development legitimises state agencies for transformational change and sees citizens as clients (Li, 2000).

As a critique of its hegemonic power relations, Escobar (1992a) urges us to decentre development. Instead, he proposes a politics of post-development, which calls for socio-political and epistemological transformations by focusing on everyday repetitive and habitual practices of the 'local' (Escobar, 2000, 2007). As such development requires exogenous changes for the transformation of human lives. However, this underestimates or indeed disregards the importance of context and local knowledge, manifesting practices that are hegemonic. Post-development discourse criticises this hegemonic approach to development and creates a 'radical rapture'. Specifically, in Escobar's (2012) view, development is nothing more than the ideological expression of post-war capital expansion. Therefore, he proposes to displace the idea of development and search for an alternative to development (Escobar, 2012)

However, the alternative to development discourse has been criticised for being utopian and for promoting the 'romance of resistance' (Pieterse, 2000). Pieterse (2000) and Collier (2008) tend to focus on the importance of institutional and policy aspects of capitalist development, centred in neoliberal states of postcolonial countries, but keep silent about the importance of human agency. As Chatterjee (2011) points out, the state makes political calculations about the demands of the political society and selectively represents that as an exception of the norm. The political society sometimes challenges and sometimes co-opts with the state. These discursive politics unsettle the norm and create new political vocabularies like an exception of law. As the state's legitimacy in the postcolonial context is dependent on these forms of discursive politics, we adopt a postcolonial lens to analyse the state and the associated discursive relationship with political society.

2.1. Situating the state

To understand the politics of developmentalism in the postcolonial context, the neoliberal state becomes an important site which helps to unfold various forms of conflict politics. In this paper we argue the neoliberal state is not only formed of certain institutions, rather it deploys multiple arrangements and relationships through the iconography of languages, infrastructure for institutions, symbolic gestures and disciplinary power (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001; Mitchell, 1991). Here, the state is never an already constructed entity but rather an entity under continuous formations (Goodfellow, 2019) and variations. This dynamism of the state is also observable in its risk-taking abilities for political legitimacy (Papaioannou, 2020). The latter is often created through a balance between capital accumulation for the interest of the dominant class and promotion of welfare principles through development projects. By doing so, development projects automatically become the mode for capital accumulation. Although the state is not a homogenous entity that instrumentally facilitates capital accumulation, it prioritises certain models of neoliberal economic development and promotes the interests of certain social classes at the expense of others. Visions of the state play a crucial role in establishing the coherence and unity of an apparatus that is internally conflictual (Annavarapu & Levenson, 2021).

In the context of postcolonial India, relationships between the state and subaltern subjects are far more complex. Here, the state often dispossesses subaltern subjects but also

simultaneously allows them to exert their rights selectively through various networks of power. By doing so, it seeks to make structural power reappear. Kaviraj (2010), in his work *Imaginary Institutions of India*, shows that actual political suffering sometimes happens through the neighbourhood 'tyrants' where the state exists as a distant subject (Kaviraj, 2010). Neighbourhood 'tyrants' are local individuals who are not democratically elected but have both the backing of the state and the power to coerce and control local areas. It might be argued that the notion of tyrants as local power holders is crucial for making sense of conflict politics in the postcolonial context of Bhangar. This subtle invasion of the state at the local level of politics makes it simultaneously distinct and distant which sometimes allows the subaltern subjects to become part of the political process which they perceive as an exterior (Lund, 2006). The relationship between the neoliberal state and the political society also demonstrates this dualism. The political society is a discursive realm for mediations and bargaining. In this sense, it is distinct from civil society. We suggest that multiple relationships between state and civil society can be understood better within the framework of conflict politics.

2.2. What is conflict politics?

Hickey (2009) observes, conflict and struggle in politics have always been central to international development. He also sees civil society actors who were initially important to mobilise development agendas are becoming an extension of the state apparatus (Hickey, 2009). Whereas, the political society is becoming increasingly important to contest the technocratic rationalities of the developmental process. The very process of state formation has been characterised by violence and struggle, with states establishing control over territorial space and people through legitimised coercion. We align and theorise conflict politics based on this, which unsettles the binary construction of dominance and subordination. Conflict politics acts as an apparatus or 'dispositif' (Agamben, 2009). For Agamben (2009), the apparatus is an assemblage of material, power and relations which continuously produces new subjects. As an apparatus, conflict politics serves three essential functions. Firstly, it helps to identify the heterogeneity of practices and acts as a signifier for subaltern subjects who are necessarily located at the margins of the state. Secondly, conflict politics serves a strategic function of exertion of rights by the people at the margins of the state who engage with it through various kinds of relations. Thirdly, it also helps to understand how postcolonial subjects navigate, manipulate and reproduce certain power networks.

In this paper, conflict politics signifies not only political praxis and agency but also produces new subjects, i.e., discourses, metaphors, artefacts and relations to understand the distinct features of the neoliberal state in the postcolonial context. By doing so, it destabilises the conception of postcolonial subjects as a reference of subordination and strategically positions postcolonial subjects as innovative agents of change in socio-spatial relations (Jazeel, 2014). This relational change is bottom-up and predominantly participatory and democratic. Although one cannot argue that participatory and democratic politics is always conflictual, one can only insist that conflict is key for pushing the state to democratise and include people of the margins in the process of decision making about space and material resources.

2.3. Dominance and resistance

To understand the relationship of subaltern subjects with the dominant discourse, which in this case is the neoliberal state, it is also important to unpack the binary entanglement of dominance and resistance. The mainstream understanding of resistance is always represented as an act against domination (Sharp et al., 2000). Sharp et al. (2000) encourage us to look beyond this binary construction of domination and resistance. They argue resistance is the core

subject of the state apparatus where resistance can also be considered as an extension of power rather than challenging it. Here power is constructed through social relations. It is the flow of social interactions which is mobilised through various networks (Allen, 2003, 2009). At this juncture, resistance becomes the diagnostic tool for identifying differential power relations (Pile, 1997). Similarly, subaltern groups are not always ready to tear through the hegemonic power via resistance. Their acts are more contingent, repetitive and habitual (Haynes & Prakash, 1991).

The term resistance originates from the Latin word '*resistere*' which can be translated as 'to make a stand against someone/something or oppose someone/something'. The relationship between subaltern subjects and the state in the postcolonial context is not always representative of resistance; rather, it contains bargaining, negotiations, patronage or even sometimes direct antagonism. This does not undermine the importance of resistance as a form of engagement but portrays resistance as one of the forms which can be achieved through the possibilities of rupture. We define these engagements as conflict politics which developed through a 'networked mobilisation' of power, the capacity of different actors and the possibilities for analysing the dynamic trajectories of emancipation and social change (Featherstone, 2008; Papaioannou, 2014). We also borrow from Tsing (2005) the idea of 'friction' to construct these engagements. For Tsing, 'friction' is represented by unstable, heterogeneous, awkward encounters that are developed through interconnections across power relations. She states:

> As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. (Tsing, 2005, p. 5)

To understand and analyse these unstable, heterogeneous engagements, everyday life becomes an essential ethnographic site that not only portrays the extraordinary encounters but also gives a scope to understand the ordinary acts of the subaltern subjects. James Scott (1990), in his work on South-Asian peasants, calls these ordinary acts 'hidden transcripts'. He shows how subtle acts by the peasants challenge the dominant discourse, and they challenge it from the outside (Scott, 1990). In fact, Scott (1990) focuses only on rupture and clearly makes a distinction between the subordinate and the dominant as binary opposites. However, the practice of clientelism in the South Asian context shows that rupture is not the only outcome of conflict politics. Simultaneously, the subordinate and the dominant are not always polar opposites; rather, they are mutually constitutive of each other. State agendas are often shaped by ordinary struggles (Haynes & Prakash, 1991). Abu-Lughod (1990) warns us about romanticising resistance by taking examples of everyday acts and the folklore of Bedouin women. Her provocation helps us to look beyond the polar opposite nature of domination and resistance and opens up possibilities to find innovative acts, artefacts and strategies to analyse various forms of conflict politics (Abu-Lughod, 1990). This paper forms its arguments based on Abu-Lughod's (1990) understanding of everyday acts. Before analysing everyday acts in the Bhangar movement, the next section details out the methodology that was adopted for this study

3. SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on an empirical study of conflict politics in the postcolonial context of Bhangar, Kolkata in India. The overall methodological approach is qualitative. The focus is on the Bhangar anti-power grid movement in Kolkata. This movement was selected as our empirical research case because it demonstrates the coexistence of multiple and often conflicting narratives of development. The case study also enables the unpacking heterogenous relationships between the local neoliberal state and people at the margins. Simultaneously,

the case study exhibits how mechanisms of conflict politics in the postcolonial context are enacted, shaping the outcomes of the neoliberal developmental project. In doing so, finally, the case study also helps in mapping multiple identities of the local state.

For this research, we adopted an ethnographic approach. This included a combination of qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, photographic documentation, and content analysis of secondary data materials (policy, acts, pamphlets, posters). The fieldwork was part of the first author's PhD work. When the first author was conducting his initial fieldwork (at the end of 2016) in Kolkata, the anti-power grid movement started in Bhangar. At the end of 2016, the first author established connections with leaders of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star (CPIML Red Star) who were involved in the mobilisation for the protest. During his PhD fieldwork (2017–2018), the first author participated in the movement as a 'participant observant'. Even though he attended some of the political meetings, rallies and protests, he was not directly involved in the mobilisation process.

A total of 12 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups (each consisting of four to seven participants) with key informants were conducted. Overall, about 30 key informants were selected on the grounds of their involvement in the Bhangar anti-power grid movement. Each interview's duration ranged from 30–90 minutes. Key themes discussed in the semi-structured interviews included: involvement in conflict politics; identification of rights; strategies for conflict politics; and spatial adjustments and perspective about the state. All interviews followed the discussion on these thematic areas. However, each interview was unique in the sense that each key informant reflected in depth on these thematic areas, building on his/her life histories and everyday encounters. The interviews and focus groups were always conducted in community spaces for the safety of interviewees and interviewer.

For this research, participant observation was also used as a method of data collection. It involved the observation of civil society gatherings, rallies and political meetings and informal interaction with civil society members. This has helped us to become active participants in their conflict politics and observants of how they engage with the police and other state apparatus and how they mobilise resources to engage in conflict politics.

In addition, photographs were taken during the fieldwork. The purpose was to provide a method of triangulation. Here, photography only acts as supplementary material to support interviewees' claims, not a major tool of data collection and analysis.

Secondary data was collected through newspaper reports, Government Acts, policy documents and poster/pamphlets. The research undertook a content analysis of documents for two purposes. Firstly, to help decipher different discourses around conflict politics and the changing rhetoric of conflict politics. Secondly, to further triangulate various claims both by the state and people at the margins. The paper, in the next section, contextualises the study in Bhangar Kolkata by detailing the case study of Bhangar.

4. THE CASE OF BHANGAR'S ANTI-POWER GRID MOVEMENT

Over the years, neoliberal megaprojects in the urban areas of the postcolony have become new nodes for capital accumulation. Studies have highlighted how these megaprojects hold the status of 'zones of exception' within existing planning regulations to counter informality. They have been justified in the name of development to seek support from the political society and subsequently counter any dissent (Follmann, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; Shatkin, 2016; Williams et al., 2021). In the Indian postcolonial context, Roy (2009) calls this a 'tool of unmapping'. She argues, this 'tool of unmapping' serves two purposes for the state. On the one hand, the absence of any institutional maps enables the state to disregard any concern regarding the environmental, social or cultural aspects of the land. On the other hand, fuzzy land details

(boundaries, titles, etc.) and vagueness of plans help the state to remap the urban (Follmann, 2015; Roy, 2009).

The Bhangar power-grid project was also conceptualised as a 'zone of exception' (Figure 1). In 2013, the state acquired 13 acres of land by implementing the controversial Land Acquisition Act, 1894, just a day before the new Land Acquisition Bill, 2013 was passed in the parliament (Source: Land Conflict Watch). Initially, there was an ambiguity around the purpose of the land acquisition as the state was solely relying on the local tyrant for mobilisation and disregarding any dissenters who were affiliated with the ruling party. From 2016, some of the farmers were concerned about the land acquisition. Gradually the reason for acquisition became clearer when the Power Grid Corporation of India (PGCI) started the initial construction. Hence, from the end of 2016 the people from Machibhanga village (within which most of the acquired land falls under) started organising and voicing dissent against the proposed power grid.

Bhangar's peri-urban location was also an important factor for mobilisation against the power grid. It is adjacent to the newly planned city of Rajarhat which has already observed speculation in the land market in the form of real estate developments. These real estate developments not only created a volatile land market but also created a new local political class in the form of syndicates[1] (Kundu, 2016). Bhangar being adjacent to Rajarhat, this complex nexus of local tyrants, real estate developers and the state was also extended there. Hence, on the one hand, the spatial politics of Bhangar followed the laws of speculation (Goldman, 2011).

On the other hand, this micropolitics gets further complicated by conflicting interests among different political classes, land developers and landowners. Raman (2016), in her work

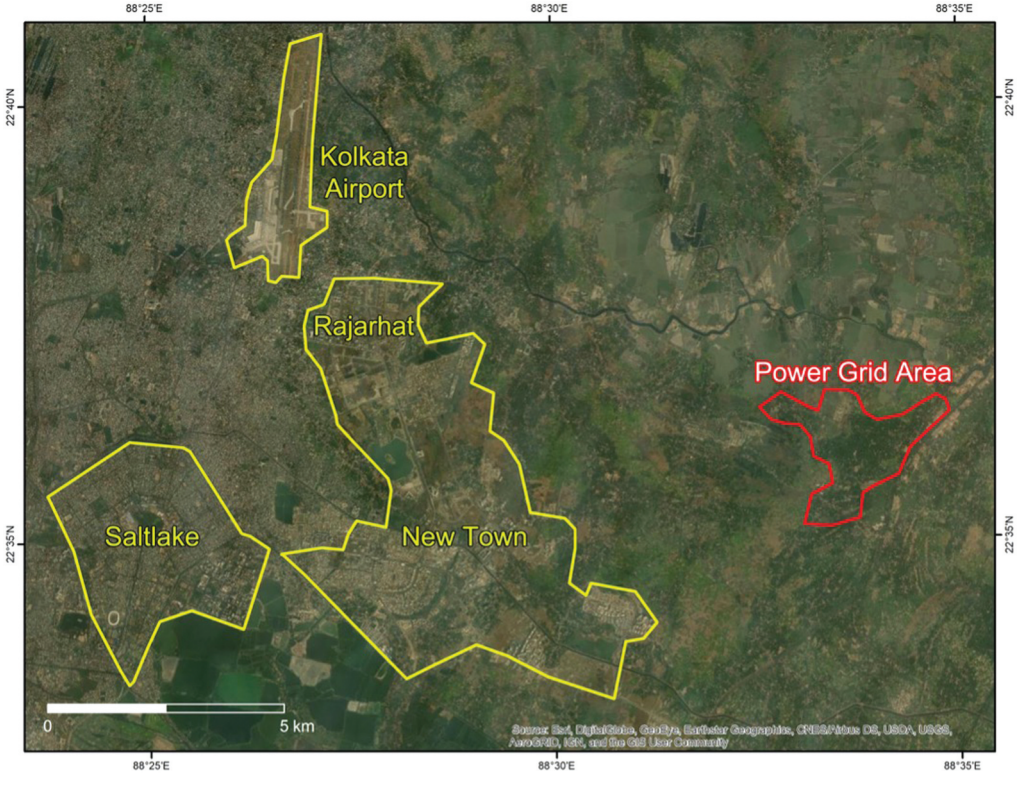

Figure 1. Bhangar power-grid area within its surroundings.

in the Sriperumbudur Oragadam region in India also shows how small developers and landowners respond in a complex way to the land acquisition process by the state which cannot be fully explained by the speculative logics. The land market in Bhangar has become an apostle for higher value and velocity of circulation of capital through land-use changes into 'high-value liquid capital' (Samaddar, 2015). Our interview with key informants suggests that the change in land-use in this area started in early 2000. The inflow of investments in the real estate project of Vedic Village opened the floodgate for rapid land conversion. The land price appreciated by almost three times after Vedic Village. Before Vedic Village, the land price was INR 25,000/Katha approximately (GBP 280/0.02 acre) which appreciated to 60,000/Katha (approximately GBP 670/0.02 acre) and finally the current rate is INR 200,000/Katha (approximately GBP 2220/0.02 acre). Vedic Village was developed as a high-end commercial (resort) and residential complex located next to the airport. This investment was followed by two more real estate projects Tapovan and Shantivan. Hence, there was a sudden influx of inflow of real estate capital by the large developers and multinational financial corporations in the area. Simultaneously, the internal land market of the area was dominated small developers and large landowners. Additionally, the micropolitics of the area was further complicated by interests of syndicates, two antagonistic lobbies of the ruling party. In this already volatile situation, when people came to know of the power grid proposal in the area, small developers, large landowners and one of the lobbies of the ruling party became anxious as the power grid has a potential for depreciation of the land value due to its environmental impact. Hence, when the farmers who were not willing to participate in the land acquisition process expressed their dissent, this group of 'hegemonic locals' (Dirlik, 1994) supported the unwilling farmer's resistance towards land acquisition. It is important to highlight here, that the 'hegemonic locals' are also not a homogenous group. It consists of the rural local body (Panchayet) head, affiliated to the same ruling party, which was in favour of the land acquisition and the ruling party (the state) was relying on him for forceful acquisition of the land. To unpack this complex micropolitics, the next section maps the chronology of events in Bhangar and discusses the main actors who were part of this conflict.

4.1. Chronology of events in Bhangar

The chronology of events in the anti-power grid movement of Bhangar enables the identification of the different stages and subsequent strategies mobilised by various actors. It also highlights the dynamism of conflict politics, in the case of Bhangar.

- 2013: The state government controversially acquired 13 acres of land with the help of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, a day before the new act Land Acquisition Bill, 2013, was passed in parliament. No stakeholder consultation was conducted before acquisition and no information was given to the landowners about the purpose of acquisition.
- 2015: Some landowners submitted a deputation to the local Member of Parliament (MP) against the acquisition
- 2016: The state provided partial compensation to some of the landowners. Some other landowners refused to take compensation as they voiced their dissent against the acquisition. The state relied on the local tyrant and, in collaboration with PGCI, started construction of boundary walls in the acquired land. Three villagers were arrested while protesting the construction. This was the initiation of unrest in the locality and PGCI stopped construction. Villagers got in touch with CPIML Red Star at the end of the year to mobilise resources for resistance. With the help of CPIML Red Star, the villagers submitted a deputation to the Block Development Officer.
- January–February 2017: The state deployed police in the area and during one of the protests two people died allegedly either by the police or by the goons of the local tyrant.

The local tyrant also mobilised his power to threaten and intimidate the villagers who were against the power grid construction project. CPIML Red Star organised villagers which was followed by the subsequent arrest of some of the villagers and leaders of CPIML Red Star.

- March–September 2017: The villagers, with support from CPIML Red Star, formed Jomi Jibika Bastutantra O Poribesh Rakkha Committee (Land, Job, Ecosystem and Environment Protection Committee, later referred as Jomi Committee). This committee became the grassroots organisation for mobilisation of resources for resistance against the power grid and the state. Micro level village committees were formed through this organisation. The Jomi Committee participated in the meetings with Power Grid Corporation and the state government which were unsuccessful as the government was unwilling to respond to the demands of the committee. Following this, three–four villages were declared as a 'state-free' autonomous zone. Opposition parties of the West Bengal state extended their support for the resistance movement. Thus, this movement scaled their claims for land justice up to the formal political system, consolidating conflict politics.
- September–December 2017: The local tyrants orchestrated further attacks on villagers and committee members. The state declared they would continue with the construction of the power grid. Villagers also declared their non-negotiable position to resist the power grid. A further arrest of political workers of the CPIML Red Star was conducted. The construction at the site stalled and the state deployed paramilitary forces to guard the perimeter of the project site.
- May 2018: Jomi Committee filed nine independent candidates for the Panchayat election, and finally, five of them won the elections at the lower tier seats of the elections. This also symbolised the dwindling political control of the local tyrant.
- June–July 2018: The leader of the movement got arrested on the grounds of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and was finally released on bail in July 2018.
- August 2018: The state administration arranged a meeting with the protesters for negotiations. Finally, the government agreed to increase the compensation amount, and the representatives of the protesters agreed on the construction of a power substation instead of a power grid. Some of the protesters and organisations associated with the movement interpreted this as a betrayal. However, the Jomi Committee considered this a success of their movement.
- September–November 2018: Developmental activities like road construction, identification of beneficiaries for government programmes, etc. started with the supervision of Jomi Committee.
- December 2018–January 2019: Further conflict and minor violence erupted. The construction work at the site was again stalled because of the resistance from the committee. Further negotiations with the state government officials happened and the situation became 'normal'.
- March 2019–end of 2019: For the upcoming parliamentary election of 2019, Jomi Committee filed nominations for three candidates in different constituencies. None of the candidates won in the 2019 election. Currently, the construction of power substation is continuing and developmental activities in the village are monitored by the Jomi Committee.

5. CONFLICT POLITICS STRATEGIES BY VARIOUS ACTORS

The Bhangar case represents a unique political field where various actors engage with each other in a complex way. This complexity cannot be defined through the binary logics of domination of the neoliberal state vs resistance by the protesters. This resistance counters the capitalist interest of this type of state. Simultaneously, due to their anxiety about land value depreciation in the area (an extension of capitalist interest), small developers subtly supported the protest. This reveals the paradoxical nature of accumulation of capital in a postcolonial context which faces its own internal conflict among various interest groups. The relationship between the civil and the political society in the Bhangar case cannot be fully understood by Chatterjee's (2011) theorisation of the political society. For Chatterjee (2011), the civil society is also always governed by the rule of law, a site for accumulation and an extension of state apparatus. However, in the Bhangar case, civil society supported the political society (the protesters) in mobilisation and the movement at the end was able to reach a broader political imagination of participatory democracy. In response to questions about the objective of the movement, the CPIML Red Star leader and a key person for the Bhangar movement Alok[2] states:

> We need to develop a collectiveness. The more people would try to control; there will be more conflicts with the state. That would gradually lead to more class struggles and mass movements which would gradually increase people's aspirations to participate in the state making process.' (Interview Transcript, 2018)

This statement highlights a broader perspective of the movement towards participatory democracy. This broader political imagination also shapes the strategies for practising conflict strategies which encompass the politics of autonomy, formal transactional engagements and negotiations, participation in electoral democracy, and mobilisation. Each of these strategies has a specific objective and creates artefacts and infrastructure for the movement. In what follows, we analyse them in more detail.

5.1. Strategy of autonomy

The strategy of autonomy can be defined as a process to occupy, reclaim and re-appropriate space as a means to social transformation (Vasudevan, 2015). As Vasudevan (2015) notes, the act of occupation creates an alternative habitus of common spatial fields to participate, produce and operationalise sentiments, ideas and values to achieve rights. The acts of occupation reconfigure space as an 'oeuvre' to maximise user value rather than exchange value (Vasudevan, 2015). In the Bhangar case, the politics of autonomy operates through the creation of a liberated zone. The protesters managed to create an autonomous zone consisting of six villages, free of state presence for over a year (Figure 2). After the massive police violence in February 2017 with the death of two protesters, the villagers resisted local tyrants with brickbats, catapults, wooden rods, etc. and finally declared six villages free of any state presence.

To describe this autonomous zone, the local Panchayat leader states, 'The police cannot enter inside those villages. As the police are not there, there is a complete lawlessness' (Interview Transcript, 2018).

The interview with the protesters reveals the creation of an enclosure as a political strategy was taken consciously to avoid further violence and provocation from the state. Jomi Committee leader Mohammad confirms:

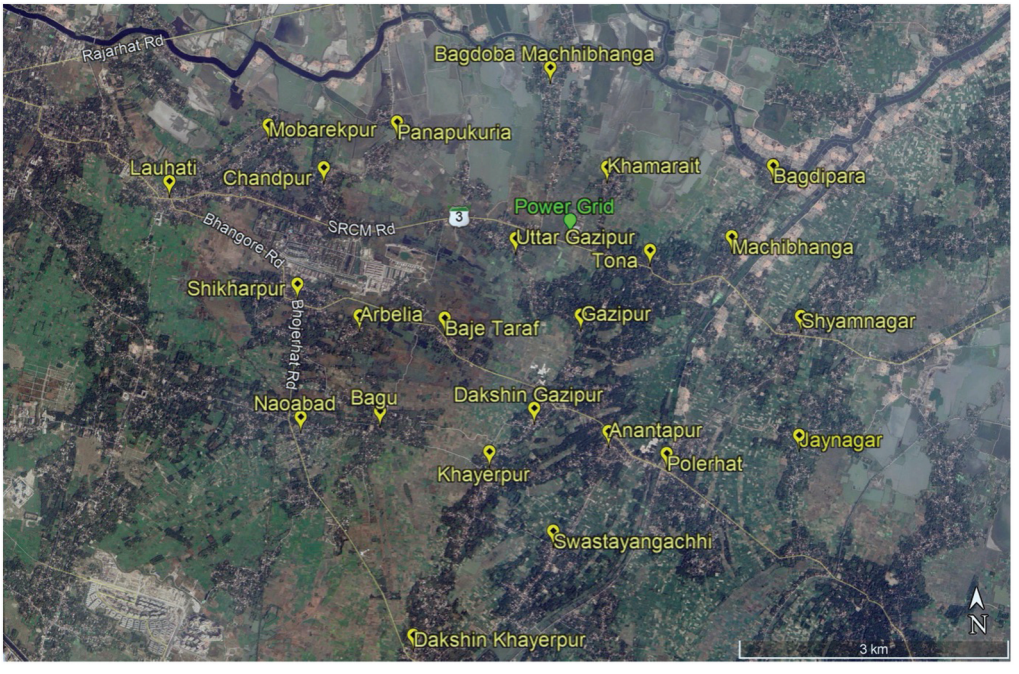

Figure 2. Villages involved in the movement.

> We fought against them with whatever we had. We did not allow those goons to enter in our area. We were scared. If we allow them to enter, they could kill us. (Interview Transcript, 2018)

In fact, this is a confirmation that the committee created the autonomous zone as a defence mechanism to avoid further violence.

5.2. Strategy of formal transactional

The formal transactional strategies are those engagements which are legal in nature from the interpretation by the state (Mahadevan & Ijlal, 2017). In Bhangar, this includes creating a pressure group through formal opposition political parties and subsequently pushing the issue for discussion in the state legislative assembly. The protesters also submitted formal deputation letters to the District Magistrate, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (PGCIL) and other administrative bodies of the state to voice their resistance against the proposed power grid.

These formal transactional strategies also included negotiations with the state officials. The negotiation process started after Alok, the leader, got arrested in June 2018 by the police. On the one hand, thousand people came on to the street to protest and on the other hand, there were discussions on negotiations to start the project. Finally, Jomi Committee agreed to sit in a meeting with the state government officials. The state government agreed to give due compensation to the farmers and the committee also agreed on not creating any more 'troubles'. Each side considered this as their victory, which was also reported in the newspapers (Figure 3). This series of events highlight that the political society engaged with the state beyond direct antagonism and negotiated their demands. That the state also agreed to some of the demands highlights how the state's actions go beyond the coercive mechanism and how the state managed to regain some forms of legitimacy and political capital through this negotiation process.

Figure 3. Creation of state free areas.

5.3. Strategies of participation in electoral politics

Grassroot activism in Bhangar also differs from various other similar grassroot movements in India against the state and capitalistic interest. In West Bengal, an important movement against land acquisition was the Nandigram movement in 2007 which started as a grassroot movement against the forceful acquisition of land by the then communist government (Bose, 2020; Patnaik, 2007; Sarkar & Chowdhury, 2009). The opposition party in the state of that time was Trinamool Congress (TMC) (the current ruling party) who joined the Nandigram protest with grassroot activists and hijacked the political capital from the movement and came to power by defeating the communist government in the next state election in 2011. Other similar forms of land-focused grassroot activism against capital accumulation in Orissa or Andhra Pradesh have managed to stall those megaprojects but failed to reach a broader political imagination through electoral politics (Dash & Samal, 2008; Smitha, 2018).

In the case of Bhangar, Jomi Committee not being a formal political party, participated in the electoral politics (in 2018) and managed to get some form of political representation in the lowest tier of the rural local body. Nineteen candidates from Jomi Committee filed nominations at various levels of the Panchayat, and finally, five candidates won at the Gram Panchayat level (the lowest tier of the three-tier *Panchayati Raj* system). As a reason for participating in the election the CPIML Red Star leader Alok mentions,

> Participation in the election is not a choice here, but it is a necessity which comes with the movement … If people who are against this movement have people's mandate, then they can curb people's movement. If the panchayats stay with them, they won't bother for anything. For them, power is a significant matter. The idea that they can be thrown out can be very painful to the state. This would make them more insecure and apathetic. The more their footings among people will reduce, the more they would be interested in compromising. Otherwise, they would be ferocious and would try to attack. They will face problems for both cases. We would benefit from them. (Interview Transcript, 2018)

Hence, it was clear that participation in the electoral politics was a strategic choice for the political society for better power in the negotiation process. This political representation was also very important to shift the power from the local tyrant. Due to the failure in political mobilisation by the local tyrant, the ruling party gradually lost political control in the area. In

the next State Assembly Election of 2021, though TMC managed to keep their dominance in the state politics (winning 211 out of 294 seats), they lost the Bhangar constituency which was won by a newly formed political party called Indian Secular Front (ISF). This is because of the Jomi Committee's overwhelming support for the ISF candidate. Hence, the Bhangar movement also shows how political society has managed to create a bottom-up participatory democracy in the region through their mobilisation.

5.4. Strategy of mobilisation of civil society

As discussed earlier, the civil society in Bhangar supported the grassroot activism and countered the state. By civil society, here we mean artists, doctors, singers and academics from Kolkata. They were actively involved in all phases of the movement in various activities. One of the prominent roles of the civil society was to organise demonstrations at various parts of Kolkata and hence bringing the Bhangar movement to the broader political imaginations (Figure 4). Some of the local university professors were also involved in a separate environmental assessment of the project. They also provided scientific information from academic works across the world regarding the emission of poisonous gas from the power grid. This played an important role in the movement as the state was unable to nullify the claims of the protesters as 'non-scientific'. Involvement and subsequent imprisonment (Figure 4R) of civil society members gave heightened prominence to the movement. Simultaneously, this involvement of the civil society also demonstrates the circulation of resistance infrastructure from the

Figure 4. Newspaper coverage of negotiations.

peri-urban area of Bhangar to the heart of Kolkata (Figure 5 shows the demonstration in central Kolkata). Table 1 shows different stages of conflict politics that took place in the Bhangar anti-powergrid movement.

Figure 5. Civil society support for the Bhangar movement.

Table 1. Stages of conflict politics and associated manifestations.

Stage	Vocabularies	Reasons	Manifestations
Initial stage: Late 2016	Anti-power grid, Anti land grabbing	Forceful land acquisition, Dominance of the local tyrants and lack of public consultation for the land acquisition process	Mobilisation, creation of *Jomi Jibika Bastutantra O Poribesh Rakkha Committee* Initiation of protest
Early 2017	Anti- Karimul (local tyrant)	Violence and domination	Organised resistance, shifting camps from Trinamool Congress (TMC) to *Jomi* Committee
Mid 2017	Discourse of development	Unleashing democratic aspirations among people through movement	Increased intensity of the contestation, Alliance with opposition parties
Before the Panchayat election Mid 2018	Anti TMC, Anti Mamata (current Chief Minister)	Otherness from the state, intensified violence, arrest of the protesters	Contesting election
After the Panchayat election Mid 2018- till now	Discourse of development	Part of the Panchayat, the release of arrested protesters	Reduced intensity of the movement

6. COUNTER CONFLICT POLITICS STRATEGIES BY THE NEOLIBERAL STATE

The neoliberal state in this conflictual postcolonial context operationalised counter strategies through various networks of power which included the administrative body, Panchayat, local tyrants and the police force. Initially, the power grid project was proposed in the Rajarhat area. Such neoliberal projects take the form of infrastructural investments which mainly aim to enable free market dynamics. However, they are usually controversial because of their probable human and ecological impact and because of the land price depreciation in the nearby areas of the power grid. The power grid project was shifted from the Rajarhat area, a nearby location with high land values, because of a strong push from the local real estate lobby. The selection of Bhangar as a site was predominantly dictated by the logic of the ruling party Trinamool Congress's (TMC) strong grassroots mobilisation capacity in that area. Simultaneously, the ruling party also underestimated the conflicts among various factions of the party and the people's growing dissatisfaction with the local tyrant. The state's counter strategies to conflict politics can be categorised in three forms: discipline and domination; utilising administrative institutions; and negotiations. In what follows, we analyse these counterstrategies of the local neoliberal state in more detail.

6.1. Counterstrategy of discipline and domination

At the initial phase, the movement was strengthened because of the sabotage effort within the party against the local tyrant. Instead of a successful mobilisation, there was counter mobilisation which was prominent when grassroots political workers of TMC joined the protester's group. However, it was never a rebellious act by the grassroots workers as it happened with the backing of a group of TMC leaders to control the local tyrants. This also came up repeatedly in the interview with the local tyrant Hafiz:

> At this moment the government has no say. And I am a person who is part of the government, so I couldn't say a single word against the government. Why government is not proactive to curtail this don't ask me that. I will not tell you anything about that … … … … …. No, actually we have different lobbies. So, don't know who is asking for what purpose. Then it will be used against us. (Interview Transcript, 2018)

6.2. Counterstrategy of utilising administrative institutions

The state also exercised its administrative power through coercive forces by utilising police, rural local body institutions and paramilitary forces. Firstly, the local police station was used for filing cases against the protesters for damaging public properties, obstruction in public works, etc. They also utilised the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 for the arrest of the protest leaders. At least 20 people were arrested and jailed for days to a couple of months, including the leadership. There was also constant surveillance of the leadership through the tracking of mobile towers.

Secondly, Panchayati institutions stopped any land registration or mutation process in the area. Any service from the Panchayat, like issuing income/caste certificates was made inaccessible to the villagers from the involved villages. Major developmental works like the construction of roads and distribution of programme benefits were curtailed in the involved villages.

Thirdly, paramilitary forces were installed to protect the power grid perimeter, and for intimidation, they used to march through the villages every morning and evening as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Paramilitary forces guarding the perimeter.

6.3. Counterstrategy of negotiations

Finally, after the Panchayat election, the state started negotiations with the protesters. This happened as the ruling party observed a massive drop of votes favourable to them. Both the parties (the state and Jomi Committee) signed an agreement paper of negotiations (CPIML Red Star, 2018). The agreement provides that the government will revise the scheme and instead of a power grid they will construct a power substation by following the Indian Electricity Act. The government also agreed to start construction of a gas insulated substation after resolving a pending case in the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The Jomi Committee agreed to cooperate with the government if they followed the agreement and managed to include their participation in the sub-committee for the implementation of the project. The government also agreed to provide welfare and developmental schemes in that area focusing on skill development training, training for small assistance, supplying useful kits for solid waste management, development of women led self-help groups (SHGs), grants for education, health, business, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, etc., construction of local roads, restoration of the river, road electrification, etc. It was also mutually agreed that all legal cases against the Jomi Committee members will be withdrawn subject to the court's approval. However, the police can identify and prosecute the agitators and their sympathisers according to the law (highlighted in Table 2).

The strategies and counterstrategies of conflict politics in the case of Bhangar demonstrate two things. Firstly, the complex relationships with the state and its apparatus and also with the civil society and political society which is represented through various forms (antagonism, negotiations, dominance and counter-hegemonic). Secondly, the dynamic nature of the movement, where the subversion of political power happens continuously. A stronger counter-hegemonic force is often able to confront state domination and violence by the subaltern subjects. Simultaneously, the subaltern subjects also negotiate with the state at a certain historical point. Hence, the Bhangar case represents a seesaw power struggle situation. As discussed earlier in Section 5.3, at the end the ruling party (state) gradually lost their political

Table 2. The state's responses.

Index	Title		
Phase	**Reasons**	**Mechanisms**	**Response by Villagers**
Phase 1: end of 2015- Early 2016	Intimidation, forceful acquisition, political domination	Operationalised through local tyrant, sporadic violence	Initiation of the movement
Phase 2: Early 2016-mid-2017	Loosing partial political control	Intensified violence, police firing, massive arrest, administratively stopping land mutation process	Intensified movement, Alliance with opposition parties
Phase 3: Mid-2017-Mid-2018	Complete loss of political control within the liberated zone	Spreading rumour of outsideness and Naxal link, Verbal threats, sporadic violence, sporadic arrests	Contestation in election
Phase 4: Mid 2018 to current	Partial loss in election	Negotiation with *Jomi Jibika Bastutantra O Poribesh Rakkha Committee*, the arrest of the local tyrant	Partial win in election, acceptance of government's compensation 'package'

capital in the area due to this movement and lost that constituency in the State Assembly election of 2021.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. Power, networks and actors

In the case of Bhangar, the network is much more complex because of the involvement of several actors. Here, initially, the local neoliberal state acted as a hegemonic entity through political domination, forceful acquisition and violence. However, the state also needed to retrograde after an intensified countermovement by the villagers. The villagers even declared some local areas as state free zones. The opposition parties (CPIM and Congress) took this opportunity to amplify their opposition against the ruling party TMC and made an ally with the Jomi Committee. This was also capitalised on by the Jomi Committee to form a broader solidarity network. The police, local tyrant and rural local body institution acted together as an apparatus of the local state machinery and maintained a hegemonic relation with civil society. The role of land brokers was also very complex. Though they were supportive of the movement, initially they had been involved in the capital accumulation process through land-use change. Their support for the movement is also based on the logic of capital accumulation. As they were sceptical about the impact of the electric power grid in diminishing land price, they wanted to shift the power grid from their region. At the grassroots level, the ruling party cadres were divided between the state's side and Jomi Committee's side. The lobby against the local tyrant predominantly joined the movement to overthrow him, whereas his loyal group stayed with him. Some of the ruling party cadres also joined the movement in fear of losing their livelihood. Though initially Jomi Committee and the state shared an antagonistic relationship, finally they agreed on a mutual negotiation strategy. This complex network of power among different actors are shown in Figure 7 below.

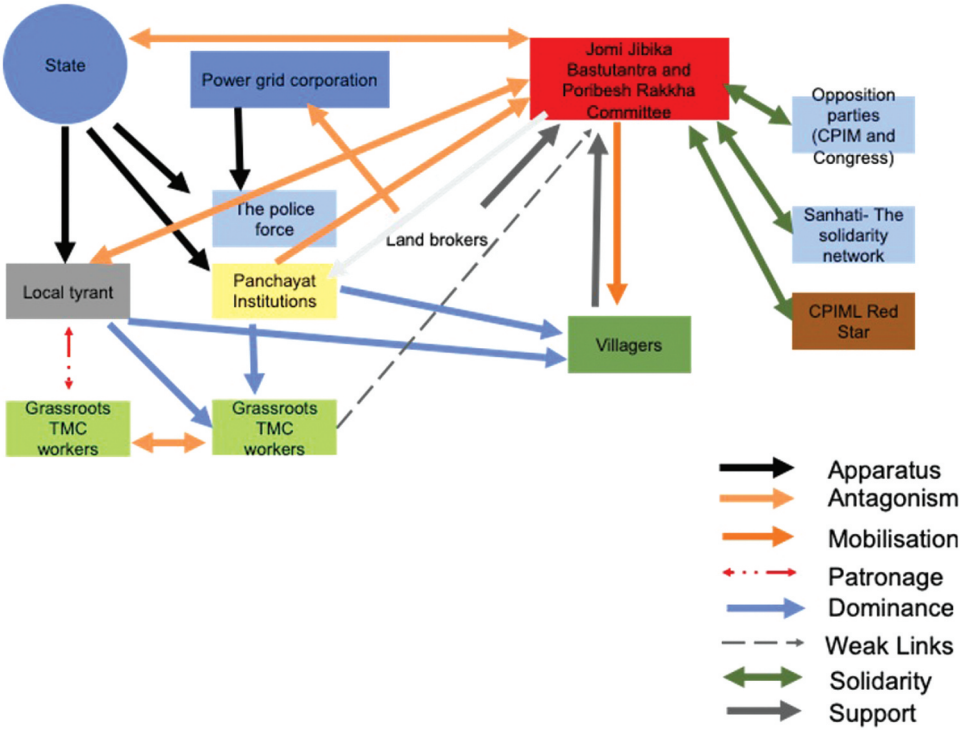

Figure 7. Network, power and actors.

7.2. Outcome of conflict politics in Bhangar

The anti-power grid movement in Bhangar is essential for understanding conflict politics of the local neoliberal state for various reasons. Firstly, it creates a discursive political field which threatens the state through narratives of autonomous and participatory strategies. Instead of being driven primarily by ideology, the autonomous and participatory strategies adopted what Spivak (2012) called 'strategic essentialism'. Irrespective of the difference of conflicting class interest or political identity, people engaged in essentialising common interest, which in this case was against the developmental project of the power grid that had complete disregard for the people and their needs in relation to land (Spivak, 2012). This autonomous and participatory politics finally enabled the state to include Jomi Committee in the decision-making process.

Secondly, the movement was also innovative in the way that Jomi Committee used technology in their contestation practices. At the same time, they were fully aware of how technology was also used by the state to counter the movement through the tracking of mobile towers. However, that did not stop them using social media and WhatsApp for the purpose of dissemination, mobilisation, solidarity and publicity. The leadership strategically trained the grassroots people to use, manage and capitalise on the use of technology for the purpose of resistance.

Finally, there was a conscious effort to build a sense of ownership and cohesion among the civil society activists. In one interview, they said it was an experiment to unleash people's highest democratic aspirations through building a sense of ownership and cohesion. This sense of ownership was also translated into the cultural consciousness among civil society activists. Numerous songs, poems, slogans and posters were written and designed by these activists.

These cultural artefacts were counterhegemonic. They helped the movement to catch a broader political imagination and enabled better positioning. This broader political imagination included contesting the rural local body election and finally managed to win at an election and send three representatives to the rural body. In 2021, this also resulted in the ruling party losing that constituency in the State Assembly election.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to do three things: firstly, to show the ambiguous nature of the neoliberal state in the postcolonial context. This is mainly in terms of capital accumulation and simultaneously in terms of a discourse of welfare through developmental projects like power grid construction. Bhangar, being a peri-urban area, represents a high-velocity circulation zone for capital. Numerous investments in the form of residential development, proposed special economic zone (SEZ) and conversion of agricultural land use for non-agricultural purposes highlight how capital is hypermobile in Bhangar. This hypermobility of capital is directly promoted by the local neoliberal state where tyrants, affiliated with the ruling party, got involved in the land transactions by coercive means. However, these speculative logics were also countered by small developers and large landowners to protect their own capitalist interest of land value appreciation.

Secondly, this paper has sought to use empirical evidence of conflict politics to demonstrate how the politics of developmentalism is multi-layered and goes beyond the orthodox binary formulation of dominance vs resistance. The state's direct involvement in the accumulation process propelled civil society to practice strategies directed against the state. This also led to the creation of an autonomous state free zone in the villages. Simultaneously, the participation in the rural local body election by the civil society is also an attempt to unsettle the hegemonic appropriation of power by the state. After maintaining an antagonistic relationship with the state for over two years, finally, when the state agreed to rehabilitate the dispossessed through compensations, implementing developmental programmes, the political society engaged in collective bargaining. This shows the dynamism of the relationships that people at the margins maintain with the local state. The Bhangar movement managed to create a discursive political field which was developed through essentialising common interests. Over time, the narrative of the movement was also changed to address several developmental agendas and an attempt to create radical democracy. Here radical democracy signifies achieving common goals through consensus building, a set of dynamic and an iterative process that act as signifiers for postcolonial subjects (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Finally, the paper has sought to offer a framework within which to understand how the politics of developmentalism operates through the networked mobilisation of power. Here, power is a fluid medium that can be understood through social interactions which stabilise networks of social relations (Allen, 2003, 2009). Allen (2009) argues that power is mobilised through networks of human interactions which subsequently mobilises resources. Political society does not lie at the bottom of the network; rather, it counters the state from a similar position. In the Bhangar movement, the civil society is not a mere subject of domination by the local neoliberal state. Rather, it challenges this state by using various practices of conflict politics. The location of civil society higher in the network is possible through its continuous mobilisation of resources, creating a broader solidarity network as a pressure group and by inducting representatives in the rural local body. These enable them to bargain collectively and strategically. This has also helped them to create a state-free autonomous zone for over a year. The networked mobilisation of power helps in two things. Firstly, it helps the civil society to mobilise resources collectively and effectively for conflict politics. Following Allen (2009), this networked mobilisation of power also enables them to change socio-spatial relations. Secondly, these networks are used by the local neoliberal state both to control and discipline civil society and to simultaneously seek validation for its quasi-

welfare approach towards the people at the margins. This validation helps them in vote bank politics and hence for their political survival.

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NOTES

1. Local tyrants who mainly operate within the construction sector as an extortion racket. Often, developers are bound to buy construction materials from syndicates otherwise their construction projects would be stalled.
2. Only pseudonyms have been used for all respondents.

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