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Mining, Resistance and Livelihood in Rural Bangladesh

Md Rashedul Alam, *The University of Western Ontario*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Anthropology

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**MINING, RESISTANCE AND LIVELIHOOD IN RURAL
BANGLADESH**

Monograph

by

Md Rashedul Alam

Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MA
(Master of Arts)

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

In 2006, over fifty thousand people in the Phulbari Sub-District of Bangladesh mobilized against an open-pit coal mining-project that posed serious environmental and social risks. The state authorities negotiated with the protesters intensively over four days to reach an agreement. However, the state failed to fulfill the agreement, and the protest movement continued. The agrarian communities successfully halted the mining project for the last nine years. My research aims to understand how the protesters resisted this project. My objectives have been to explore the practices of a grassroots movement, attendant transformations in the socio-political landscape and role of the state in a place of uprising. In addition to the *Bangalee* villagers, two types of stakeholders have played crucial roles in the movement: the indigenous *Santals* and the *migrants*. I have used an ethnographic approach to establish an account of the protests as viewed by rural villagers. My hope is that this research has the potential to illuminate how natural resources are contested sources of livelihood and identity and how the quest for capitalist modernity through revenue-based economic growth may threaten destruction of ecosystems, human rights violations and social injustice.

Keywords: Bangladesh, grassroots resistance, Phulbari Movement, protests, Asia Energy, Santal, open-pit coal mining, state, migrants, displacement.

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Acronyms

AE	Asia Energy
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ARCO	Atlantic Richfield Company
BAL	Bangladesh Awami League
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BHP	Broken Hill Property
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BPDB	Bangladesh Power Development Board
CEGIS	Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CJS	Chatro Jubo Shomabesh
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
FB	Facebook
GCM	Global Coal Management
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
IAP	International Accountability Project
JKKMS	Jatiyo Krishok Khet Mojur Somiti
kgoe	kilogram oil equivalent
LDC	Least Developed Country
MP	Member of Parliament
MW	Megawatt
NCBD	National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Mineral Resources Power and Ports
NGO	Non-government organization
OPIP	Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza
PNCBD	Phulbari Unit, NCBD
PRC	Phulbari Roksha Committee
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
Sq. km.	Square kilometers
SUPRO	Sushasoner Jonny Procharavizan

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Chapter 1 Introducing the Story

আমার যা যা দরকার, তার সবই আমি নিজেই উৎপাদন করতে পারি। তাই বেঁচে থাকার জন্য আমার কোন সরকারের দরকার নেই।

I produce everything I need. I can survive without the government.

- An ordinary village protester claimed that he is dependent on his land for survival not on any government.

On a regular day, after daylong farming activities, Ramendu Soren (a 62-year old Santal¹ peasant) would have his afternoon tea with friends and neighbours at an adjacent tea stall and discuss politics, crops, droughts, or movies. However, this daily routine was changed by the end of 2005. A different topic was being discussed throughout the village. News came that their village was sitting on a very precious rock and a company was coming to grab it. They had to leave their houses to let the company dig their lands. Suddenly he revisited his ancestors' nomadic lives and struggles against rough environment or colonial power. This time, however, his struggle was against a sovereign government whom he selected by voting. He talked with his friend Jahir Hussain from a neighbouring village, who migrated to this village four decades ago when his previous village had been washed away by the river. Jahir also heard the same news and could not predict what would happen if he had to migrate again for the third time in his life.

Dazed and confused, their friends in town were arguing that the company or government could not evict them from their ancestors' lands for a fixed amount of money in exchange for land. Very soon, Ramendu and Jahir met some *new* people in their village, accompanied by their friends from town. They said that they read and taught at universities, worked at offices in Dhaka and had connections with newspapers. They said this precious rock was their resource but the government wanted to

¹ One of the largest indigenous groups of Bangladesh. Skrefsrud (1887) documented that the name Santal might come from the word 'Saontar' since the ancestors of Santals used to live in Saont (now Silda) of Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal (cited in Ali 2008:28). Scattered all over India, the Santals of Bangladesh migrated to Barind Tract (mostly the Northern parts) of the country along with other indigenous groups (e.g. Mundas, Oraons and Mahalis of Bihar) at the very beginning of 19th century (Ali 2008:36, 40).

transfer its ownership to a foreign company who would destroy their land, water, food, and crops to dig for that rock. In exchanges of land, only those people who had *sorkari* (government approved) land documents would gain monetary compensation.

Now the whole story became clear to Ramendu and Jahir. They knew that even though they had ancestral rights to their lands, without the *sorkari* documents they would get nothing in return for their lands. The new people offered their help in stopping this project. Ramendu, Jahir and their friends started to visit other villages to let people know about this destructive plan and reached a consensus that they would protect their lands at all costs. Finally, the day came. Their friends from town invited them to the company's local office in Phulbari town. However, what they did not expect at all was that government people were waiting in town to defend the company office. But Ramendu, Jahir and their friends were so desperate that the government could not deter them – even after the government shot some of their fellow protesters.

Ramendu and Jahir were not alone

The story of Ramendu and Jahir is nine years old. Since then, the company and government have been trying to stop these villagers or their friends from town or Dhaka who opposed the mining project. However, Ramendu and Jahir did not know that they were not alone in the world among others who were also struggling for the right to their land and natural resources against the alliance of state and corporations. The neighbouring state of India over the last fifty years displaced around sixty million people to implement most of its the coal mining projects (Fernandes and Bharali 2014:184-185). In the Ecuadorian Amazon indigenous people have been struggling against one of the largest oil corporations in the world, ARCO, to halt the company's divisive and dangerous practices turning their land into a 200,000-hectare oil block (Sawyer 2004:4). In South Africa, the Platreef mine project in Limpopo province has been threatening local inhabitants with the loss of farmlands, pensions, and cemetery plots if they refuse to co-operate with the mine (York 2015). In Turkey, the Bergama communities have been fighting against the Eurogold project to save their means of subsistence, their local environment, their land, air and water, as well as the local fauna and flora (Çoban 2004:442). In Papua New Guinea, large-scale mining has reshaped the society with immigration, alcoholism, community conflict and violence, gambling, and materialism. (Banks, et al.

2013:490). These are some examples of people's struggles over natural resources being grabbed by multinational corporations with the help of the host governments.

A double-edged sword

The politics of resource extraction is not only reshaping the earth's physical landscape, it is also creating new 'resource frontiers' throughout the world: corporate giants all over the world have been grabbing natural resources from their local users. They have succeeded in disengaging nature from its previous ecologies by remaking it as entrepreneurial raw material (Tsing 2003:5100). Such modifications have two interrelated impacts. First, the quest for modernity on resource frontiers threatens community aspirations for social and environmental justice (Tsing 2005:205). At the same time, the processes of globalization open the door for communities to mobilize opposition against its destructive aspects. The mobilizations claim human rights, property rights, or indigenous rights from the perspective of communities' historical and present lives (Escobar 2008:6). This mobilization cannot be ignored any more because it has shown its effectiveness in facing globalization.

My research

My research tells the story of the struggle of Ramendu, Jahir and their thousands of friends, kin and neighbours against an open-pit coalmine project in Phulbari of Northern Bangladesh. The movement originally started against a plan to acquire almost sixty sq. km. of mostly farming and settlement land for mining activities, threatening to displace more than one hundred thousand people (Gain 2007:4). The project posed risks for local agriculture, land, water, air, the indigenous community and overall, the local livelihood and environment. Resistance by local agrarian communities with the support of a group of national activists has successfully halted the mining project for the past nine years. Their practices, modifications and successes, as well as the strategies of the state and the company in opposing them, are at the core of this thesis.

A year, a motivation and some outlaws

My feelings and interests concerning Ramendu or Jahir's life started in 2006. This year is special in the history of post-independent Bangladesh. Prior to the Phulbari Movement, the most noteworthy movements in Bangladesh had been those of independence first from the Britain (in 1947) and then

Pakistan (in 1971). However, in 2006 different kinds of struggles emerged. New struggles were for electricity as a civil right, struggles for proper wages from the factory owners, and struggles to protect lands from being grabbed by an international coal company. Anu Muhammad², a key voice of the Phulbari Movement, points out that the neoliberal³ strategy of the government has been allowing multinational corporations' predatory gaze on the natural and human resources of the country, but he also says that host communities are becoming conscious about their rights. Despite the strong opposition and repression of the local MP (Member of Parliament), grassroots people in Phulbari continued their movement to secure basic human rights (Muhammad 2007:7-8).

In 2006, I was an undergraduate student in Dhaka studying Bedouin women's resistance in Egypt (Abu-Lughod 1990), peasants' struggles in Malaysia (Scott 1985) and the impacts of revolutionary events of the 1960s (e.g. Martin Luther King, the Prague Spring, hippies in Haight-Ashbury, students riots in Paris and so on) on social science as a discipline (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001:111). All these struggles pointed to the power and awakening of socio-politically marginal people against dominant groups. In those days, before I thought about a degree in anthropology, I was much influenced by the slogans of my fellow students at the University of Dhaka, demanding the rights to land for a rural community in the sub-district of Phulbari in Northern Bangladesh. It was late 2006, when nation-wide attention started to focus on widespread demonstrations against plans to develop an open-pit coalmine in inland Phulbari. An important part of this protest was that thousands of rural villagers were mobilized to stop the project. This was the first time that rural people played such a massive role in the history of grassroots resistance in Bangladesh. It led to my interest ever since to undertake this research project.

There were also academic motivations. For more than three decades, anthropologists have been debating the ethical and epistemological foundations of the discipline. Some believe that *objective*

² He teaches economics and anthropology at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh. In 2006, he signed the Phulbari Agreement with government representatives on behalf of the protesters. Besides the Phulbari Movement, he along with his fellow activists have been protesting different development projects throughout the country involving multinational corporations and concerns over socio-environmental threats for the host communities. He is an influential activist in Bangladesh and the key voice of the Phulbari Movement, nationally and internationally.

³ "In popular discourses, *neoliberalism* ... represents unregulated financial flows that menaced national currencies and living conditions" (Ong 2006:1).

anthropology has been mystifying the hegemonic power relations and serving the interest of the oppressors. A *critical* anthropology, instead, was proposed by them to change the world and end the oppressions (see D'Andrade 1995 and Scheper-Hughes 1995). Nancy Scheper-Hughes advocates a *moral* anthropology and believes that –

All variants of modern critical theory work at the essential task of stripping away the surface forms of reality in order to expose concealed and buried truths. Their aim, then, is to “speak truth” to power and domination, both in individuals and submerged social groups or classes (Scheper-Hughes 1992:229; cited in D'Andrade 1995:400).

Such calls to transform anthropology have grown in prominence in anthropological works where oppression has been unveiled in various parts of the world. Certainly, this call to action was not only confined to anthropology. Thomas Rudel and his colleagues mention, “In the past 15 years, sociologists have begun to theorize about the circumstances in which the excluded and unorganized can influence agencies and corporations through their own local organizations and mobilization as well as with the support of intermediaries” (Rudel, et al. 2011:228).

The boom in mineral prices in the 1970s and 1980s led to enormous impacts on greenfield areas, especially in untapped Asia-Pacific regions mostly inhabited by indigenous communities (Ballard and Banks 2003:287-288). Aggressive neoliberal strategies left permanent marks on the social, political, economic, ecological, and cultural structures of the places that owned raw materials (Escobar 2008:4). Accordingly, indigenous communities got involved with the larger politics of state and business corporations and anthropologists started to take political ecology, globalization, indigenous rights, social movements or resistance as areas of research. In this thesis, I am carrying on the legacy of anthropologists who have been documenting the commoditization of natural resources and struggles of host communities to protect it (e.g. Tsing 2005, Scott 2009, Sawyer 2004 or Golub 2014).

A perilous project and an awakening in Phulbari

As elsewhere in South Asia, Bangladesh is suffering from a chronic energy crisis. Currently, the vast majority of the rural population is out of the reach of commercial energy. These people are mostly dependent on non-commercial biomass like agricultural residues, cow dung, fuel wood, leaves, and

thatch for energy purposes (Imam 2013:1, 3). Recent consumption figures indicate that natural gas is the source of more than 70% of commercial energy and this dependency on natural gas is a significant component of this energy crisis because the country has been experiencing a gas shortage since the beginning of 2008 due to excessive consumption with no new exploration (Hossain 2013:26-27). At this point, the development of untapped coal reserves had been seen as the key means to overcome this energy crisis.

So far, there are five coal basins discovered in Bangladesh (Table 1). Among these five coal basins, exploration has been going on only in the Barapukuria coalfield (Imam 2013:16). The discovery of the Phulbari coalfield with 570 million tonnes of coal reserve gained special attention from the government as a potential contributor to solving the country's energy crisis. Local perceptions are that the government targeted this location because this area had many lands owned by the Forest Department, currently inhabited by a group of migrants (more about the migrants on page 39) who had been affected by riverbank erosion. To acquire land in this area, the government would not have to pay a large amount of compensation since a government institution owned the land where the migrants were living.

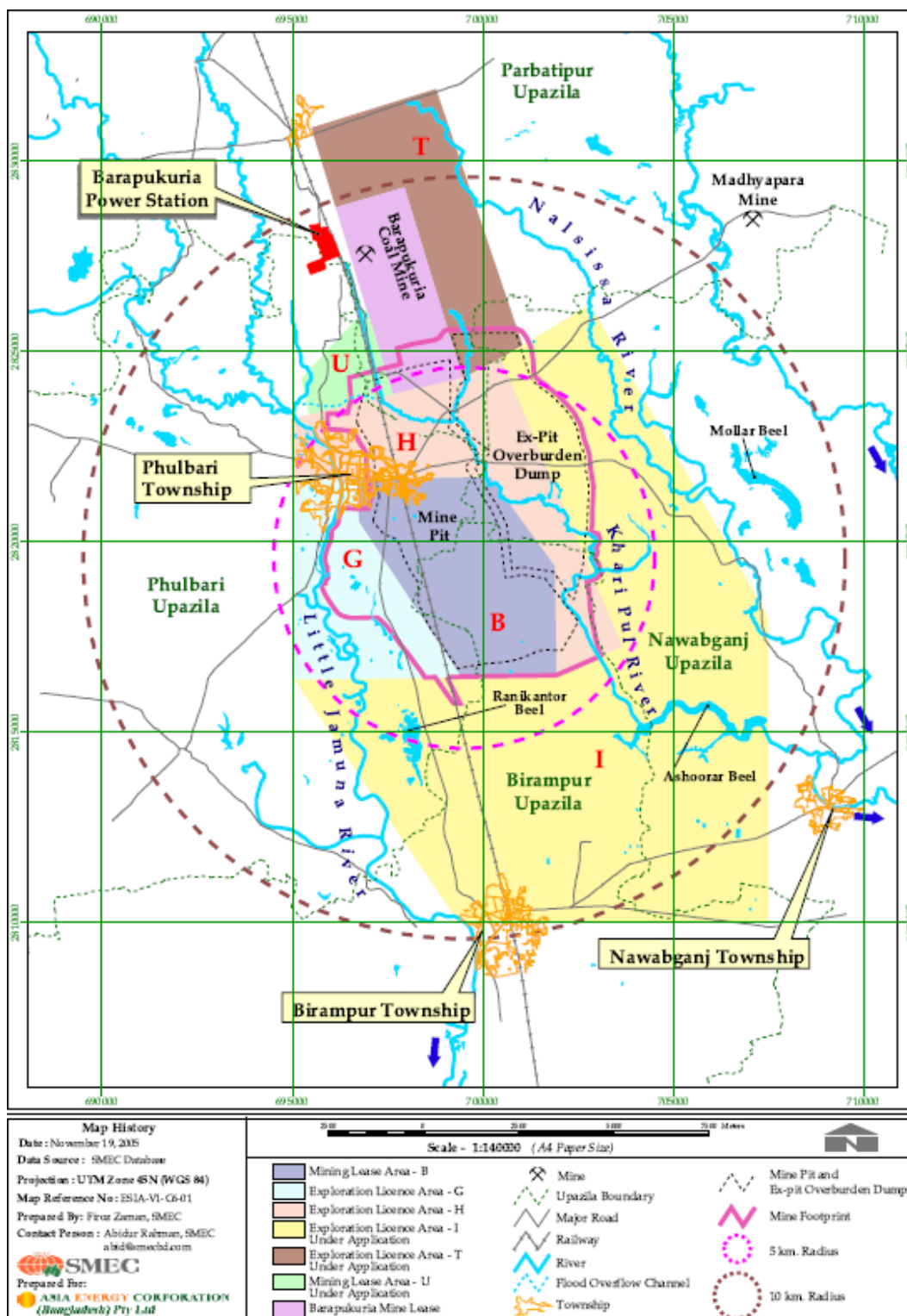
The discovery

The Australian company BHP explored and discovered Phulbari coalfield in Dinajpur district (Map 1). The exploration was carried out from 1994 to 1997 and eventually the coalfield was discovered in 1997 (Imam 2013:13). BHP wanted to deploy open-cut mining in Phulbari but soon they realized that such mining methods in a flood-prone deltaic region with heavy monsoon rainfall might cause environmental, social, geological and engineering difficulties (Islam 2008). Eventually, BHP stopped the mining operation within three years of initial exploration and the license was transferred to the British-based Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pty Ltd (in short Asia Energy) in 1998 (Pegu 2010:2).

Coal Field	Mineable Depth	Discovery
Jamalganj	640m	1962
Barapukuria	120-500m	1985
Khalashpir	250-480m	1989
Dighipara	328-407m	1995
Phulbari	150-240m	1997

Source: Imam 2013:13

Table 1: Five coalfields in Bangladesh



Map 1: Planning of coal operation in Phulbari coalfield

Source: Asia Energy 2006a:2

According to the Environmental & Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of Asia Energy, Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pty Ltd is a fully owned subsidiary of Asia Energy Corporation Pty Ltd (Asia Energy 2006b:2). The report also mentions, “Asia Energy PLC (incorporated in England and Wales in September 2003) owns all issued share capital of Asia Energy Corporation Pty Ltd” (Asia Energy 2006b:2). Facing 2006’s mass resistance and under severe criticism, Asia Energy adopted a new name Global Coal Management PLC (GCM) in early 2007; however, according to the contract and in popular media, the name of the Bangladesh subsidiary of the company remained the same Asia Energy (Gain 2007:3). In this thesis, from now on, I will use Asia Energy as the name of ‘the company’ involved in the Phulbari coalmine project.

A perilous project

In 2012, a report published by the World Bank mentioned (cited in Imam 2013:2) that in 2009 the per capita energy consumption in Bangladesh was 201 kgoe (kilogram oil equivalent). This rate was extremely poor compared to other countries of Asia (e.g. 585 kgoe in India or 2391 kgoe in Malaysia). The same scenario also existed in per capita electricity consumption. Experts believe that energy consumption has a direct correlation with the GNI (Gross National Income). According to the World Bank, to be a LDC (Least Developed Country) a country must possess more than \$1000 per capita GNI (cited in Imam 2013:2). To reach this goal, the country needs to accelerate its per capita energy use of 2010 three times. The challenge becomes harder when the current government mentions a promise of \$2000 by 2021 in its political mandate “Vision 2021”. It has been a long time since new reserves were discovered, and the country has been in an acute energy crisis in recent years (Imam 2013:3, 9, 22).

Different governments over the years have been trying to improve the energy situation by using untapped coal reserves, and the Phulbari mining project was such an endeavor. However, the question is whether the project is able to solve the energy crisis or it solely targeted coal exports. In terms of electricity production, the website of the company mentions, “at full production, coal mined at Phulbari could support generating capacity of 4,800MW” (GCM Resources 2015a). This sounds supportive to the existing production scenario of the Bangladesh Power Development Board, as its peak production was 7549 MW on 3rd June 2015, but BPDB’s forecast shows that within five years the peak demand of electricity would be 17,304 MW and in 2030 it will increase to 33,708 MW (BPDB 2011). From this perspective, the Phulbari mining project could be important in

terms of energy supply in the beginning of its life cycle, but much less so in the concluding years. This raises the question of whether the project targets a national energy solution or merely revenues since Asia Energy's ESIA emphasizes coal production and its trade nationally and internationally (Asia Energy 2006b:2).

Therefore, leaving the question of energy production aside, it seems evident that the government prioritized revenues from this project. The government of Bangladesh expected a profit of US\$21 billion over the 30 years of the mine's lifetime (Gain 2007:4). The government, however, ignored several risks behind this monetary expectation. The company's draft Resettlement Plan mentioned only 49,487 people as affected persons, while an Expert Committee Report (ECR) commissioned by the government calculated that up to 129,417 people would be affected directly, and that indirect impacts might reach to over 220,000 people (Kalafut 2008:10). This figure includes the displacement or impoverishment of 50,000 indigenous Santal people (Hoshour 2012:3). In addition, 80% of the acquired land was the most fertile agricultural land in the country (Kalafut 2008:10).

In terms of environmental impacts, open-pit mining methods needed the entire coalfield area to be completely drained, which could result in desertification in the area. This mining method also needs to remove the topsoil, which would destroy the land for agriculture. Other potential adverse impacts were water, air and noise pollution from mining activities (Gain 2007:5-6). The adjacent Barapukuria coalmine project already created problems in terms of its environmental and social impacts. A group of Bangladeshi scientists concluded that –

The coal of Barapukuria is a good quality coal but the mining processes deteriorate the surrounding environment including air, water and soil especially agricultural fields. The polluted air of coal mining area can cause of high toxic of acid rain. The acidic pH may limit the growth of plants even death. The chemical properties of surrounding soil of coal mine, such as concentration of Ca, Mg, Pb, Fe, Cu, Zn etc is greatly increased by the mixing of coal water and greatly impacts on the farmer's field soil. These heavy metal contaminated soil may also halt the flora and fauna of the surrounding environment. In addition, the local people have experienced less production of common crops in the study area (Harun-Or-Rashid, et. al. 2014:272).

The awakening in 2006

On 26th August of 2006, more than fifty thousand people including farmers, teachers, students, indigenous people, politicians, gathered in Phulbari to urge Asia Energy to leave their land and stop all mining activities. It was a pre-declared and preplanned *gherao*⁴ of Asia Energy's office. The plan was not to let the company officials go anywhere outside the office until they comply with the protesters' demands. However, the government forces fired on the protesters, killing three people and injuring more than two hundred (Gain 2007:2). This bloodshed fuelled the whole protest and the protesters shut down the entire area. At that time, the government negotiated intensively with the protesters over four days to reach an agreement. The government representatives and NCBD⁵ - a group of national activists on behalf of the protesters signed a six-point Phulbari Agreement on 30th August 2006 (see Appendix A). As an immediate reaction to this agreement, Asia Energy was expelled from Phulbari and all mining activities were halted. However, the government did not fulfill the signed agreement (see page 108). As a result, the agrarian communities – with the help of national activists – have been successfully carrying on the protest for the last nine years.

Anthropologists' and activists' responses

The Phulbari Movement has attracted attention from a number of anthropologists in addition to some NGOs (Luthfa 2015). Based on her three-month ethnographic fieldwork, Nasrin Siraj Annie explored threats of displacement from the means of subsistence and loss of identity as factors motivating the protesters to join the movement (Annie 2010:86). She specifically focused on the issue of human rights violations and motivational aspects of the movement. Later, another anthropologist, Sadid Ahmed Nuremowla carried out extensive research on the Phulbari Movement. His multi-sited ethnographic approach allowed him to explore the internal politics of the movement. He showed that the leadership of leftist nationalists based in Dhaka initially orchestrated the Phulbari Movement, and that the alliance between urban nationalists and the rural grassroots carried

⁴ "*Gherao* or encirclement means, "the surrounding of politicians or buildings until the protestors' demands are met" (Tenhunen 2011:403).

⁵ The National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Mineral Resources Power and Ports (NCBD) is a committee of civil society activists (<http://ncbd.org/>). This committee has a local unit in Phulbari, which is officially leading this movement. There are more details about this organization on page 34.

it out despite their own internal frictions and tensions (Nuremowla 2012:207). He also sketched a portrait of the village of migrants in his research (see page 39). On the other hand, Samina Luthfa conducted a sociological study based on seven-months of ethnographic fieldwork including fifty-six interviews. In her work she shows that a sense of community obligation initiated by the local leaders motivated people to join the movement, and that the state's unplanned and unnecessary coercion attracted national and international support for the protesters (Luthfa 2011:6).

Before all these academic researchers, Philip Gain – an NGO activist – wrote about the Phulbari Movement with an informative description of the beginning of the movement, especially the 26th August incident (Gain 2007). He described the key events and main points of the contracts regarding the mining project between government, BHP and then Asia Energy. Gain is extensively cited on the Phulbari Movement in different newspaper and academic writings. Later, Manoranjan Pegu also wrote about the movement (Pegu 2010). He focused on political economy, especially the issues of development, democracy, revenues, and so on concerning the Phulbari project.

Using this research as background, in this thesis I seek to add to our understanding of the Phulbari Movement with a focus on its state and internal workings nine years after the events of 2006. I am interested in examining the aims and practices of the protesters and their supporters, as well as changes in these over time. In particular, I focus on 'weak' groups' – the Santals and migrants – and the movement leaders and their roles in the movement, which were less thoroughly explored in earlier works.

Some questions

Based on my knowledge of this project, I was seeking answers to some questions. First, have the people living in rural and remote areas managed to sustain the movement against the coal-mining project despite state opposition? If so, how? Second, was the movement successful in bringing about desired outcomes? Why or why not? Finally, if informal resistance movements begin without an explicitly political focus and are often justified on moral grounds to ensure survival then how do they turn into collective political struggles?

To answer these questions, my specific research objectives have been to explore the practice of a grassroots movement, transformations in the socio-political landscape because of the modifications

in the movement, and the role of the alliance between the state and the coal company in a place of uprising.

Methodological odyssey

Sherry Ortner has argued that most influential resistance studies provide weak or thin accounts of ethnographic context, especially regarding the internal politics of dominated groups (1995:173, 190). One of her concerns is that such approaches mute discordant voices within dominated groups and screen out an understanding of positionality within them, but I think the anthropologist's positionality also matters in studies of this kind (Abu-Lughod 1991). For example, in my twelve weeks of fieldwork in Phulbari I met several people who have benefited from the region's mining interventions. Nevertheless, the distressed groups including the farmers, day laborers and indigenous people had shaped my perspective more. The key reason was, unlike the benefited group, this anxious portion of Phulbari people have a strong attachment to the land; not for only livelihood, also for their culture, social and kinship relations or memory of their ancestors. On the other hand, land was mostly a material resource for those benefiting from the project. I strongly wanted to tell the story of poor distressed people of Phulbari, which also included stories of the benefited group⁶.

Entering the field

I had three key challenges when I started planning for the fieldwork in Phulbari: first, convince the leaders that my study would not be against their movement; second, clear the permission to work at grassroots level; and third, find a safe place to stay in the field. Therefore, I contacted Anu Muhammad (more information about him in page 4) in Dhaka. After listening to my research details, he agreed to help me in my project. Fortunately, he was supposed to join a demonstration in Phulbari at the time and invited me to accompany him there, so he could introduce me to local protest leaders, which would help make my fieldwork effective and safe.

Accordingly, on a warm night I started my journey to Phulbari, where I met him and participated in that demonstration. There he introduced me to the leaders present and asked them to help me in my

⁶ I found Tsing also faced this challenge and preference in her study in Indonesian rainforest politics (Tsing, 2005:xii).

fieldwork. I still think without that introduction my fieldwork would not have gone so smoothly. He also asked a local person to assist, and through his help, I found a hotel room that I rented for three months. Though built illegally without the permission of municipality, I found that hotel room was perfect for me, because the place all the protest leaders gather in Phulbari was just next door. It was also the hub of Phulbari and I witnessed a couple of demonstrations in front of my hotel as people from remote villages converged here from three different directions.

On the roads of Phulbari

Phulbari comprises very different landscapes for its urban and rural areas. The basic differences can be observed by the coverage of government services and facilities. Urban areas were mostly covered by government services, e.g. water, electricity, sanitation etc., but those are very limited in the rural areas. However, the actual location of Phulbari coalfield is located on the rural side of the locality, which is in or very close to several villages, while the municipality was five to six km. far from it (Map 2).



Map 2: Landscapes around Phulbari coalfield (in red circle)

The Phulbari municipality is divided in two parts by the national road in an east-west direction; both sides have a similar landscape. The roadside lands are lined with business centers, offices, banks,

schools, small industries etc. Rural areas, on the other hand, have a more diverse landscape. The municipality has many roads connected to surrounding villages. These link roads were important for village life because all the significant establishments were located either on these link roads or very close to them. I noticed most of these roads host three establishments: a mosque, a convenience store and a tea stall. Irrespective of rich or poor, Bangalee⁷ or Santal, Muslim or Hindu, most village inhabitants were living in cottages with mud floors and walls and roofs made of straw and dry leaves. Some people also used corrugated galvanized iron sheets for making roofs. Concrete buildings were relatively rare. Agriculture is the key source of livelihood, and the majority of the rural landscape covers farming lands.

Meeting the people

The first week of my stay at Phulbari I did not conduct any interviews or other formal fieldwork activity. I used to spend all day with the protest leaders to get to know their activities, and within one week I was familiar with every leader, including some grassroots Bangalee and Santal leaders. After one week, when I started to feel comfortable and secure enough, I decided to start interviewing. I first approached the leaders to make an appointment for the interview. I interviewed the leaders of municipality first: particularly one at morning and one at night. After three or four interviews at the municipality, I decided to go to the village level and shared my plans with the leaders there. The leaders appointed Papon as my research assistant who was a local college student, involved with leftist student politics. This was to avoid harassment by the villagers. I started my interviews at the village level with a Santal leader – in a distant Santal village – who is an important member of the Santal *manjhi*⁸ council. He helped me in interviewing other Santals easily. I ended my fieldwork with the interview of Anu Muhammad in Dhaka, with whom my fieldwork began. The day I first met him in his university office, a group of local and foreign journalists were interviewing him on the socio-environmental impacts of contemporary development projects in Bangladesh. The last day when I was interviewing him, like the first visit I also had to wait for more than two hours because a

⁷ The largest ethnic group of Bangladesh. More than 98% population of the country are Bangalee (BBS 2011).

⁸ An administrative unit of Santal villages, “where all its occupants are related by some sort of kinship or other ties and know each other as members of a single socio-political group” (Ali 2008:169).

French journalist was interviewing him on a thermal power plant project and its adverse impacts on the Sundarbans and its adjacent localities.

Through my interviews, I found there were significant differences between people from rural and urban areas. For example, rural people have food from their own fields rather than buying it, speak regional dialects rather than standard Bangla, often wear traditional clothes (*lungi* and *Panjabi* shirt for males, *sharee* for females), eat the same food (rice and fish or vegetables) everyday, live in an extended family, and so on. In contrast, urban dwellers were the stereotypical symbols of modernity with costly cell phone and a computer in a concrete house, t-shirt and jeans, diverse foods, electricity, television, etc. For example, when talking to me, the key local leader had always been trying to add at least one English word with Bangla in his sentences to prove himself as modern. The urban people I interviewed were mostly engaged in small trade, farming business, NGO jobs, teaching or small industry. They were educated with formal school and college degrees. On the other hand, most of the rural people I interviewed were earning their livelihood from agricultural activities: some owned agricultural fields, some worked on those fields as day labor, some sharecropped others' fields, some just carried the products from one actor to another in the value chain, and some worked in the processing industries.

The unintentional activist and other risks and dilemmas

Russell Bernard affirms, “There is no value-free science. Everything that interests you as a potential research focus comes fully equipped with risks to you and to the people you study” (Bernard 2006: 77). My fieldwork also came equipped with dilemmas and risks. For example, my initial plan was to be neutral to both protesters and opponents to this protest. However, because of my long time spent with the protesters, an excellent and friendly relationship developed between them and me. Therefore, when they were participating in a march, they expected me to be there with them because they started to think that I also supported the movement. Resnick believes that despite good intentions, an ethnographer may inadvertently create material hopes among the participants through his or her actions (Resnick 2010:106). She worked among the Bulgarian Romani neighbourhoods where she expressed her sympathy to the school-aged children because the adjacent school was closed. Her sympathy eventually created hopes of financial help to rebuild a school among her hosts, which jeopardized her research goals.

Aware of the social conditions affecting many Romani communities, I had prepared to be an engaged, active anthropologist, but suddenly the requests for action were not those for which I had prepared, and they seemed beyond my capacity to fulfill (Resnick 2010: 105).

In my case, when the protesters were building a new office, they wanted me to help them financially because they saw me as their friend. I do not criticize such attitudes of my hosts in Phulbari, rather this is a common practice to seek help from friends. To avoid a breach in the relation with my participants, I tried to help them based on my ability.

My fieldwork also featured some risks. For example, after an interview, I found several young boys were in front of the house with motorcycles⁹. I walked for approximately one kilometer to get a rickshaw-van to return to my hotel and I found those people were following me on motorcycles. I took an auto-rickshaw and they continued to follow me until I arrived really close to the crowded hub of the municipality. I mentioned this incident to my assistant and he said he heard that some people were following me for the last couple of days. Later I discovered that three or four influential persons who do not support the movement (more details about these people are on pages 101-103) were living in that neighbourhood with a bunch of their followers. The young people who were shadowing me were their followers. The movement leaders advised me to take my research assistant with me if I needed to do further research in that neighbourhood.

Framing thoughts

Among all mineral resources, coal might be the most commonly mined one throughout the world. In 1842, a Royal Commission Report mentioned adverse social impacts of underground mining activities in England (Bridge 2004:216). This clearly indicates that the coal mining has long been a source of socio-political problems and struggles. How did the mining of coal start?

⁹ Motorcycle is the most common transport for affluent people in Phulbari. I saw because of earthen roads people tend to use motorcycles because the roads are not suitable for three or four-wheel motorized vehicles. The cost of an average motorcycle may range from 1250-1500 USD. This clearly indicates that mostly the financially well-off people have access to it. People mostly use motorcycles of Indian make besides a couple of local companies. Furthermore, in addition to legal purchase from local dealers, some people buy illegally from the smugglers who bring motorcycles through the border of India-Bangladesh without paying duties.

In the 21st century, the era of a boom in coal mining, it is really hard to believe that 13th century England banned using coal mainly because of its strong and sharp smell. However, by the late 1500s and due to an energy crisis, England learned how to tolerate the odour and, thus, became “the first western nation to mine and burn coal on a large scale” (Freese 2003:1-2). By the 17th century Britain increased its coal production ten times and mined five times more coal than the remaining entire world (Freese 2003:56). But not without a price: green lands destroyed, trees disappeared, miners died in underground water in coalmines, human health deteriorated, fossil fuel burned to warm the earth to a level not seen in millions of years (Freese 2003:6, 175, 184). Compared to Britain, coal production grew in America dramatically during 19th century’s American version of Industrial Revolution. Today’s brutal image of coal mining started in America. Historically, American coal corporations controlled the fate of their employees, abandoned the land once coal had been removed and took autocratic political decisions for the host society (Lockard 1998:15, 165, 174). Furthermore, coal has also served as a dominant political object in history. For example, coal served as the key source of energy in gaining economic sovereignty for a colonized country like India (Lahiri-Dutt 2014:15). Bangladesh is still a newborn child in coal mining and started its first coal mining in 2005, and is still limited to only one underground mining project.

Theoretical background

Historically the alliance between the modern state and corporate power has used, modified or appropriated coal along with other natural and mineral resources. I want to share some theoretical views in anthropology from different periods in this regard.

Leslie White believed that energy was integral to culture, and for him energy and the economy were the foundations of cultural change: “culture develops when the amount of energy harnessed by man per capita per year is increased” (White 1943: 338). Foucault thought the essential art in legitimizing a government was to introduce the economy into political space. Governing a state means monitoring and controlling the economy from the political level – exercising power in the form of economy – through complex processes of intervention (Foucault 2003a:234). For Ong, this century’s “governments adjust political space to the dictates of global capital, giving corporations an indirect power over the political conditions of citizens in zones that are differently articulated to global production and financial circuits” (Ong 2006:78). Here she refers specifically to the neoliberal strategies of developing economies in Southeast Asia.

These theoretical views are relevant for understanding the dynamics of the current mining boom, especially Ong's idea about adjusting political space to global capital. Two key facts behind her argument are - first, government agencies of most countries still strongly regulate the entrance of mining corporations into the national space, and second, countries often tend to weaken environmental, social and labor regulations to secure global mining profits (Ballard and Banks 2003:294). In this process of adjusting political space between mining corporations and nation-states, people of the mining locality are nearly always missing from the account. So, for example, in Indonesia, Suharto's New Order¹⁰ grabbed forest resources illegally from rural communities with the help of international finance and military muscle (Tsing 2005:ix). Elsewhere, the Ecuadorian government almost destroyed the northern rainforest over three decades of oil exploitation to pay international debts over the objections of local people (Sawyer 2004:13).

Analytical framework

Analyzing protest or resistance is always an ambiguous and complex task. The key question remains *what is or is not resistance*. Ortner thinks that this ambiguity arises from theoretical differences: for example, in resistance studies "Foucault (1978) drew attention to less institutionalized, more pervasive, and more everyday forms of power; on the other hand, James Scott (1985) drew attention to less organized, more pervasive, and more everyday forms of resistance" (Ortner 1995:175). These discussions alert us to the fact that any research issue can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, and not all will necessarily end up with similar conclusions. For this reason I will discuss some analytical frames I used in my research here.

Conceptualizing power and its structures: In this research the most difficult part was to analyze who is powerful and why. Weber defines power as "the probability that an actor will be able to realise his own objectives even against opposition from others with whom he is in a social relationship" (cited in Giddens 1996:156). I found this definition useful in analyzing power and its structures of the Phulbari Movement. The bloody confrontation between state and protesters in 2006 clearly indicates that power is ubiquitous and even the dominated groups can resist the power (Ortner 2006:6). The state's negotiation with the protesters and supplying free land and electricity services (see page 110)

¹⁰ During the period from 1966 to 1998 in Indonesia under President General Suharto's regime.

to the wounded protesters since 2006 clearly acknowledge this situation. Foucault analyzed this situation by implying that power is not always negative or repressive, rather it is also productive and it creates knowledge, discourse and pleasure (Foucault 2003b:307).

To me Foucault's position mostly explains the dimensions of power but the source of individual agency and its transmission remained blurred. Here I borrowed Bourdieu's thought that "the homogeneity of the conditions of existence ... enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction" (Bourdieu 1977:80). It helped me to understand when I saw the young sons of 2006 movement's veterans also believe that their fathers fought for their rights even though they did not directly experience it.

After understanding power, I needed to analyze the power structure of the Phulbari Movement. This was a complex process since agrarian communities of Bangladesh maintained two kinds of power relations: kin-based factions and vote-based local government bodies like *Union Parishad*¹¹ (Chowdhury 1982:52). The thinking in creating village-level leadership groups in the Phulbari Movement has been influenced by both of these kin-based and vote-based relations. However, I split up the whole power structure of this protest into five areas of discussion: the prize of power, the eligible competitors, composition of competing teams, rules of game/tactics, and rules to resolve crisis (Bailey 1969:19-20). I noted that the power structure of this protest has an official form: it has rules and regulations, it follows office hierarchy, its management and activities follow written documents and it follows a specific division of labor. If not exactly in ideology, this official power structure shares structural similarities with Weber's features of bureaucracy (cited in Gerth and Mills 1998:196-198).

'State view' of the project: In this research, I analyzed the state's point of view about this mining project, which has been strongly criticized both from environmental and socio-economic points of view. Based on my findings, the movement is a struggle to save land from being acquired by the company. This land has always been synonymous with life to the local communities, while the government cared mostly about what is under that land. In this regard, Scott said, "the administrators' forest

¹¹ An administrative unit usually consists of nine to eleven villages depending on the number of population.

cannot be the naturalists' forest" (Scott 1995:195). I agreed with this argument and analyzed the implications of surface land of coalfield both from the state's and the protesters' points of view. In another book, Scott confirmed that many of the 20th century's 'conflicts with states' are the result of rulers' utopian plans to bring modernity to their society (Scott 1998:89). This opened up the discussion of why and how the plan of energy production through the Phulbari coalmine was made intelligible from an international point of view by completely ignoring local perceptions (Greenough and Tsing 2003:3). I also focused on how Bangladesh has been trying to pursue rapid development through exploitation of natural resources.

Friction and power: How do actors accomplish power? Both the protesters and the state used a combination of accurate information, vague data, and rumours to accomplish their goals: the state approved the company's Resettlement Plan but underestimated the number of project-affected persons, while the protesters did not have exact number of people who participated, died and were wounded in 2006's protest. Both parties have been using vague data to open up space for compromise and negotiations with each other to accomplish their aims (Li 1999:304). In addition to repressive armed forces, the state used the discourses of economic benefits and the energy crisis to validate the Phulbari project. There also have been several negotiations and compromises so far between the state and protesters, and I analyzed the making and structure of these negotiations.

Friction was another factor in accomplishing power by different actors. How does a movement run successfully with different local, national and global actors, each with different motives for collaboration? Anna Tsing analyzed the workings of such encounters in the era of global motion (2005). She pointed out that global encounters could often benefit actors at different scales, rather than weakening them. She used the metaphor of a wheel's motion:

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power (2005:5).

Tsing points to cultural creativity and diversity from the interconnections of different actors in global connection. Ordinary villagers, political parties, national and international activists have participated in the Phulbari Movement since the very beginning. Therefore, ideological differences

between all the actors were inevitable; still they have been carrying out the movement successfully and creatively for the last nine years. These actors complement each other in the practices of the movement. Tsing further mentioned in this regard, “social criticism and political mobilizations could only advance through friction” (2005:206). Accordingly, I analyzed how all these actors, despite their different goals, created a common sense to fight together and how the frictions among them influenced the movement both positively and negatively.

Understanding actors: Among all actors in the Phulbari Movement, I found it is hard to analyze ‘local people’ and ‘civil society’. In popular discourse, the state remains at the *top* and grassroots are close to the *bottom* and more rooted. The state always manipulates and controls *disconnected* grassroots people (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:982). However, in my research I analyzed the worldly and well-connected *local* people’s networks with translocal actors, including national and international activists working to raise support for the movement beyond Phulbari.

The connections of ‘locals’ beyond locality were supposed to be mediated through civil society – another problematic category of actors in this protest. Who is civil society? Gramsci defined civil society as “organizations in a social formation which are neither part of the processes of material production in the economy, nor part of state-funded organizations, but which are relatively long-lasting institutions supported and run by people outside of the other two major spheres [economy and state]” (cited in Bocoock 1986:33-34). Following this definition, I found a group of traditional intellectuals¹² supporting the movement including university professors, human rights activists, NGO professionals, lawyers, and so on.

Peasantry and agrarian structure: What is land for the rural communities in Phulbari? Grossly, land is power, land is subsistence and land is identity. The people of Phulbari are the second or third largest suppliers of rice for the entire country. Their triple roles (producer, consumer and worker) create a strong bond with land over the generations (Wolf 1966:13): not only do older generations have strong bonds to the land, youth also cannot think about leaving their ancestors’ land. Children grow

¹²According to Gramsci, “professional intellectuals, ... whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations” (Gramsci 1999:131).

with an identity rooted in the land. They can recognize and recall their villages by the seasonal smell of the crops, trees, flowers or livestock. As Jackson said, “each fragrance, in its time and season, characterized particular parts of the ... [place] and connected those places with specific events and practices important to community life” (2011:608). In this thesis, I highlight the land and struggles for it as a symbol of agrarian or indigenous identity. Whenever the government tried to use agrarian lands as raw material for aggressive development initiatives, especially in northern Bangladesh, the peasants faced state brutality. In spite of that, the peasants never stepped back, but rather showed their political consciousness (Smith 1989:11-12). Land is also important in Phulbari for another reason: that is, class relations in rural Bangladesh are based on land ownership (Chowdhury 1982:6). These relations of production are not only economic; they have deep socio-political roots and impacts. For example, a parcel of land is not just a natural resource in Phulbari; rather it is at the heart of relations between ten to fifteen individuals and the families of owner, sharecropper, wage labourer, retailer, transporter, etc. Therefore, when the land of Phulbari was under threat, all groups in these relations had a strong basis for unity, unlike other movements for electricity or wages.

Which acts are resistance? When the majority of a community participates in a movement, it is harder to document which act is not resistance, even after nine years. Seymour thinks individual or group resistance against superior power is certainly intentional and conscious (2006:305), while James Scott argues that everyday resistance can be extended to include informal, invisible or unorganized actions (1985:255). In Phulbari, I found that the protesters avoided the shops of those people who they thought did not support the movement (see page 53). If I had missed everyday informal resistance, I would have misunderstood the movement because subtle daily protests were going on even if there were no demonstrations. Therefore, following Scott’s prescriptions I participated in the daily performances of community life, especially at evening gatherings in tea stalls, and the Friday prayers (*Jummah*). People from Phulbari usually gather in traditional street tea stalls after the dawn to dusk agricultural activity. People from all classes participated in this social gathering and discussed various social, political, religious, and subsistence matters, which reflected their points of view. In addition, after the weekly Friday prayers, people discussed amongst themselves the burning issues of the previous week and sought to solve anxieties in a communal manner.

Besides conscious and unconscious protests and sites of resistance, I found celebrations and commemorations were another strong form of protest in the Phulbari Movement (see page 55).

Through these performances, protesters were building a strong collective memory. Connerton states, “Commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms” (1989:5). This was relevant in this protest. Every year Phulbari Day on 20th August has been the largest annual demonstration for the movement. This also provides a great space to strengthen solidarity.

I also considered the scale of protest significant because some protests beyond Phulbari contributed a lot to this protest. In this sense, the scale of protest may be widespread or locally confined (Hollander and Einwohner 2004:536). Scale is important in the Phulbari Movement because the same protest was different in Dhaka and Phulbari. When it was in Dhaka, the protest was centered on human chains or documentary film shows; however, in Phulbari it would be a parade with slogans or the *gherao* of government or company offices.

Rumour analysis: There existed many discourses and rumours regarding the Phulbari mining project and the movement opposing it. Different kinds of information from different categories of stakeholders were available about the positive and negative impacts of the mining project. It was hard for me to conclude from one single source about any fact. Supporters of the mine told me there would be huge industrial development in this region if the mine were implemented. In addition, they claimed the protesters would be unable to stop the project because their leaders have under-table financial dealings with the company. On the other hand, some protesters thought the company had no intention to implement the project anymore. They just needed the name of this project to sell their shares on the London Stock Exchange. None of these claims had documentary evidence, but had powerful influence in this protest nonetheless. Burrell’s opinion is that rumour can create wisdom and madness among crowds, and to some extent rumours are beyond the control of individuals who receive and retell them (2012:16, 18). Rumours can take on a life of their own, and this was very relevant in my research. Even where the leaders’ voices did not reach, rumours worked as the leaders’ instructions to their followers. In this sense rumours have operated almost like an autonomous organizational element in the movement.

Research expectations

Though a couple of anthropologists have analyzed the movement (see page 10), there remain many things yet to examine about the movement, for example, the relation between globalization indigenous rights and new leadership, the scale and transformations of the movement, the politics of opposing the movement by the state the company, and so on. Moreover, it has already been suggested that the movement originated on common moral ground to save land and livelihood but evolved on the uneven interests of different participants beyond the locality (Nuremowla 2012). This conflict and coexistence – which is to say friction – between local, national and international participants of the movement required more attention to everyday practices in relation to a complex power topography and its connections with different locations. This research seeks to shed light on this complex power topography.

Negotiations and compromises are considered as key strategies to accomplishing power. In the case of the Phulbari project, within four days of massive resistance in 2006 the government signed the Phulbari Agreement. So far, this is the only successful negotiation between government and protesters. The Phulbari Agreement is not yet implemented and, therefore, the protesters are still demonstrating at local, national and international levels. The sites and scales of resistance have changed: instead of mass demonstrations, now protesters arrange dialogues, debate shows, exhibitions, and publish information in newspapers, electronic media and blogs. Such modifications in the movement are analyzed in this research to examine the impacts on the socio-political landscape of Phulbari.

Taken as a whole, this research has the potential to show how Phulbari people – and perhaps others – defend their human rights when they stand to lose land, livelihood, and identity. In addition, my research hopes to outline new insights on the concepts of power, domination and the agency of subordinate people, the analysis of ‘grassroots’, and the impacts of neoliberalism on traditional state-citizen relationships.

Thesis outline

In writing the story of the Phulbari Movement, one chronology seemed best to me: start with the practices of the movement, end with the opposing strategies by the government and the company and in between document the changes experienced in the movement throughout the years that also

modified the socio-political landscape of Phulbari. Therefore, I decided to include five chapters in this thesis, of which three core chapters will be based on: practicing, modifying and opposing the movement.

Chapter 1 is the overview of the entire research – including the motivation, background, questions and objectives, methods, frameworks and expectations of this research. Some ambiguities regarding concepts and theories are explained here in this chapter. *Chapter 2* documents the practices of the movement, including the power structures, positioning of the protesters, frictions between different parties, scales and forms of protest, leadership and rules, celebrations, and so on in this protest. This chapter is a synchronic analysis of the movement, while the next chapter (*Chapter 3*) focuses on more diachronic analyses. It includes discussions on how over the years the protesters changed the composition, structure and function of the movement and how they politicized it. In addition, attention is also directed toward the institutionalization of the protest and its footprints beyond its borders. *Chapter 4* discusses the perspectives of mine supporters (the government, the coal company and their local agents) in opposing the movement. In particular, it includes how the government and the company utilized the factions among the protesters, how they constructed rumours through their local agents and how they challenged the legal basis of the Phulbari Agreement. In addition, specific focus is also directed towards the nature of periodic absence of the state in the face of protest in 2006 and how the state overcame this crisis through negotiations and compromises. The *final chapter* concludes at the critical juncture the movement is now experiencing. It includes my final comments on the movement based on the situations I experienced in my fieldwork in Phulbari. To me, this chapter is less concluding remarks about my research, but more about the threshold of new further research on the Phulbari Movement.

Chapter 2

The Movement in Practice

আমার মাটি, আমার মা
কয়লাখনি হবে না।

My land, my mother

We will not destroy for coalmine

- One of the slogans of the Phulbari Movement, which refers to the land as mother.

My first visit in Phulbari was harsh and difficult, considering the volatile political situation of the locality. The day my dear friend Amirul invited me into his house to have dinner with his family, I felt warmth of friendship in Phulbari for the first time. After a long time I had a homemade dinner with great foods prepared by his wife. This dinner did not imply anything unusual; rather it was a perfect example of traditional patriarchy in agrarian communities in Bangladesh: men are supposed to work outside the home to earn money, while women are supposed to be confined to household chores and taking care of children. I knew every bit of this tradition.

However, next morning I discovered a significant departure from this tradition. On that morning, I was talking to a local college teacher, who told me about events on the night of 26th August in 2006, during the first wide-scale demonstration of this protest. When the male protesters fled after being chased by government troops, women built a wall of resistance to halt them. Government troops were searching the village houses to arrest the protesters but they found only the female family members. Unprecedentedly, to save the land and family, women chased the armed forces with indigenous tools like *da* and *boti* (traditional rural cooking chopper) and *jharu* (broom). They literally blocked the village entrances that night. The government forces could not attack the women since it was both socially and politically sensitive. The next morning the women organized a large procession at Phulbari municipality. This incident supplied enormous courage to the protesters, induced them to come back to Phulbari and take control of the protest. The women then went back home. Although this event was temporary, its impact was significant. The Phulbari Movement is the success story of such socio-politically marginal groups and their empowerment.

This awakening was not an easy and comfortable experience for the protesters. Throughout the movement, the state and the coal company had been trying to restrain the protesters – politically, financially, administratively or with force – for the last nine years. So far, they did not succeed. If they had tried to sabotage such a movement three or four decades ago, it might have been possible. But globalization since the mid-1990s turned the tables in the power game. Global market expansion had been threatening communities with land loss, displacement and human rights violations. However, transnational NGOs at the same time reshaped communities with their discourses of indigeneity, human rights or inequality, and empowered them to struggle for their land rights and cultural identity (Nash 2005:1). Globalization, therefore, not only encouraged the intrusions of the multinational corporations, it also made possible collaborations between communities and actors beyond political or administrative borders. Despite the differences in actions between colleagues, these collaborations still effectively pursue a common cause and are able to create new agents, networks and links (Tsing 2005:246-247). Consequently, the communities now are aware of their resources and rights and can become empowered by using connections beyond the local. In this chapter, I will discuss how a multinational mining company (Asia Energy) threatened an agrarian community in Bangladesh with displacement and how the community resisted this threat by organizing themselves and by utilizing the help of national activists with transnational networks.

An imagined heaven or a hell

The Phulbari Movement has a symbiotic relation with the landscape of Phulbari. The protest organizers portrayed different pictures of the landscape in terms of this mining project: the project would make Phulbari a hell; but otherwise, it is a heaven for its inhabitants. Moreover, they visualized losses they never had experienced and spread a shared ideology across the locality. Influenced by the leaders, the mass of protesters invented an affected community that never existed. This community consisted of people who never met each other, but their ties grew out of the imagined threat of displacement or the dream surviving on their ancestors' land (Anderson 1983:6). They created a utopia based on fertile land, subsistence affluence, ancestral identity, national resources and a secure future.

Unlike the leaders, ordinary protesters changed their imaginary of heaven and hell over the course of this protest. Poor villagers first thought this mining project could be a way to overcome poverty. They initially supported the coal company because the company needed to use land for their initial

testing process and they paid a lot higher compensation than the usual price¹³. For example, they paid great amounts of money for a small amount of barren land used for drilling tests. This over-valuation created greed (*or hope!*) among poor people. People were very eager to give their land to the company. However, their illusions were soon shattered. They learned that the company needed more than these small pieces of land; rather they would take the whole area and displace all of the people. The people started to think the locality would become a hell after the implementation of this project. They changed their attitude to the project and thought they would be fortunate if the project were never implemented in Phulbari. This shared imagery originated and sustained the movement.

Portraying a utopia

The protesters portrayed Phulbari without the mining project as a landscape of their livelihood and resources, ethnic and religious diversity, politics, tradition or identity. These shared feelings led ordinary villagers, even those who never heard the name of the company, to participate in a mass struggle. Here are five different responses to the question *why do you want to save Phulbari from the mining project* I asked to my respondents.

- a. “I collect my livelihood from this land, not from the government or the company. Phulbari’s land is so fertile that I can produce everything I need to survive. Furthermore, I do not have other resources except the ancestral lands.” – (Khaleque, a farmer and village leader of the Phulbari Movement). Despite some small agro-based industries, most of the people in Phulbari are still dependent on agriculture.
- b. “My family has already experienced repeated displacements because of riverbank erosion. In the late sixties, my father and grandfather settled here in Phulbari. It took a long time and was very hard for us to establish social relations with the people here. If we are displaced again, where we will go? We do not have enough resources to resettle again.” – (Jahir, college teacher and organizer of a migrant group in the movement). Phulbari has enormous number of migrants who consider this land as their only hope to survive.

¹³ For example, if the market price of land was BDT 10,000, the Asia Energy representatives offered BDT 20,000 to 30,000 or more.

- c. “For generations, Santals have been living in Phulbari alongside people from other religions and ethnicities in cohesive ways. Land and nature are not only the source of livelihood for an indigenous group like us, but it is also our religion. If we lose it, we will lose our identity.” – (Keertiman, Santal farmer and organizer of Santals in the Phulbari Movement). Santals are the poorest and most dependent group on Phulbari’s land; if they lose their land, they cannot afford resettlement by themselves.
- d. “We know the resource will always attract the companies and we may have to fight for our land for a long time. We may even die in the movement. However, maybe our deaths will bring security and prosperity to this locality for the next generations.” – (Luky, petty trader and organizer of women in this protest). The land of Phulbari served livelihood and subsistence for generations and is supposed to do so in future.
- e. “Phulbari’s land is very productive. In several cases, the farmers do not have to use additional fertilizers or other chemicals other than just the seeds; the land fertility itself suffices for the crops. The waste from the mining project will destroy this fertility. We have already seen how the Barapukuria mine destroyed the productivity of adjacent land because of extreme pollution by the mining waste¹⁴. We do not want it here in Phulbari.” – (Kabir, local college teacher and communist¹⁵ leader). The adjacent Barapukuria coalmine already showed land degradation, subsidence, and loss of productivity that terrified the inhabitants.
- f. “This is a national resource. We cannot hand over its ownership to a foreign company. Moreover, the mining project will not only destroy the environmental resources of Phulbari but also extinguish the nature of the entire region.” – (Aman, follower of leftist politics and human rights activist). The protesters did not agree to transfer the ownership of a national resource to a foreign company that may destroy the nature and environment of the whole region.

¹⁴ Barapukuria coalmine has been adversely affecting the local ecosystem since the very beginning. There are some discussions of this issue and its relevance to the Phulbari Movement in page 9 and 65.

¹⁵ Phulbari has been a fertile land for communist politics for a long period. I have discussed this issue in details on page 73-74.

The protesters portrayed threats to their culture, economy, nature and their everyday lives from the risk they felt of losing their lands (Escobar 2008:30). The issues of nationalism, resource loss or indigenous identity motivated this protest; but the land or place-based struggle has remained dominant.

Visualizing unforeseen loss

In all the demonstrations I participated in Phulbari, I saw the leaders in their speeches always saying how disastrous the project could be. The mining location was not in Phulbari¹⁶, nor was there actually any physical intervention other than some geophysical and socioeconomic surveys at that point. Nonetheless, the movement leaders were able to conjure a vision of the adverse impacts of this mining project even before it happened.

The protesters responded right after they felt the threat: first, by organizing themselves and then by communicating with national activists. Although they had not experienced any adverse impacts, they did not wait for that. The protest leaders successfully instilled the potential impacts in people's perceptions. All my participants responded to me about the same impacts. For example, massive displacement, de-watering of the whole region, the unavailability of compensation for people living on government lands, degraded food production, health hazards – all appeared as real risks of the project.

Instilling a 'common sense'

The leaders were able to represent the movement as a redemption from all the adverse impacts by promoting a shared ideology among all protesters. This ideology was built in two phases (pre-2006 movement and post-2006 movement) on four issues. Until the 2006's movement, the protesters resisted the company and government mainly to save their land, and fear of *displacement* boosted their motivation. Displacement not only threatened the local people with land loss but also with rupture in their human security, dignity, social relations and comfort (Annie 2010:51-52). Furthermore, *ethnic identity* played a significant role in the decision by the Santals and other indigenous groups of

¹⁶ The actual mining site is located in an adjacent separate sub-district Birampur, while Phulbari sub-district was located in the buffer zone and included in the acquisition plan.

Phulbari to pursue a strong movement. Loss of land means loss of identity and ancestral history for the Santals. Risk of losing both led the Santals to collaborate with other actors in the movement. After the protest of 2006, when the company halted all of its activities in Phulbari and the immediate risk of displacement faded, movement leaders added two other issues to focus the protest: *environmental protection* and *nationalism* (more in page 63). They knew that if the ordinary protesters could not see any immediate risk they might give up, and they therefore highlighted these two long-term issues. They were able to convince people that this project might destroy the local and regional environment and at the same time exploit a national resource for the profit of foreigners. All the leaflets, posters, banners, newspapers articles or speeches of the leaders specifically concentrated on the issue of national interest as the goal of the Phulbari Movement (Nuremowla 2012:99). The language of these protest instruments created a consciousness of nationalism, similar to the way Anderson explained the contribution of ‘print capitalism’ for creating national consciousness (Anderson 1983:44). Consequently, even Khaleque – a farmer from a very remote village – told me “this is a national resource and we have been protecting it through the movement. We are fighting for our nation and its environment, not only to save our houses”. Therefore, at present the motto of the movement is “no open-pit, no export and no foreign company”.

Power, authority and leaders

A key goal of political competition is to defeat opponents and establish a new or different set of rules (Bailey 1969:1). So far, the Phulbari Movement has succeeded in altering the existing power relations of the society, but it has itself also experienced vast changes in its topography of power. After every challenge, the movement changed its power hierarchy: added actors to connect those below, replaced others and dismissed some. However, all the changes modified three common components: a theoretical leadership, a functional leadership and a motivated group of followers.

Alliances and breaches between powers

It may come as a surprise if I say that the coal company, Asia Energy (AE), initiated the movement. Asia Energy started to bargain for land prices in 2005 in Phulbari municipality, and tried to attract villagers by offering high prices as compensation. Some local people hoped for financial advantage in dealings with the company, which eventually created feuds among them. Subsequently, they

formed a common organization – the Phulbari Roksha Committee (PRC) – to claim benefits from Asia Energy¹⁷.

People and leaders from all kinds of political parties participated in the PRC, although the PRC neither expected nor wanted mass participation in their movement. But meanwhile engaged local people in the committee called for a large public gathering in 2005 to express its opposition to the mining project. This effort was not fully successful, and some claimed that it was undermined from within. For example, the leader who was supposed to send trucks to villages to bring people for the protest turned his cell phone off just one hour before the demonstration and stopped communication with the protesters. Ordinary and dedicated protesters were getting suspicious about the PRC leaders, but they kept pressuring them. Though the PRC leaders apparently did not intend to create a solid movement, the spontaneous and dedicated participation of local people brought a movement into being.

Some interested young followers of the PRC went to Dhaka and started to contact professors, experts and activists to know whether the project would be beneficial for them. All of them were assured that the project would have devastating social and environmental consequences for Phulbari and the surrounding area. Most importantly, it would displace more than a hundred thousand people. Contacting students from Phulbari who were studying at Dhaka at that time, they printed thirty thousand leaflets in Dhaka to raise opposition against the mining project. They also conducted many small demonstrations and contacted the national activist group NCBD, which was protesting problematic government development projects. The NCBD leaders were not aware of the project details, but promised that they would look into the Phulbari project as well.

The young protesters came back to Phulbari and, without PRC support, arranged a demonstration against the project in Phulbari and named it *Chatro Jubo Shomabesh* (CJS), the Student-Youth Union, and facilitated a couple of other demonstrations under this banner. At the same time, a peasant

¹⁷ Some friends in Phulbari told me actually Asia Energy created PRC to make the compensation or land price negotiations favourable for them. I have no means of evaluating this claim. In his research, Nuremowla also mentions similar confusing information. A group of local political leaders formed the PRC to secure public support in local government elections and, simultaneously forcing Asia Energy to get the supply contracts in the mining project; while some people joined the committee because Asia Energy refused to give them financial facilities (Nuremowla 2012:172).

organization *Jatiyo Krishok Khet Mojur Somiti* (JKKMS), the National Farmer Day-Laborer Union whose followers were also members of PRC, arranged a public gathering where the project's issues were discussed. Meanwhile, the NCBD leaders and other activists from Dhaka started to join the demonstrations of CJS and JKKMS. These activities fostered a revolutionary climate in Phulbari. Meanwhile, the PRC did not involve itself in these demonstrations, but was instead bargaining with Asia Energy about land prices.

In early 2006, when the company started their drilling and survey activities, local protesters and national activists pressured the PRC to add their support to the movement because this committee included most of the acceptable political leaders of the locality. Despite this, the PRC failed to form a strong movement, and their leaders were suspected of having secret relations with Asia Energy. At the same time, the association between NCBD leaders and local communist parties was getting stronger and more popular. By mid-2006, NCBD leaders formed a Phulbari unit with a committee of eleven to twelve persons (they were also the members of the PRC). From now on in this thesis, I will refer this Phulbari unit of NCBD as PNCBD. The PRC leaders did not oppose this enterprise publicly, but were not happy. During an interview, Anu Muhammad told me,

We could not understand why the movement was not getting strong. We suspected that some influential PRC leaders took money from the company for not making the movement stronger. Moreover, this committee was not formed to start and organize any active movement or opposition the mining project; rather its key goal was to ensure proper compensation from the company.

Perceiving the PRC leaders' reluctance, NCBD leaders asked for a mass demonstration to *gherao* the office of Asia Energy on 26th August of 2006¹⁸. The success of this demonstration made the PRC disappear from the scene and handed over the authority of the movement to PNCBD.

¹⁸ Although my participants did not tell me about such an incident, Nuremowla mentions that the leaders of PRC tried to halt this *gherao* of 26th August by distributing leaflets against it (2012:173).

Structural authority

There is no doubt that the PRC initiated the protest movement, but PNCBD sustained it for the last nine years. All the rightist and communist parties joined PRC, but in the PNCBD, the rightist parties could not participate anymore because it conflicted with their capitalist political motives and alliance with the governments. Therefore, when the protest reached its peak through the leadership of the PNCBD, PRC leaders started to leave the movement. The success of 26th August demonstration and signing the Phulbari Agreement with the government secured PNCBD's recognition as the official authority of the movement. During the celebration of last year's Phulbari Day, I saw some of the previous PRC leaders celebrate the day separately from the PNCBD. However, the PNCBD retains the authority of the movement. All the negotiations and compromises with government have been done by the PNCBD and they announce the demonstration programmes. The PNCBD brought a political structure to the movement and connected with the grassroots. The leaders maintain strong connections with the grassroots people to organize and disseminate information about the impacts of the mine.

Since 2006, the NCBD is the theoretical backbone of the Phulbari Movement. This group is an umbrella organization consisting of elements of different leftist political parties. It is the strongest, most active and popular activist group in Bangladesh. The group, led by teachers, students, writers, artists, and activists (mostly followers of communist parties in addition to a few non-political people), was established in 1998. In 1998, the group first resisted the government for leasing a seaport to an international oil company for 199 years. Second, the group resisted the government's policy for gas export (Falguni 2009). Then the group engaged with the Phulbari Movement. Unlike their other movements, in Phulbari this group achieved enormous success and mass support. There were several reasons behind this success, including the fact that this area has a high population density. Compared to other projects the NCBD was opposing, the Phulbari project could have directly affected more people. The area is also home to different groups of marginal people (e.g. Santals or migrants) who were able to organize themselves through the movement. Because of these factors, the movement put the NCBD in a very strong position to force the government to reconsider its interventions.

The PNCBD, on the other hand, has been functioning as the operational backbone of the Phulbari Movement and has a structure similar to that of its mother organization, the NCBD. Despite the

mine's actual location in Birampur sub-district (with a separate NCBD unit), the PNCDB has been leading the movement. The NCBD does all strategic planning in the movement and the PNCBD executes these plans with the help of their secondary and tertiary units. Most of the leaders in these units have active networks in Phulbari town as well as with villagers.

Since 2006, the PNCBD has been collaborating with different local and national communist parties for two key reasons: first, the apolitical leaders could not facilitate the movement without any political association, and second, no one party had the ability to carry out the movement alone. Moreover, Phulbari historically has been a fertile land for communist politics since the British colonial period when it was attached to West Bengal (India). As a result, most of the active leaders of PNCBD were engaged with communist politics. For example, during the 2006 protest, Jatiyo Gonofront (a communist party) had more than 700 village farmers' committees. When the PNCBD formed their village units, they included farmers of these committees because the key local leader of Gonofront was also one of the organizers of the Phulbari Movement. Therefore, for many local people, the movement is now viewed as a protest of communist parties.

The leaders and their leadership

The Phulbari Movement has two kinds of leadership: theoretical and operational. Most of the NCBD leaders belong to the first kind and the second kind consists of PNCBD leaders.

Portrait of a national leader

At present, Anu Muhammad is the member-secretary of the NCBD and key national leader of the Phulbari movement. He signed the Phulbari Agreement with the government in 2006 on behalf of the protesters (see page 108). In addition to the Phulbari Movement, he along with his fellow activists has been protesting against different projects related to mining, port and energy, and especially those projects that have foreign investment. He is one of the key voices to protect national resources from imperialism, neoliberalism and capitalism. Since his student life, he has been involved with communist politics. He published several books and news articles to promote solidarity with the Phulbari Movement. A couple of my participants told me his speeches in different villages ignited people to stage their protest on 26th August 2006. He asked people to

bring only sticks in their hands on that day, and within one week, people of just one village had prepared more than twenty thousand from local bamboo. He retains great influence on the village-level protesters, as well as on the PNCBD leaders. Now he is protesting a thermal power plant project to protect the world's largest mangrove forest – the Sundarbans – adjacent to it. He turned this protest into a national issue by writing newspaper articles, public demonstrations long marches, and TV talk shows.

I found the operational leaders of the PNCBD are engaged with agriculture or business, and they have their own lands for housing and farming in the area. These people maintain good business relations with influential persons in Phulbari municipality. Their key roles have been to convey the message of NCBBD leaders to the villagers, organize them and lead them in demonstrations.

Portrait of a local Bangalee leader

Shariful has been the chief leader of PNCBD since 2006. Agriculture is his source of income, but he does not have to do any farming work. Instead, he hires agricultural labourers for farming. In that sense, he does not have a regular job. He wears mostly traditional Bangladeshi clothes and always rides a motorcycle. Riding a motorcycle and using English words are two common ways for him to attract people. He thinks these are the gestures of people with modern thinking. Despite a wealthy family background, he lives in a mud house, though financially he is fully capable of building a concrete house. I came to know that he does not want to build a concrete house because people will think he took bribes from the coal company to build a house. Moreover, he also wants to show people that he is an ordinary person like most of the villagers are. I found the ringtone of his phone very interesting: it was a famous Bangla humanitarian song. The loud ringer volume is another way to present himself as a humanitarian person who carries all the moral responsibility of protesters. His view on the concept of power was – “power always disturbs people, it always tells people to take it, enjoy it, taste it and abuse it”.

Portrait of a local Santal leader

Shariful's Santal colleague Ramendu has a different kind of personality. He lives with his wife in a mud house in a remote village of Phulbari district. Mostly dependent on small agricultural fields, this Santal leader told me about the chronic hardship he and his family are undergoing now. Despite his position as a key Santal leader, I found him a very introverted person. Apart from demonstrations, I rarely saw him with other leaders. Even in the demonstrations, he is not a loud voice. This man told me how Bangalee people are forcibly grabbing Santals' lands; however, he still supports Bangalee leaders in the movement in order to protect his small amount of land. He also accused some national level indigenous leaders because of their controversial relation with government on this mining issue. He told me "I engaged with the movement because of my commitment to my fellow poor Santals and if I just make call, more than fifty people will come here right now".

The weak, the grassroots, and the others

Who is weak? James Scott borrowed Barrington Moore's words and mentioned "a class over whom the wave of progress is about to roll" (Scott 1985:27). Let me talk about the 'weak' groups of the Phulbari Movement. There is a popular tale in Bangladesh that people from northern parts of the country are simpler and more kind-hearted than others. However, at the same time these people fought in the historical Tebhaga Movement of indigenous sharecroppers to reduce the share given to powerful landowners from one-half to one-third (Hashmi 1994; cited in Annie 2010:71). In the Phulbari Movement, they showed their revolutionary faces. Upon asking about the 26th August 2006, the key national leader told me "this protest was not our plan. Local people pressured us to declare that". Regarding that day, one protester told me:

It was a pre-declared *gherao* of the company's office but when the leaders saw the enormous number of protesters and government troops, they cancelled it suspecting the possibility of violent conflict. However, the crowd did not listen to them. The angry protesters wanted to destroy the company's office when the troops fired on them. If the troops did not fire, the protesters might have killed them.

Police shot Babu, a former van puller, among others on that day. Babu told me, “On the 26th of August, there were no male family members at home. We outnumbered the number of bullets of the government troops. How many people could they have murdered?” Even people from some areas where there was not any protest activity joined the demonstration. Two groups were very active in the movement: the Santals and the migrants. Despite a conservative atmosphere, the women of Phulbari also showed their unprecedented participation in the protests.

There have been some groups of people who never supported the movement. For example, people from outside the project acquisition area did not support the movement. Local MPs and people who were supposed to benefit from the mining project (e.g. by subcontracts for small parts of mining like digging or drilling) always opposed the movement. Currently, according to the protesters some young addicts have been supporting the company for cash to buy drugs (more about these people on page 101).

Marginality and uprising of the Santals

Different Adivasi (indigenous) communities, e.g. Santal, Oraon, Munda and Pahan, have been living in Phulbari and its adjacent localities for generations. Among these groups, Santals outnumber all the other groups and therefore faced the greatest threat of displacement. Most of the Santals do not have resources other than land, and depend entirely on agriculture for their livelihood. They have been living in this locality for generations based on ancestral rights. The Santal leaders told me that their ancestors started settlement here in this hilly and forested area centuries ago¹⁹. They never felt the need for government recognized land title until the government started setting Bangalee people here. After the establishment of independent Bangladesh, the Bangalee settlers abused the Santals’ lack of land title, encroached on their land and displaced several Santal families. Many Santal families are still fighting legal proceedings against Bangalee people for their land rights. Recently the Santals sought government recognized land documents to avoid land loss. However, there are still some Santal families who do not have proper land documents, and before the protests never felt the need because they have been living with Bangalee people for several decades. It was not hard for them to

¹⁹ The Santals are exclusively subsistence farmers and do not produce for market. Their ties to the land are rooted in their initial forest clearance, which made the land agriculturally productive.

realize that without government land documents they would not get sufficient compensation if the government implemented the mining project. Even if the Santals with proper land documents received compensation that would not be sufficient to compensate for their identity, religion and social relations based on their ancestral land. Because of this, they deployed their best efforts in resisting the project.

The protest organizers approached the Santals through *manjhi* (see the meaning in page 14) council. The NCBD leaders requested the *mondals* (the administrative chief of *manjhi* council) to inspire all Santals in their respective areas to participate in the movement. Sreekant, a Santal shot by police on the 26th of August, told me about that day, “The leaders sent trucks and buses for us to go to Phulbari. Not only male Santals, but females also participated in that protest. We participated in the protest with our traditional bow and arrows” (Figure 1). My Santal friend Ramendu made clear the Santals’ stakes in the movement:



Figure 1: Indigenous people joined in a long-march in 2010

Photo: Rabindranath Soren

http://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/gr_action_alerts-bangladesh.pdf

This land was our forest. Why do we need paper for our forest and hills? We will not leave our three-crop land to make way for a coalmine. If we are displaced, we would be nomadic again. We have our history, our memory based on this land. If resettled, we will lose our identity.

The last hope of migrants

Phulbari has a large village of migrants. About forty or fifty years ago, before the birth of independent Bangladesh, the ancestors of these migrants resettled here in this hill and forest locality after the Ganges River eroded their homestead lands. Probably in 1968 a very few people from erosion-affected areas of Nawabganj district in Northern Bangladesh migrated to the forest areas of

Phulbari (Nuremowla 2012:122). They cleared the forests and made it suitable for agriculture.

Nuremowla explains that –

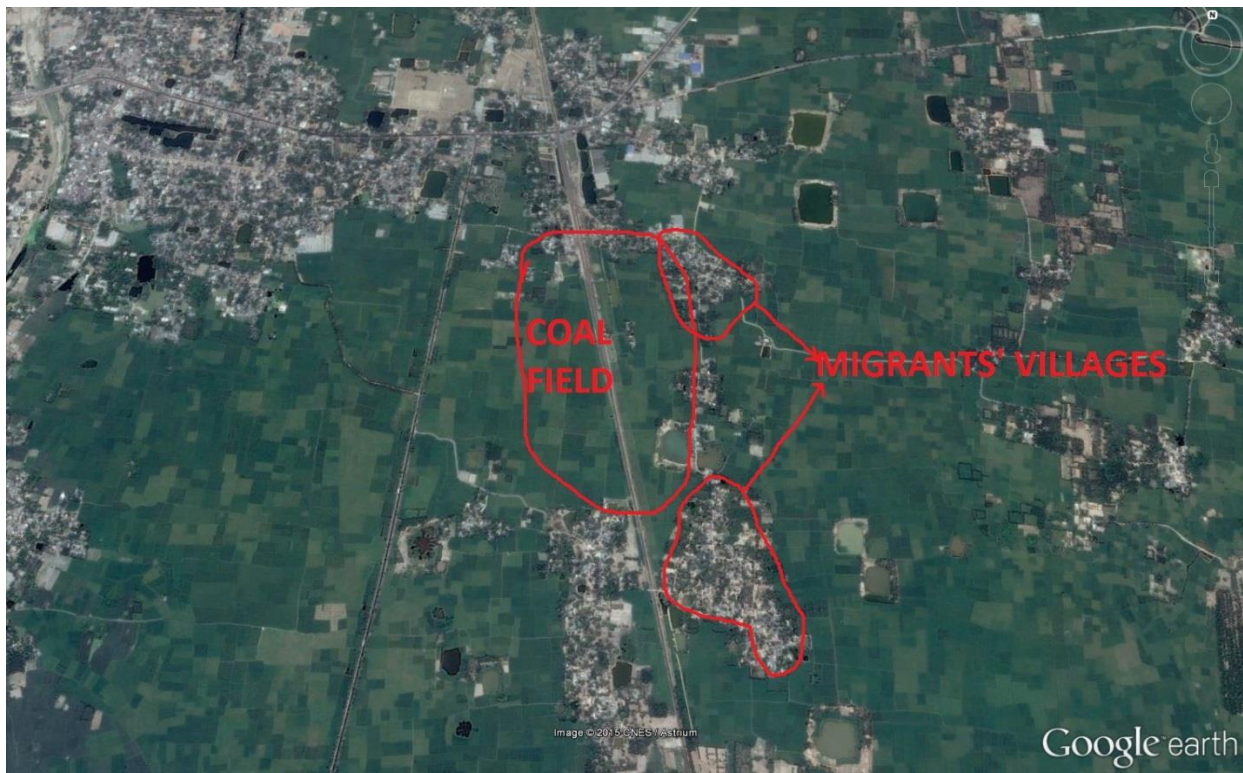
A large area was gradually cleared to accommodate a population that now exceeds 2500 individuals living in approximately 500 houses. Over the last four decades the people have asserted their rights to the land through their presence, despite legal action from the forest authority supported by the Government. The first group's initial success in securing land by clearing forest attracted more people from the river-erosion affected areas to migrate to this 'new place' (2012:123).

Portrait of a migrant protester

Jahir (age 42) is a local college teacher whose grandparents came to Phulbari after losing everything in riverbank erosion. He recently built a house in Phulbari municipality though his family still lives in a village area. He is quite influential among the migrants. I had to get his permission before going to the village of migrants. Like many other people in Phulbari, he also has a motorcycle, which helps him a lot to go to migrants' villages to organize any quick demonstration and come back to the municipality for planning with other leaders. He said that the migrants have been living in Phulbari for last 40 or 50 years. The migrants fought with the Bangalee people to resettle here. They did not have any place in the society. People even refused to build marital relations with them. After these 40 years, now they have their own identity in Phulbari. They know that if they resettle again they will lose this identity again.

The migrants' extremely densely populated village is very close to the coal basin (Map 3) and were supposed to be displaced at the very beginning of this mining operation. Migrants have served as the muscle of the movement in order to save their last place to live. This group of migrants are locally called *dolil-bihin lok* (people without land documents). This title is not a respected one in traditional rural society. The migrants think their ancestors were the first group of people in this village but the gradual peopling process initiated a competition over land ownership and put them in danger of losing their ancestors' land. However, over the last half century, these migrants worked hard to

secure social and cultural status in this locality. Now they believe that if mining displaces them, there is less chance that they will find a new empty place for resettlement in this densely populated region. Furthermore, they would not get proper compensation because they lack proper documentation. This hopeless situation led them to pursue desperate opposition against the mining project. The Bangalee and Santal people actively supported the migrants in the movement because they showed enormous courage and skills in violent confrontations with government troops. Some movement leaders treat the migrants as the militant wing of the movement.



Map 3: Locations of migrants' villages around the coal-mining project

Striking the patriarchy by women

In agrarian Bangladesh, usually men do farming work in the fields while women are confined to household chores and child rearing. Women contribute equally to the maintenance of households compared to their male counterparts, but their work is not recognized for having any visible or direct economic returns, unlike men's farming activities. Women's works are often treated as supplementary to the men's jobs. Long ago Arens and Beurden said, "The man earns the family income and she must sustain his labor power by preparing food for him" (1980:47). This division of

labour is very relaxed among poor people, while it is rigorous among the rich people who do not allow women to work outside of the home.

However, women of Phulbari staged a large demonstration on 27th August 2006 (Figure 2), when men were hiding to avoid legal actions by government. One of my participants told me that if women had not come out of the house, then they might have lost this struggle (see page 26). Without any large demonstrations, women do not usually take part in the daily practices of the movement, but ignoring their contributions would be a big mistake. The



Figure 2: Adivasi and Bangalee women's resistance

Photo: Munem Wasif

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/munemwasif/with/1476839843/>

movement was never limited to only physical confrontations with the government and the company; rather symbolic demonstrations also generated solidarity. The picture of women's awakening in 2006 imparted a very strong message throughout the nation that poor farmers are losing their means of survival so brutally that women of the area even came out from the houses and gathered on the street. Women's resistance in the movement moved national and international activist groups.

Even though I did not see the protest in 2006, I can perceive women's heroism from the narratives of male protesters. One key national leader told me,

The communist parties basically encouraged women to move into the street. On the second day of our first demonstration (27th August 2006), government troops took control of Phulbari from protesters. On that day, women and Santals broke the ice and played a crucial role to sustain the movement. They did not follow any leaders like the men. They were simply spontaneous and chased away government forces from the villages. Usually they do not participate in regular meetings but whenever there is an emergency they never hesitate

because they have stronger feelings than men for livelihood, house, children and other kin relations.

However, this is not the usual scenario. I also heard mixed responses from others. Another movement leader told me,

We do not like women's public presence in our meetings because our society and religion do not support it. Still, I should recognize that the protest in a sense started by the women because when the company started to visit the villages they found mostly the women at home because the men were busy in the fields. At that time, women resisted the company's interventions by not giving them any household information and also chased away them from the house.



Figure 3: Women's participation in 2014's Phulbari Day

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

Portrait of a woman protester

Luky Akter (age 39) is one of the leaders who led women at a crucial point of the movement. Prior to 26th August (2006), this woman along with other male leaders visited several villages to organize people for demonstrations. After brutal suppression by the government, the male protesters found it hard to protest; she, however, is one of those who brought out women on the street to protest and facilitated a successful protest on 27th August 2006. She is not highly educated, only can read and sign. Now she is running a business supplying paper to local presses. I found her quite remarkable because talking with her was always comfortable. Usually Phulbari's rural women are quite conservative Muslims and strictly maintain purdah (veiling). However,

some courageous women like her broke this religious and social shackle and participated in the movement. I saw her in every demonstration and organizing meeting prior to demonstrations. She said the movement leaders came to their houses to warn them about the adverse impacts of the mining project prior to the 2006's movement. She was particularly concerned about being uprooted from her own house. She knew it would be hard for her family to resettle somewhere else, even with compensation. Moreover, the male members of her family participated in 26 August's demonstration and she was concerned about their safety. At that night when the male members fled from Phulbari to save their lives and government troops started to come to their houses to arrest them, she along with other women chased the troops. Then they organized themselves and gathered in Phulbari municipality next morning to resist the armed forces. Their parades motivated the male protesters to come back to Phulbari.

Protest and actors beyond Phulbari

Different activist organizations have shown their interest and, so far, supported and enriched the movement. They indirectly helped to make the movement a national-resource issue and extended it at the international level. I will cite some examples based on my experience. *First*, I do not doubt the intentions of communist parties of the NCBD. Still, I should mention that these parties used the movement to boost their lost political fortunes in the country. Recently they protested several government projects involving foreign stakeholders but succeeded in none of these protests the way they had in the Phulbari Movement. As a result, they now count it as a major *political project*²⁰.

Second, during Phulbari Day of 2014, I met several people including a university professor and a retired bureaucrat who were accompanied by the NCBD leaders. These people do not know the protesters and the protesters also do not know them. Nevertheless, they delivered their speeches on

²⁰ Similarly, in the Nandigram movement of 2007 in West Bengal (India), the protesters received support from the Maoist (Naxalites, a communist guerilla group who are considered as a threat to the internal security of India), while for the Maoists the movement was a channel to strengthen their base in the West Bengal (Tenhunen 2011:404).

the stage of the demonstration. I can say that they wanted to grab the media focus on that day, but at the same time their presence also boosted the visibility of the movement.

Third, I also encountered some people who came to Phulbari and met the leaders because they wanted to write articles on this issue in national newspapers. Some of them do not know the background, motives, organization and composition of the movement. One of them called me during fieldwork to ask about the details of the movement.

Fourth, there are also national and international activist groups, who voluntarily or financially support the Phulbari Movement or do research on it. These include, for example, SEHD, IAP, Delhi Forum, Cultural Survival and others. There are also some internet-based NGOs like BanglaPraxis or Sourcewatch. I think some of these groups are not the permanent stakeholders of the movement because after 2006's protest many of them moved away. For example, either they stopped updating information on the movement on their website or they removed the specific page dealing with the issue.

Finally, there is also a UK-branch of the NCBD. The members of this branch are Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK, and most of them have personal contacts with the NCBD. Their involvement is only during the AGM of the company in London (details on page 65).

Plans and tactics of the protests

The movement started with very limited and relaxed planning, but the situation led them to organize it in a structured and political manner. At the very first official demonstration in 2006, two things happened: mass participation and the government troops' firing on protesters. Unexpected and brutal repression from the state motivated the leaders to produce a long-term plan for the movement. In this section, I will discuss how the plans of protests in the Phulbari Movement flowed from both top-down and bottom-up directions while the state and the company relied only on the former one.

Layering the organization

To make the movement permanent, since 2006 the NCBD layered the organization of the PNCBD into secondary and tertiary units: union PNCBD and village PNCBD. A union is an important

administrative unit consisting of nine to ten villages. In 2006's demonstration, the union PNCBD played an important role in the movement. Most of the leaders of this unit are either retired or active members of union administration. That means they have a political background and good acceptance among ordinary protesters. On the other hand, the village PNCBD unit has the most intimate relation with ordinary protesters. Members of this group mostly live with them. Leaders are local wealthy and educated people who have good network connections with union and municipality leaders. The leaders divided the villages into different blocks and created a distinct committee for each block.

The central NCBD does all the strategic planning of the movement, including agendas for demonstrations or negotiation strategies with the government, while these tertiary units execute actions like gathering people in demonstrations or staging physical confrontations with government troops. The PNCBD combines the plans and actions. Not only in Phulbari, the NCBD also established its units in other sub-districts inside the land acquisition plan of Asia Energy.

'Together we stand, divided we work'

The leaders know very well that this is a long-term movement that requires enormous financial and human resources. Therefore, in every protest, they divide all the tasks into different groups. For example, in 2006's protest the leaders created different sub-committees. One sub-committee was appointed to resist the potential government attacks with sticks and bamboos; one was performing the role of transportation facilitator by sending buses and trucks to remote villages to bring protesters to the municipality; one was maintaining communication with national activists; and another was campaigning with grassroots villagers. Even in last years' Phulbari Day, instead of hiring extra people, I saw the PNCBD chief split the activities among four groups (finance, logistic, communication and monument repairing). All expenses had to be sanctioned by the finance committee and required the oral or written approval of the PNCBD chief. I saw several necessary things like purchasing flags, flowers, and so on held up because of not having sanction by the finance committee on time. All of these were reflecting a shadow bureaucracy in action (details on page 59-63).

Using the landscape

The hill population of Zomia²¹ in Southeast Asia have been using their landscape throughout the remote highlands to resist state efforts to integrate and monetize the resources and lands of the hills into the statecraft: their strategy was based on constant nomadism (Scott 2009:4, 22, 23). So far, the leaders used the landscapes of Phulbari in very effective ways. Since 2006, they use the Nimtola Triangle of the municipality to stage all their meetings and demonstrations. This triangle has connecting routes to the villages, people can easily use those to gather in the meetings, and this triangle is located on the hub of the municipality. This plan was proved highly effective in 2006's protest. People from different villages could join the protests quickly through the connecting routes (Map 4). Moreover, when government forces started to shoot, they promptly fled through these paths to save their lives.



Map 4: The paths of planning to gather mass people in Nimtola Triangle on 26th August 2006

²¹ "Zomia is a new name for virtually all the lands at altitudes above roughly three hundred meters all the way from the Central Highlands of Vietnam to northeastern India and traversing five Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) and four provinces of China. ... Zomia is the largest remaining region of the world whose peoples have not yet been fully incorporated into nation-states" (Scott 2009:ix).

The protesters have another effective trick: Phulbari is the entrance to Dinajpur district and, therefore, whenever the protesters block it, the government is compelled to respond immediately because Dinajpur is a significant district for Northern Bangladesh.

Generating solidarity and coverage

The protesters knew their strengths and limitations and they used these very effectively. They knew that marching by themselves could be very difficult. Therefore, to pass their message quickly and effectively around the country, they contacted the national activists with extended networks and effectively used them to generate support for the protest. For example, the protesters (specifically, a peasant organization JKKMS) calculated an estimate of financial losses because of this project (see page 91). However, the peasant organization did not publish the findings itself; rather, they requested the NCBD to publish it to secure extended publicity and credibility.

The leaders, furthermore, have been effectively using the traditional agrarian structure and its stereotypes in this protest. This area always has been the source of grain products stock for the country and the *zamindari* (feudal) system had a great impact on that. After the abolition of feudalism, the socio-economic situation has not changed a great deal. There has been a clear distinction between the owners of means of production (the rich class) and the forces of production (the wage labourers or the poor class). The former group has enormous dominance and influence on the latter group. The leaders first contacted the influential people of each village and in most cases, these people had a big amount of land and people dependent on those lands. Bailey thinks, “Leadership is an enterprise. To be successful as a leader is to gain access to more resources than one’s opponents” (Bailey 1969:36). The leaders’ trick of appointing rich people as leaders worked successfully. One poor farmer told me “the leaders came to our village with Yasuf (local wealthy farmer) to invite us in the movement. Still we do not have any village PNCBD committee but Yasuf is leading us since 2006”. Regarding a leader’s efficacy, another participant told me, “he is from rich family, he is educated and his father is a former MP. He certainly knows how to lead”. These rich people have been supporting the movement financially from the beginning, mostly because the key source of their wealth is the bulk amount of land they own. Though they were supposed to receive good amount of compensation for their land, most of them did not support the mining project because even this good compensation from rural lands was not enough for them to buy land in comparatively urban areas. Furthermore, in agrarian societies, land resources carry more honor and

prestige than the cash money. Lands are considered as permanent resources in villages while the cash money is more temporary. However, the leaders did not stop here. They also started to campaign with poor villagers who had no resources and livelihood other than agriculture. This plan also worked very well.

Mobilizing community emotion

The Muslim community observes *Janaazah* (religious funeral ceremony) for dead people. The movement leaders arranged a *Janaazah* for the dead on the day after the government forces' shooting on 26th August. This was a *gayebana janaazah*²², and it sparked emotions and fed confidence among the protesters (Luthfa 2011:14). This religious ritual held by the non-religious communist leaders was appreciated among the grassroots community and was a great example of how the leaders used community emotions.

Agrarian society always neglects the poor classes, but the PNCBD leaders did not neglect the poor, and put a lot of them in leadership instead. This tactic fuelled mass participation in the movement for a long time. For example, I asked a Santal leader about Santal participation in the movement, and he responded,

The then leaders invited us to the Phulbari municipality to discuss matters. The leaders arranged special food for us and said they did not arrange food for others except the Santals because they love poor Adivasi people. Then they said how this mining project would destroy our agricultural land, water and livelihood.

This feast was an honour to this leader and his fellow Santals. This honour motivated them to follow PNCBD leaders with conviction. This leader also had the chance to visit India with other protest leaders to observe situations of open-pit mining. Moreover, the leaders engaged many peasants involved with JKKMS in tertiary units of the PNCBD. This honour and empowerment inspired grassroots people to participate in the movement. Another strong strategy to secure

²² *Janazah* means the funeral. In Islam before taking a corpse into the grave, the family members, relatives, neighbours and other people pray together putting the corpse in the front of all. *Gayebana Janazah* is the practice of funeral when the corpse is absent. For example, a house was burnt to ashes with a family. It was not possible to present the corpses for funeral. In that case, people can pray for the corpse without their presence.

community support was to help injured protesters. Helping injured protesters prompted hundreds of poor protesters to support the movement and its leaders. One injured protester told me:

I was shot by police and was admitted to hospital for a long time. Our leaders helped me in paying medical expenses. No other political parties took care of me. The leaders gave me a couple of buffalos to maintain my livelihood by selling milk because I was the only earning-person of my family. They built me a concrete house. Our leaders have no weakness. They maintain good behaviour with me.

Practice of secrecy

The protesters maintain secrecy as part of their tactics. Despite ideological frictions, the popular publicity of the movement portrays a strong bond among the protest leaders and the political parties embedded under the PNCBD. On the surface, conflicts are hard to observe because the protesters maintain certain strategies of secrecy. For example, decision-making meetings for negotiations with the government or donation collections are quite often limited to five or six key leaders. No physical or financial confrontations among the political parties are allowed to surface in front of general protesters. Sometimes the leaders also use secret strategies in demonstrations that the ordinary protesters might be unaware of. For example, in the demonstration of August 2006, the plan was that the then chief leader would not come out publicly; rather the second leader would lead the movement. If the government arrested him, then the chief would come out publicly and lead the movement. However, this plan imparted the wrong message among the protesters. Some people misinterpreted this strategic absence to the ordinary protesters, saying that the leaders fled and abandoned the movement.

Negotiating power

The protesters have negotiated with the government on many occasions. The two most significant negotiations happened in 2006 and 2012. In 2006, after four days of continuing protest, the government and protesters reached a six-point agreement (more details on page 108). In 2012, local protesters blocked all highways and railway passage through Phulbari and shut down all kinds of institutions to halt government's decision to let the company survey the area. Finally, after two days' continuing protest, the District Commissioner of Dinajpur negotiated with the protesters by promising that the government would not allow Asia Energy to carry out any activity in Phulbari if

they withdrew their protest (see page 106). In these two negotiations, the protesters maintained some specific strategies. For example, if there was enough of a crowd to resist attacks from the government forces, then they maximized the demands and if there was not enough crowd, they relaxed the demands. They tried to avoid demonstrations during significant events like school exams to avoid annoying the public. They chose the places of negotiations in such areas where they have strength and influence; they did not go to places where the government might arrest them. Finally, they always included national activists in the negotiation committee to get media attention and focus nation-wide solidarity.

Practices and celebrations of protests

Protesters play different roles based on their age, socio-economic background or education. For example, average rural farmers usually participate in village meetings or marches. Young protesters stage the confrontations, set up roadblocks and make strikes successful. Protesters with higher academic degrees avoid the enterprises of company agents. Comparatively rich and young protesters are active in social media or internet blogs to generate solidarity among the people at large.

Formal practices

Formal practices include the village meetings (to maintain communication with villagers living in remote areas), public gatherings (to declare any specific protest, e.g. protest to the government's decision of allowing the Asia Energy to carry out surveys), periodical marches or parades (to protest company activities, e.g., the activities of company agents) and strikes (usually to protest the government repression). In most of the



Figure 4: March with slogans

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

cases, the PNCBD organizes these protests. However, I was waiting for more than two weeks to participate in such a demonstration arranged by PNCBD. Finally, the chance came, but not in a

comfortable way. On a warm weekend evening, the PNCBD leaders heard that the recruited agents of the company had mounted a campaign in Phulbari to gather support in favour of the mining project (see more on page 100). Instantly, the leaders planned to stage a counter-demonstration. They promptly gathered more than 100 people and within half an hour started a procession with slogans. I participated in that. On that night, the protesters blocked the national highway and the leaders presented their speeches to inspire their followers and to restrain the agents of Asia Energy. Later, I participated in several such marches. Usually, led by eight to ten leaders, fifty to five hundred people march across the municipality of Phulbari with specific slogans (Figure 4). In these marches, there are always particular persons who shout the slogan and all other people repeat it.

Common slogans on marches

Phulbarite kbhoni hole,
(Mine in Phulbari),
Jolbe agun ghore ghore.
(Nobody will approve).

Pran prokeriri poribesh,
(Life, nature,
environment),
bachao phulbari, bachao
desb.
(Save! Save!)

Jomi'r bodole kbhoni
(Land for mine)
Manina, manbona.
(Don't want, don't
want).

Rokte lekha 6 dofa,
(Blood-written 6
points),
Briha jete dibo na.
(Cannot be failed).

The first organized meeting I participated in was a night meeting with protesters in a distant village. Since the villagers were working in the fields in the daytime, protest leaders visited them during the night (Figure 5). This was a preparatory meeting for inviting people in celebration of Phulbari Day. The leaders also use these meetings to organize the ordinary protesters at the grassroots level who are the movement's source of power.



Figure 5: Night meetings with villagers

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

The largest public gathering I participated in was on Phulbari Day. More than five thousand people participated in that gathering (Figure 6). All the key national and local leaders presented their speeches and determined the next

goals of the movement. Among these five thousand people, the majority were followers of different political parties. However, there were also apolitical protesters. This gathering was planned and everything went according to plan. Nonetheless, a leader told me such kinds of gatherings are not always planned. For example, in 2006's protest, one hundred thousand people participated. The leaders did not expect such a crowd and could not handle it properly. They could not stop the angry protesters from engaging in disputes with aggressive government forces. After three people's deaths, both the protest and the protesters were totally out of their control.

Besides these organized gatherings, I found that at least two of my participants wrote books and analytical articles in newspapers about the movement. The leaders inspired them in this regard. The key PNCBD leader told me,

I always encourage the protesters in trying new ways of protest, even if they make a mistake. For example, in posters, in speech or in books, sometimes they write wrong or inappropriate words or information. However, I never rudely criticize them – rather, I correct them.

Informal practices

Once this area was hill and forest-covered and still has many mosquitos and different bugs. My friend Amirul told me to use a mosquito coil to stay healthy. However, following his idea, I was walking to the nearest shop and he suddenly stopped me. He requested me not to go there because the owner of that shop was a supporter of the mining project. He took me to a different shop, whose owner, according to him, was a protester in the movement. This was an example of informal and everyday boycotting in the movement.



Figure 6: Public gathering in a demonstration

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

When I was planning my fieldwork, I was told that I should get permission of the NCBD leaders first, then the PNCBD leaders. I had to inform them about my research before going there. Otherwise, the village-level protesters might have harassed me. It seemed to me that the leaders made Phulbari closed to outsiders. Furthermore, despite securing leaders' permission, I could not free myself from being constantly spied upon – by both the supporters and opponents of the movement. Situations got worse when I had my camera or notebook with me. During my first participation in a demonstration, three people asked me who I was and why I was there. However, they were not aggressive to me. This mistrust originated since the company started to recruit local agents to drum up support for the mining project (see page 101).



Figure 7: Protesters giving interview to a news channel

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

Virtual protests

Virtual and technological protests have also been shaping the landscape of movements and resistance. For example, Tenhunen describes how mobile phones affected the conflicts of Nandigram in West Bengal (2011). Both the opposition and ruling party made effective use of mobile phones to secure their goals. The opposition activists used phones to organize strikes, impart their messages about the ruling party's misdeeds to their party high command, enabling the leaders to react faster to coordinate political action. On the other hand, the ruling party used the phone to communicate with grassroots supporters and regional leaders to handle the opposition's tactics (Tenhunen 2011:405-406). In the Phulbari Movement, the key national leader told me, upon facing violent repression by government forces on 26th, he used his mobile phone to communicate with media personnel, fellow leaders and other colleagues, to take care of the wounded protesters, and to

give further directions about the protest. I saw that he maintains communications with local protesters and journalists mainly over phone.

Facebook (FB) has also been an influential network of this protest. I saw, one night, the protesters identifying a secret agent through FB because he posted something on his FB page against the movement. In addition, there are enormous numbers of blogs and websites on the movement run by protesters, journalists, organizations, individual researchers, human rights activists, etc. The NCBD also has a distinct website where the protesters archive all the documents (photo, newspaper articles, research papers etc.) of the movement.



Figure 8: Performing revolutionary songs

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

Media has been playing a great role in the movement since 2006 (Figure 7). A protester told me that although some media are now supporting the company²³, in 2006 they partially led the movement: they taught people what to say, how to talk in front of the camera. They covered all demonstrations, which helped the movement to raise nation-wide solidarity.

Commemoration

Connerton says, “Knowledge of all human activities in the past is possible only through a knowledge of their traces” (1989:13). The protesters of the Phulbari Movement traced the history and pride of the movement in different commemorative ways. Phulbari Day (26th August) is the biggest

²³ Some protesters believe that some journalists of both print and electronic media are now broadcasting news in favor of the mining project because their editors took financial payments from the company. I think, in 2006, the movement was breaking news for the media, while now they mostly broadcast the demonstrations during the Phulbari Day and if there is any unexpected events of protest (e.g. demonstrations concerning the company CEO’s recent visit). Except for some TV talk shows and news articles, the movement is not on the media frequently.

demonstration of the movement to commemorate the martyrs of 2006, and I am fortunate that I could witness it during my fieldwork. Protesters from all over the Phulbari area gather on that day to mourn, honour and remember the heroes by offering flowers to their monuments (Figure 9), sharing their sacrifices, singing revolutionary songs (Figure 8) and showing the history of this protest through documentary film (Figure 10). The day ends with the declaration of the next goal of the movement by NCBD leaders. From the experience of this day, I learned that this protest is not only a struggle to survive, but also a joy in daily life. I saw men and women wearing new clothes, embracing each other and exchanging greetings like any other religious and cultural festival. It is an occasion for absentee inhabitants return to Phulbari to join the celebration.



Figure 9: Offering flowers to the martyrs' monument



Figure 10: Documentary film on the movement

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014.

Summary

Local people with both political and non-political background first resisted the company when it started its activities. Although this group (PRC) eventually failed to launch an effective movement, its role was taken over by a national group (NCBD) who formed an alliance between national activists and rural communities that is still continuing.

Land was the key issue that attracted the most active groups in the movement: the Bangalee peasants, the Santals and the migrants. Land was the main source of livelihood for all three groups but for the Santals it was much more. Land was the symbol of their indigenous identity and ancestral

memory and rights. For the migrants, the forestland they cleared and settled decades ago was the last hope of survival. Threat to losing land without any compensation (because of not having proper land documents) motivated the migrants to expend all their strength in the movement. The Bangalee peasants were also solely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Evaluations of risks centered on the land brought these three groups together to halt the company and the state from grabbing their lands.

The engagement of the Santals shows how the Phulbari struggle became a new arena for the participation of previously marginalized actors, and this is also shown with regard to gender. Women of Phulbari played a very significant role in sustaining the movement. The traditional patriarchy could not keep them from participating in protests when needed. The movement, then, helped to transform Phulbari's social landscape. In the next chapter I examine in detail the ways the movement changed over time, and how the movement changed the political landscape.

Chapter 3

Modifying the Movement, Transforming the Political Landscape

ফুলবাড়ির মানুষ যেমন সরল, বর্ষার কাদার মত, তেমনই আবার যখন চৈত্রের খরার মত শক্ত হয়ে যাবে, তখন আপনি ফুলবাড়িতে পা রাখতে পারবেননা।

The people of Phulbari are very simple and easygoing - like the mud soaked in rainwater of the monsoon, but they can also be hard and solid like the soil in summer drought. If it happens, you cannot enter into the Phulbari.

- Strategic warning in a popular speech of a popular leader to the local Member of Parliament (MP) supporting the mining project.

After a couple of weeks of observations and interviews, I became convinced that both the protesters and their participation in the movement were based on a moral commitment to save their locality, land and livelihood – until I talked with two protesters. Varun, a customary Santal leader, told me:

Besides the company agents, we often suspect the NCBD leaders: whether they have been capitalizing on our trust because they are also Bangalee people. They did not put their best effort in implementing the Phulbari Agreement. We suspect the leaders took money from the company for becoming less active in the movement. Moreover, they are from Dhaka; if the government acquires the place, they would not lose their land.

Khaleque told me: “the common dream of the movement is now divided: some have been dreaming to be councillor of the municipality while the others have been dreaming of money”. These two protesters implied that the leaders have not only moral but also growing political and financial motives.

I observed that the NCBD leaders recently started to visit Phulbari more frequently to encourage local leaders and protesters because, according to some leaders, these local ‘lay’ people do not understand what danger they are facing and what kind of conspiracies are going on. A strong communication gap had evidently been developing between the protesters and the leaders: while unsophisticated villagers could not see any visible enemy at present, the leaders could even see the invisible enemy!

The Phulbari Movement has been gradually changing the physical and political landscapes of the locality. For example, the PNCBD office was located just beside the national road through Phulbari. After the movement began, this roadside location turned into the socio-economic hub of Phulbari sub-district and transformed the previous ‘downtown’ area into a residential space. In this chapter, I will show what kinds of changes the leaders adopted in the movement. In particular, I will discuss how and why the movement extended its footprint beyond Phulbari, how it shifted from a moral to a political struggle with consequences on the political and social landscapes of Phulbari.

An institutional look

Even after long conversations on different issues, Shariful, the current PNCBD chief, would not give me time for an interview. Finally, after cancelling three or four times, he talked with me for an hour. He confessed to me that he did not want to talk with me about the movement but could not reject me because the central NCBD chief referred me to him and asked him to help me. I had another similar experience. One of the village organizers of the movement, who was also a member of one of the communist parties, cancelled one date and was not answering my phone calls prior to the rescheduled date of interview. Still, I went to his house and talked with him. He told me with a smile,

When you asked me for an interview, I discussed it with our party leader (also an influential leader of the movement) whether I should give an interview to you. After his positive signal, I agreed to talk with you but delayed.

These two experiences explicitly indicated that the movement leaders have developed a very organized institutional structure over the years, so that even the grassroots organizers had to secure permission before talking to someone about the movement. The Phulbari Movement adopted a formal institutional framework for their struggle: a structure in between bureaucratic organization (rigid division of labour and centralized decision-making process) and informal institution (segmented leadership, informal networks and overarching ideology) (Jenkins 1983:539). Let me explain.

There was a time when the villagers were actively involved in the planning of demonstrations. However, now most of the demonstrations are arranged by the PNCBD and the ordinary villagers participate in the protests as the “large mass”. PNCBD has specific persons for specific duties in the demonstrations, for example: leadership, media coverage, physical confrontation, financial settlements, and speeches at public gatherings. For example, if you find any media coverage on the movement, you will mostly watch Ariful and Shariful, who are always talking with journalists as PNCBD representatives (Figure 11). Many of the participants could not tell me the plans of the movement. Nor is this confined to planning: there is other evidence that the movement is now a headquarters-based struggle.



Figure 11: Leaders giving interviews to TV journalists

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

Formal office space: Max Weber believed that the modern officialdom is constituted of some important elements, e.g. management, permanent office authority and a bureau (Weber, et al. 1948:196-197). Over the years, the leaders and organizers worked to ground the movement in “official space”. But when I first went to Phulbari, there was no formal office for the protest or its participants. The PNCBD had an office two years previously and, after the completion of the lease, the property owner did not renew the contract. Since last year, to celebrate the Phulbari Day and to revive the protest, PNCBD leaders started to look for a new office space. They took a long time to find one because no property owner was ready to rent their space to them. The protesters believed that the property owners were afraid that rightist political parties and the local MP would go against them if they gave their space to the PNCBD. This office space was important for the movement leaders because without any visible space it was hard to demonstrate the presence of the movement. Moreover, a demonstration requires diversified official activities, which were difficult to maintain

without a fixed space. In the end, the protesters rented a new place as a formal office and I saw that all local movement activities were being conducted from this office during my fieldwork (Figure 12).

Inactive auxiliary units: Secondary and tertiary PNCBD units²⁴ have been important in the movement. Many protesters told me that before 2006's protest, hundreds of village units were active in gathering people and securing their support. However, now most of these units are inactive in the locality. Imagining their victory won, many local leaders pulled away from grassroots people over the years. This resulted in a stagnation of auxiliary units of the PNCBD (see page 97-98).



Figure 12: Installing signboard for new office space

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

Although the NCBD established units in sub-districts, like the PNCBD, they are not proactive in the movement. Consequently, protest leaders have been losing their grassroots connections, as well as their solidarity with other sub-districts. As a result, the movement has been gradually turning from a place-based protest to a PNCBD-based organization with headquarters in the municipality.

Seeking financial autonomy: The local PNCBD leaders had strong connections with the central NCBD leaders. For any significant demonstration, all national leaders come to Phulbari. This participation helped the movement in attracting extensive media coverage. Most significantly, this bond translates into financial help for the movement. Nonetheless, the PNCBD protesters have been seeking financial autonomy for themselves instead of sole dependency on their national or international allies. In this they are progressing slowly. For example, they took financial help from central NCBD leaders in building the new office but the local leaders planned to share the monthly rent of the office according to their ability to pay.

²⁴ Union and village units of the PNCBD. Leadership of these units consists of nine to eleven persons according to the population size of the union or village.

It was not surprising for me to see that the leaders were having financial difficulties in operating a movement in a locality where significant portion of inhabitants were impoverished. On several occasions, the leaders told me that operating this protest for the last nine years required enormous financial resources and they could not bear it all by themselves. The chief leader of the movement has been serving in this position for a long time because his wealth allows him to contribute more to finance the protest than other leaders. To celebrate some important occasions, like Phulbari Day, the PNCBD received financial help from central NCBD leaders, but this has never been enough for them. Therefore, they take donations from wealthy local people. The leaders themselves also contribute, proportional to their ability, in some expenses like refreshment for grassroots workers, printing leaflets for upcoming demonstrations, buying flowers to offer at martyrs' monuments, and so on. Interestingly, in addition to this, the protesters receive another kind of support. I saw the leaders needed to acquire various logistic equipment to organize the Phulbari Day of 2014, and in most of the cases, either the seller offered them for free or at a remarkable discount in each purchase. For example, if the price of cloth for making black flags was \$5 per meter, the seller sold it to the protesters for \$2. This honorary discount helped the protesters in reducing their costs.

To me, all these measures were subtle attempts to achieve autonomy in pursuing the movement based on local leadership, rather than depending on the national allies. One friend told me,

Since we have resources under the ground, predators will come here. Maybe we expelled one company, but there could be some other parties. However, we are awake to resist them.

Even now if national leaders do not support us, we will fight our struggle by ourselves under our local leadership and achieve victory.

However, this local leadership and organization were not an overnight product. Over the years, the central NCBD organized it layer by layer. Suzana Sawyer examined a similar case of movement building in Ecuador²⁵. The Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP), an indigenous

²⁵ Here I mean similarity in the structures and networks of the movement not the ideology or outcome. OPIP's movement against the ARCO in the Amazonian Ecuador mostly focuses on the issue of their indigenous rights over their territory in addition to the protection of environmental resources (Sawyer 2004:7, 10). But this is clearly not the case in Phulbari where people resisted Asia Energy to save their land and livelihood; the protesters did not have any intention to claim political sovereignty in their place. The issue of indigenous rights of the Santals and other ethnic groups of Phulbari is included in the ideology and focal concerns of the movement.

group, has been resisting the oil giant Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) in their indigenous territory in Amazonia. OPIP has been the key actor in the movement to save their oil resources. Nonetheless, Sawyer mentioned that OPIP resistance strategies were orchestrated by three different tiers: CONAIE at the national level, CONFENIAE at the regional level and OPIP at the local level. Some transnational environmental and indigenous rights organisations also coordinate their activity with these three tiers (Sawyer 2004:42-43). Sawyer's analysis is relevant in the discussion of organization of the Phulbari Movement in comparing the layers and external actors (Table 2).

<i>Tiers of organization</i>	<i>Sawyer's analysis in Amazonian Ecuador</i>	<i>Phulbari Movement</i>
<i>National</i>	CONAIE	NCBD
<i>Regional</i>	CONFENIAE	District NCBD
<i>Local</i>	OPIP	PNCBD
<i>Direct opponent</i>	ARCO	ASIA ENERGY
<i>External actors</i>	Environmental and indigenous rights NGOs	Cultural Survival, Mines and Communities, IAP

Table 2: Analysis of organization of the Phulbari Movement based on Sawyer's findings

Strategic modifications

The mining boom of the 1980s introduced a new global cast of agents consisting of community, state, corporations, transnational NGOs, legal agencies, global media, consultants and advocates (Ballard and Banks 2003:289). This entire cast has been prominent in the Phulbari Movement as well. For example, in 2011, a letter signed by over 80 NGOs based in 25 countries was sent to the investors of Asia Energy to withdraw their investment from the Phulbari mining project (Ullah 2011). This extended network helped the protesters to create solidarity beyond Phulbari and pressured the state to listen to their demands. In this section, I will discuss how PNCBD introduced itself as a self-organizing entity through creating its own networks.

From 'home' to 'nation' and 'land' to 'environment'

The issue of land and home dominated the logic of the movement at the beginning. However, the demonstrations I experienced in Phulbari last year specifically focus on the issue of national resources and environment. I was talking to a communist leader involved in the movement since the beginning, who thinks:

The Phulbari Movement may have succeeded in preventing Asia Energy from implementing the mining project but failed to make people understand about imperialism, nationalism or

environmentalism. Rather, people took the matter of displacement seriously. The PNCBD failed to make people understand that this is not a struggle to protect ancestors' lands; this is against a neoliberal project.

Although he was frustrated with the leaders' perceptions regarding what should be the ideology of the movement, I nonetheless heard protest leaders emphasizing the issue of national resources, rather than individual home and land. They certainly stressed the issue of environment, not just the land, in their speeches. Gavin Bridge suggested that the environment has recently become an increasingly inclusive field because "it is only in the past two decades or so that mining's environmental problem has come to be understood chiefly in terms of its effects on the receiving environment" (2004:208). However, this change in perception attracted the globally connected actors' attention rather than the grassroots level. For this reason the national allies of the movement highlighted the issue of nationalism and environmentalism more than the Phulbari leaders, who still mostly prioritized home, land and agriculture (see also page 30).



Figure 13: Participants of India trip along with transnational activists

Photo: International Accountability Project

Footprints beyond Phulbari

In 2013, a group of movement leaders (from both Dhaka and Phulbari) visited selected open-pit coalmines in India to examine the impacts of mining on the surrounding socio-environmental landscape (Figure 13). All the expenses of this tour were paid by two organizations: the USA-based International Accountability Project (IAP) and the Indian NGO, Delhi Forum. The central NCBBD leaders managed this funding. I started my fieldwork in Phulbari by participating in a meeting where the movement leaders shared their findings on this India trip with the protesters. Therefore, at my first day I knew that this grassroots movement had already crossed the boundary of 'locality'. This travel beyond the locality provided significant information and established networks between

various groups of actors. Shortly, afterwards the rationale of the movement turned from ‘saving land of Phulbari’ to ‘saving national resources of Bangladesh’ or ‘no open-pit in Phulbari’ to ‘no open-pit in Bangladesh’.

However, long before my fieldwork, the NCBD established a solidarity unit in the UK to protest during every AGM of Asia Energy in London. In December 2014, this solidarity unit demonstrated in London during the AGM (Figure 14). The activists blocked the entrance of the AGM location by dumping coal and hindered the meeting by questioning the company investors inside the AGM.

Besides Bangladeshi activists and political parties, different transnational

groups, for example, the Socialist Party of England and Wales, the London Mining Network, the World Development Movement, Occupy London and Foil Vedanta, endorsed this demonstration (Manik 2014). In the introduction of his article ‘Catching the Local’, Michael Lambek says that “the local stops at many stations; it is the slow train. It does not race above ground, but moves along it” (2011:197). In the Phulbari Movement, the locals’ train has been making its way from Phulbari to Dinajpur, Dhaka, India, and the UK.

Not only did the movement cross spatial boundaries, it is also now going to endorse other mining protests under its banner. Although having similar socio-cultural, ethnic, and ecological backgrounds, people from adjacent Barapukuria underground coalmine project area did not strongly resist the corporate grab of their resources. Some parts of this mining area are now experiencing environmental and social losses, including land subsidence, water pollution, submersion of schools and other social institutions, and so on (Figure 15). To resist the Phulbari protesters, the government always uses Barapukuria as a successful case of resource extraction, and now the government is planning to introduce open pit mining there. The leaders think that if the government



Figure 14: Demonstration in London at the AGM of the company

Photo: P V Dudman

succeeded in establishing open pit mining there, the Phulbari protest might fail because people would be dubious about the efficacy of this protest. Therefore, in a couple of meetings of Phulbari leaders, I heard the leaders accusing each other for not organizing the local people of Barapukuria against the coal-mining project. They understood that in order to sustain their protest, they must mobilize the affected people of Barapukuria.

Politics, space and ideology

I encountered different kinds of dimensions based on politics, space and ideology that had explicit impacts on local socio-political structures. Here are some examples.

Left vs. right: The most dominant categorization I encountered in Phulbari was leftist and rightist political followers. In the context of Bangladesh, the leftist parties are the followers of different streams of communism (e.g. Moscow/Leninists, Marxist or Beijing/Maoists). These parties always focus on communism, the aggression of capitalism, imperialism and the looting of national natural resources by transnational corporations or neoliberalism. On the other hand, rightist political parties' key agendas promote capitalism, development, free trade, globalization, maximizing GDP through exports, and most importantly, democracy. In Bangladesh, the leftist parties have never held state power; however, they always had alliances with rightist parties that always hold state power. In Phulbari, most of the national leftist parties had local units that were the backbone of the PNCBD.

Local vs. external: Another significant distinction was between local and external stakeholders. Apparently, people from Phulbari *upazila* (sub-district) classified protesters and leaders outside of Phulbari as outsiders. Interestingly, they quite often consider people from other neighbouring *upazilas* as insiders. I think they not only classify people based on space or location; rather they also consider the stakes. To them, national leftists share revolutionary feelings with them but they are still



Figure 15: A local religious structure drowned as a result of land subsidence in Barapukuria

Photo: Mobasher Bin Ansari, CEGIS

outsiders because they do not have a direct stake in this project. Similarly, people from adjacent sub-districts are also vulnerable to the mining project even though they are from different administrative locations. Therefore, they are insiders.

Allies vs. enemies: The word the protesters most hated was ‘*dalal*’ (traitor). These are the people who were supporting the mining project (see details about *dalals* on page 101). I found that protesters called all those people who were not actively supporting this protest *dalal*, even some people who were neither supporting the mining project nor had any intense commitment to the protest. On the other hand, the allies were *nijeder lok* or *amader lok* (our people). People from distant Dhaka could be the allies and neighbours could be the enemies of the protesters.

Modified tactics

The movement leaders believed that the situation had changed since the 2006 protest. There is no visible enemy now at Phulbari. Aman, a PNCBD leader told me “until 2006, we did struggle against a visible enemy, but now we are struggling against invisible powers of neoliberalism”. The convener, Shariful, further added,

Since the movement is not a political movement and does not seek any structural change in the state, the movement never has been continuous. We wait until there is a challenge and attack. If we run fast always, where we will go? If government or company come to Phulbari, then we will respond. If they do not come, whom we will resist?

Therefore, the protesters also changed their planning as the identity of their opponents changed. Protesters have been increasing their spying on outsiders. Even NGOs limited their activities in Phulbari because people do not allow their surveyors to do any research assessments. I also had to secure permission from movement leaders to do fieldwork there. Though the leaders did not agree, I think the protesters made the Phulbari a space closed to outsiders with their strict surveillance.

I also found the once peaceful demonstrations were becoming violent in nature. Usually the villagers of Phulbari are very generous and peaceful but they also could be violent. On 26th August 2006, the first protest succeeded in expelling and halting all mining activities of Asia Energy. Since that day, all the activities of the company have been officially stopped, although the company is still covertly active through the help of some agents. I saw protest leaders discussing destroying the office and

burning company infrastructure to permanently halt company activities. The aim was to destroy the company's strategic strength.

The protesters also adopted new technology in their demonstrations. They were not limited anymore to old-fashioned meetings based on leaders' speeches with microphone and speakers. Instead, I witnessed the use of several modern tools in the protests. For example, PowerPoint presentations through projector, laptop and speakers were used in the knowledge-sharing sessions between inquisitive protesters and leaders. Such knowledge-sharing sessions were arranged after exploring any new findings about the project, especially any alarming impacts of open-pit mining or any new government plans in favour of the company. Besides technology, they also embraced new means of protest. For example, the human chain is now a common element of protest in Bangladesh. However, this is less common at the local level in Phulbari and rather more common in Dhaka. This is a nonviolent way of protest, which is mostly demonstrated in the hub of the city or in front of government offices. Participants hold placards and banners, and organizers deliver short speeches about the matter. After nine years of protest, at present the movement is limited to counter-demonstrations to the activities of the recruited agents of Asia Energy. The protesters remain silent until the company makes a move.

Exclusion and inclusion

Over the years, risk of displacement, political ideology and space reflected the self-identification process of Phulbari protesters. Though once united in the movement, a group of people from Birampur (the original location of the mine) now supports the mining project. Their perception is that if the mining project is implemented here then Birampur will become a separate district because of the industrial development initiated by the mining project. While the neighbouring people would be excluded, new actors would be included in the movement. Here I am talking about the national activists in and outside of the NCBD.

Others now excluded from the movement are the rightist political parties of Phulbari. This is interesting because the PNCBD did not expel them from the movement. As I mentioned in last chapter, the PRC originally started the movement with the help of people from all political backgrounds. Eventually this committee failed to form a solid movement and the PNCBD has been leading it since 2006. However, though the communist parties and apolitical followers of the PRC

joined the PNCBD, the rightist parties could not follow the new leadership because their political ideology did not support it. The government of Bangladesh consists of mostly these rightist political parties. As a result, most of the local followers of these parties are now excluded from the movement; some of them are only vocal during special occasions like the Phulbari Day.

More ‘political’ than ‘moral’

In addition to the Phulbari Movement, there was another civil movement in the same year in Kansat (a village in the Northern region) demanding electricity at equitable prices. The movement also thrilled the country by showing grassroots people’s strength. After seven years, the chief leader of the movement Golam Raffani joined an influential political party, participated in the parliamentary elections for the post of MP, and won. Recently, the government authority disconnected the electricity of this leader’s house because of illegal electricity connections (Prothom Alo 2015). My point here is that local villagers of Kansat made Raffani ‘a leader’ so powerful that even influential political leaders bowed before him. The public saw a strong moral leader in him as compared to the corrupt political leaders. However, seven years later Raffani joined the party of those political leaders whom the villagers rejected. Such a story of transformation from *moral* leader to *political* leader is the topic of this section because I think that after nine years the Phulbari Movement is also now a lot more ‘political’ rather than ‘moral’. Andrew Walder’s review sees political orientation as a by-product of successful social movements (2009:403). This political orientation has explicit impacts (both positive and negative) on the movement. In this section, I want to discuss this political orientation of the Phulbari Movement.

The concept of morality is a contested issue here. Tenhunen’s observation about the political consciousness of people in West Bengal (India) is that –

The villagers do not so much judge the parties by their ideological programs as by their morals. The understanding of politics as morality is in line with the literal meaning of the Bangalee term *rajniti* (politics), which is a compound word consisting of the words *raj* (king, ruler, state or government) and *niti* (morality, principle). Voters give the party their support and, in return, expect assistance when they face hardships (Tenhunen 2011:408).

Her perception is very relevant to the political philosophy of Phulbari people. In Bangalee, *rajniti* may have two meanings: *rajar niti* (king's principle) or *nitir raja* (king of principle). Local people made some persons leaders of the Phulbari Movement or the PNCBD because they did not practice stereotypical *rajar niti*; rather these leaders believed in *nitir raja*. The first one is now synonymous with a 'bad' repressive regime consisting of corruption, capitalism, deprivation and hardship for the poor, while the latter reflects 'good' practices. These include compassion for the poor, equality for everyone, rule of laws or abundance of means to survive. Local villagers believe that politicians of the two main parties of the country (BAL and BNP) follow the first meaning, and that is the reason they support the mining project. On the other hand, the people chosen as leaders believe in the second meaning of politics. They believe that the displacement of enormous numbers of people for the mining project is not fair or moral. While the practitioners of the first principle judge everything from the perspective of their own benefit, true leaders are thought not to have any such intention. Instead, they are fighting for the rights of local villagers of Phulbari by sacrificing their time and resources. So, these movement leaders are not politicians (*rajnitik* or practitioner of king's principle), but are moral persons (*nitiban* or person of principle) or sometimes moral politicians (*nitiban rajnitik* or politician of principle²⁶). However, people's portrayal of the leaders of the Phulbari Movement has been changing because they think some *nitiban* leaders are now trying to be more *rajnitik*, like Raffani of the Kansat Movement.

Politicized aims

I found most of the leaders do not have formal political influence apart from this protest. They have been considering the movement as a tool to gain political and social influence. Here I will shed light on the ways the leaders have been using the movement for their political aims. Two years ago, Malik, one of the early organizers of the movement, used his popularity among the protesters (as voters) in the municipal election. He won the election but left the movement of PNCBD with the excuse that as a government administrator he could not serve a civil movement. Nonetheless, I saw him celebrating the last year's Phulbari Day separately under the banner of Shommilito Peshajibi Shonghothon (Alliance of Occupational Organizations) and Phulbaribashi (People of Phulbari). A

²⁶ For those *nitiban* (moral) leaders who may have or had political affiliations but do not believe in repressive or corrupted political practices.

very large crowd participated in his celebration programs and I saw that he provided his followers with T-shirts and good food. His arrangements were more expensive than the celebrations of PNCBD. A couple of PNCBD leaders suspected his source of money was corruption or bribes from Asia Energy.

Yasuf is the resident of a village very close to the mining location. The PNCBD leaders first approached him in 2006 and he organized the most active group in the movement. Overnight, the ordinary people made him a popular leader. He used this popularity and was elected as Chairman of the Khajapur union. My research assistant, who belonged to the neighbouring village, told me Yasuf was accused by the public of appropriating government relief funds for poor people.

Ariful is one of the two most influential local movement leaders. He participated in the election for Chairman of Phulbari sub-district and secured a clear victory. Anybody from Phulbari can see that, though he was involved with the local communist party Jatiyo Gonofront, his victory was only possible because of the support from the mass of protesters. One of his followers told me, “We facilitated a march with more than 5000 bicycles to raise solidarity in favour of him”. Ariful told me he could not serve the movement as he expected because his administrative colleagues did not support him. Therefore, after the four years of his tenure, he did not participate again in that election. Some villagers believed that because of success in the movement his popularity is now great enough to serve as a base to fight for parliamentary election.

During my fieldwork, I heard from many sources that the present chief of the PNCBD, Shariful, is also planning to participate in the next municipal election where he would compete with his ex-colleague of the PNCBD, Malik. His colleagues think if he wins, they can resist government suppressions more successfully by having a representative in a state institution.

The Santal leaders were also not exceptions. Rajendranath Soren was the key early organizer of Santals in the movement. He is also the chief leader of Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (National Indigenous Council) and has been involved with communist politics for a long time. However, his party (the Workers Party) joined a political alliance with the current government several years ago and since then he is reluctant about the movement (more on page 108). A couple of local Santal leaders are frustrated about his recent activities. They said that, despite being a Santal leader, they never see him beside them during any hardship. He does not represent Santals properly in national councils, and is

rather accused of favouring government against Adivasi issues. More surprisingly, none of the Santal leaders of Phulbari knew any details about the Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad.

These observations contribute to the view that the leaders of the Phulbari Movement have misused their popularity among the ordinary protesters for political motives²⁷. Once the motivations in the movement were patriotic, moral and emotional, but now the political orientations are also rising among the leaders. I was talking with a leader about the decreasing trend of mass participation in the recent demonstrations. His opinion was –

I know people participate in the demonstrations because they love their land and country, but they need financial help to come to Phulbari headquarter from a remote rural place. If we can provide transportation cost to individual protesters, then there will be more people in the crowd.

His opinion clearly indicated a shift in the moral dedication to the movement. As opposed to emotional commitments, now rational and instrumental thinking is dominant among the protesters: once the fear of death could not stop them from confronting the armed forces to save the land, but now transportation costs are hindering the protesters from participating the demonstrations. In addition to the leaders, for ordinary protesters the movement's moral claims seem to be fading.

Shaping the political landscape

There is a popular stereotype in agrarian Bangladesh that the people from Dhaka are richer and more educated, worldly and smart than rural people. This stereotype favoured the movement leaders. One participant from a village area told me, “the villagers at first did not take the words of the PNCBD leaders seriously but then when Ariful (one of the organizers) brought people from Dhaka, then they believed that the mining project is disastrous”. These ‘people from Dhaka’ with the Phulbari Movement modified the political landscape of Phulbari significantly. I already mentioned that the PNCBD leaders maintain a strong connection with the central NCBD activists.

²⁷ I am not saying here that these leaders originally participated in the movement to secure their political interests because many protesters told me that without some of these leaders the movement would not have been possible. Even today, they have huge influence on it. My point is that the movement's initial success fed their political interests, and this is breaking the unity of the movement.

During any significant demonstration, like the Phulbari Day, the national leaders join the Phulbari unit. Local leaders bear all the accommodation costs of these leaders. National leaders stay in the houses of local leaders to avoid any kind of police harassment or attack from company agents. All the local leaders want from these national activists is effective advice and media attention. On other than large occasions, national leaders advised the PNCBD leaders from Dhaka in every step of the movement. Compared to the in-person meetings in old times, now a group of national activists lead movement activities in the land of Phulbari over the phone. In the case of Nandigram conflict of West Bengal, Tenhunen also observed the similar instance. She writes –

Before phones became available, the obvious person to contact was the local political leader, who settled disputes at meetings but now rural people can also call activists and leaders in other villages. On the one hand, the role of local meetings in solving disputes has decreased, while, on the other hand, local issues and disputes increasingly transcend local communities, as it has become easier for activists to call public attention to local disputes (2011:414).

The use of the phone similarly shaped the political landscape of Phulbari. The NCBD activists from Dhaka now have more control over political situations in Phulbari than the local party leaders, even from the main political parties – BAL or BNP.

Before *Bongovongo* (Partition of Bengal) in 1905, Phulbari was part of the current West Bengal area of India, where communist politics has been dominating the political scene for a long time. This scenario changed after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Since then rightist politics has mostly been dominant throughout the country. The communist parties picked the Phulbari Movement to boost their lost political profile in the country and, so far, were quite successful in the Northern region, specifically at the local government level. In the previous section, I mentioned how a couple of leaders contested local government elections by utilizing the emotional power of the movement. They now have a huge group of followers in Phulbari. According to Anu Muhammad,

Communist politics always protest imperial and capitalist interventions, unlike rightist politics' surrender to the capitalism. Unfortunately, communist parties do not have strong political networks throughout the country to resist such inappropriate neoliberal projects. We hoped that the progressive communist parties were stronger here in Phulbari; still we utilized the best of their political networks.

The communist parties embedded in the PNCBD have been leading the movement, but this dominance of leftist politics was not same before the movement. At present, there are several communist parties active in Phulbari or in the Northern region; most of them were not even structured or organized prior to the movement. The success of the Phulbari Movement strengthened the political base of these parties. The NCBBD also has been trying to capitalize on the movement's success to increase its local influence. For this reason, they established a district wing to protect mineral resources of the Dinajpur district from multinational corporations.

Edwin Amenta and his colleagues reviewed research on the political consequences of social movements and found that “the main potential political consequences of movements at the structural level are the extension of democratic rights and practices and the formation of new political parties” (2010:289). The Phulbari Movement not only opened up space for communist politics in Phulbari but also facilitated Adivasi Santals' engagement in mainstream national politics. Santals fought with colonial power for their rights, but were not proactive in national politics of Bangladesh. They were mostly involved with peasant units²⁸ of communist politics. However, now the situation has been changing. I talked with several Santal leaders and protesters who were involved with national political parties.

Friction

Sherry Ortner criticizes resistance studies for being ethnographically thin (opposite to Geertz' *thick description*). She thinks “individual acts of resistance, as well as large-scale resistance movements, are often themselves conflicted, internally contradictory, and affectively ambivalent, in large part due to [the] internal political complexities” (Ortner 1995:179). Most of the resistance studies fail to grasp the internal complexities of the movement. Still she thinks these studies important because they reflect the mechanisms of power in social and individual relationships (Ortner 1995:175). In the Phulbari Movement, a bunch of national activists was working with local protesters and their

²⁸ I saw that almost all communist parties of Phulbari have a peasant unit that works on different issues like ensuring proper prices, protesting high price of diesel or fertilizer used in farming, sharing of irrigation water, movement for subsidy for agriculture, and so on. These units enormously contributed to the Phulbari Movement because most of the farmers were enrolled in these units and PNCBD leaders easily motivated them by their communist party chiefs.

leaders; but their collaboration has never been stable or equal. After participating in a demonstration, Anu Muhammad told me:

I expected participation of at least 500 people but there were hardly 200 people. This is the failure of PNCBD leaders. They even did not invite the local journalists to cover the news of demonstration. They should communicate with grassroots people more effectively because ordinary protesters very easily tend to think of victory if they cannot see any visible enemy. PNCBD leaders should make them understand about what danger they are facing and that the struggle is not over. Unfortunately, the leaders have disputes among themselves and I have to settle those. They do not understand their disputes will eventually harm the protest and open the space for company agents.

His entire statement reflects the miscommunication existing among different actors. However, these encounters work as chemical reactions: they could be catalysts in a reaction to create something new (see discussion of ‘friction’ on page 20). Nuremowla pointed out that –

The environment has ... become a site for ... tentative collaboration between village people and an environmental organisation with global linkages. It is this search for an “axiom of unity” between disparate groups and observations at different levels that opens up the possibilities of a wider network of the Phulbari Movement. It is not a network of groups with uniform ideas, as it may initially seem (2012:198).

When interests conflict!

The migrants have been living in an area officially possessed by the Forest Department; if the government acquires this land for mining, then they will not receive compensation. Therefore, the migrants have been proactive in the movement but, according to an influential leader, they do not believe or support communist politics. Even their leaders do not share the political consciousness of their communist colleagues in the PNCBD. They pretend to have support for communist parties without any actual dedication. Some leaders were even the supporters of government parties.

Not only the ordinary protesters, but the leaders also confront and blame each other. Ariful and Shariful initially planned and organized the movement at the local level. During an interview, Ariful told me “Shariful is not a skilled leader, as he publicly claims that the protesters already gained

victory, which is not true. He is misleading the movement. This imaginary satisfaction might create space for the company to enter in Phulbari again”. On the other hand, Shariful was extremely confident about his leadership and opined that he is directing the movement in the right way. He saw Ariful’s view as a political statement since he is engaged with a communist party. However, locally they are known as strong allies and friends and I participated in a couple of meetings where they delivered their speeches together.

Shariful was not engaged with any formal political party and this image has been a great and effective advertisement for the movement because political movements are always polarized in Bangladesh. No party (or its supporters) support another’s political movement, even if it is on an important national issue. Moreover, apolitical people do not like to be involved with political movements. The NCBD leaders knew that if the PNCBD chief has a political background then ordinary protesters could be suspicious about the motives of the movement. They might have thought it was another political movement misusing public support to secure its own motives. Shariful’s apolitical image freed him from the image of a stereotypical political leader who is quite often corrupted, greedy and opportunistic. Ariful was aware of that. On the other hand, Ariful’s long-time involvement with a political party made him extremely popular in the most remote villages. His involvement in the movement encouraged thousands of his followers to participate in the movement. This was hard to avoid or deny for Shariful. Ariful participated in the local government election and won with the support of protesters as voters. Now, Shariful has been planning to fight in a municipal election. From every angle, they have been supporting each other in the movement. So far they did not confront and compete with each other publicly at the local level.

When relations are not reciprocal!

One night, I witnessed some influential local protesters criticizing central NCBD leaders for prioritizing only the PNCBD leaders. They were accusing central NCBD leaders of not communicating with other protesters outside of PNCBD. As a result, their voice never goes to the national level, and that weakens the movement. Throughout my fieldwork, I saw such resistance from the protesters to their leaders. However, the leaders also expressed their frustration on a couple of occasions regarding the protesters. I found it disturbing that the leaders had an impression that ordinary villagers are not knowledgeable. A chief leader thinks, “Every human being is powerful, has the capacity to resist. Only a few people have the capacity to lead. Without leaders,

nobody can resist”. A good number of leaders told me ordinary people failed to understand it is not a movement to protect their own houses and lands, but rather to save national resources. The same number of ‘ordinary people’ accused their leaders by saying that the people are still united but the leaders are divided by politics and are not doing their required jobs.

Whenever the leaders or followers cannot sense reciprocity in the collaboration, they show their resistance. Khaleque clarified local people’s frustrations with their leaders:

We spent lots of money in the movement but PNCBD never support us financially. I need to run a motorcycle to communicate with other protesters and rent satellite cable to know the update of world politics. PNCBD received money from national leaders but they never allocate that to us. The convener of PNCBD does not participate in many demonstrations arranged by his committees. For example, he declared the programme of *gayebana janazah* for dead people in 2006’s protest, but was not present himself²⁹. If ordinary people do not see him in meetings, it imparts the wrong message to them. They think the struggle is over. My brother fought in the union council election but PNCBD did not make any campaign for us: we lost and the supporter of the mine was elected.

Furthermore, some protesters believed that the PNCBD now mostly emphasizes the central NCBD leaders while neglecting the local leaders who sacrificed a lot for the movement. This neglect has been producing dissatisfaction among local leaders and their followers. I already discussed the impacts of politicized intentions of the Santal leaders who built an alliance with political parties who were partners of the current government. Ordinary Santals think these leaders and the National Indigenous Council failed to ignite the movement the way they started it. They hated the leaders’ strategy of protest-negotiation-protest. However, despite all these allegations, Shariful told me –

I do not have any weakness in my work plan. Continuing a struggle for nine years has been a hard task. Therefore, sometimes the villagers feel separation from the leaders but this is temporary. Since now we do not have any visible enemy, we are currently running publicity-based protests, rather than action protests.

²⁹ However, a leader later told me that this was a strategic absence to avoid police harassment (see page 50).

When politics controls ideology!

When the discussion comes to political frictions in the Phulbari Movement, the first topic would be the ideological differences between communist parties³⁰ and their rightist counterparts. Because of the transition of leadership from the PRC to PNCBD, the movement lost some influential rightist leaders and their followers. Still the leaders do not agree with the allegation that this is a movement of leftist parties. They believe the movement has enormous support by followers of rightist politics who may believe in a different political ideology but have stronger feelings for their land than the leaders or their politics. Furthermore, the movement proved that if the issue is right, then the political identity does not matter.

The political factions were not only between leftists and rightists; rather, the communist leaders of PNCBD had their own conflicts. A college professor said to me,

My party, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), fights against the multinational capitalist corporations while others have a sole motivation of saving people's land or the environment of Phulbari. Even if the protesters succeed, someday later another company will come here. Other parties are not aware of that.

His statement clearly indicated that communist parties in the PNCBD have different goals and motivations. For example, the Workers Party of Bangladesh has been a strong ally of the PNCBD. Recently the chief command of this party formed an alliance with the government, and since then the national wing of this party has a paradoxical reaction to the mining project. Its national wing is the ally of the government and patronizes the supporters of the mining project, but its local Phulbari wing – in association with the PNCBD – is protesting the government initiatives.

However, some communist parties criticize apolitical PNCBD leaders because they failed to bring political consciousness among grassroots people. They failed to make local farmers conscious about the capitalist aggression on national resources, and instead always concentrate on the issue of house

³⁰ For example, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiyo Gonofront, Bangladesh Somajtantrik Dol, Jatiyo Somajtantrik Dol and Bangladesh United Communist League are the dominant communist parties in PNCBD.

or land. They also restrain communist parties from talking about these issues considered as political speech. PNCBD leaders think the protesters achieved preliminary victory and therefore they did not pursue seriously the implementation of Phulbari Agreement. I witnessed once in a meeting a young protester demand to lead the movement because he thought he was more capable than the old leaders. He thought there were some other people who deserved to be on the leadership committee. Some villagers also expressed the same opinion about changing the existing leadership. Central NCBD leaders admitted to me that they also want to change the leadership, but young leaders do not have public acceptance.

There are also ideological and theoretical contradictions between the PNCBD and central NCBD leaders. PNCBD leaders are comparatively more religious and conservative. Some of my participants yelled at me about the clothes of some female activists of the central NCBD who came to Phulbari to celebrate Phulbari Day. They said their clothes were not religiously and socially correct, and that they were hurting the cultural values of Phulbari. Moreover, while the national wing highlights the issue of environment, indigenous rights and human rights most of the time, I found on the other hand, the local wing was mostly concerned with their lands and houses. Still, they do not contradict each other publicly over the official ideology of the movement. I found in the public space or media, even the local PNCBD leaders concentrated on the issue of environment or nationalism, but in the demonstrations in rural areas, they always focused their concerns exclusively on land issues.

I also saw the leaders' ideological differences delay important events for the movement. For example, many protesters and leaders were not satisfied with the selection of visitors for the India Trip (see page 64). They said people who have been actively involved in this protest were not selected; rather the selected persons were the chosen people of the PNCBD chief. A key national leader indirectly admitted this to me. He said,

I received the proposal for this trip two years ago but selection of representatives made me worried and that is why I delayed it. Eventually, I asked the PNCBD to suggest representatives through consultation meetings, but they provided me a biased list and misguided me. Nobody told me that the decision was not made in the meeting. Later, I found three people who were suggested for the trip those were not the most appropriate representatives of the movement; rather they were close friends of the PNCBD chief.

In addition to this trip, I also witnessed the political parties of the PNCBD fight with each other in different functions of the movement. For example, to celebrate Phulbari Day, the political parties collect donations from wealthy local people each year³¹. However, I saw a competition between the parties regarding who will go to the donors first and collect donations. Those parties who went late to the donors could not collect enough donations.

I have observed another interesting kind of friction, which also concerns political ideology. In Phulbari, during the last couple of parliamentary elections the rightist candidates who support the mining project were elected. Undoubtedly, most of the voters were protesters from the movement. The people I talked in Phulbari explained some reasons for this:

- a) Historically communist politics had a strong support base in Phulbari but communists have never been in the state power since independence. Over the decades, this situation led people to follow other political parties (mostly the rightists), but it was not hard for the local communist leaders to motivate them in a crisis. People exclusively supported the communist leaders to save their lands, although they did not participate in the political campaigns of these leaders.
- b) Voters could not find any leader from the PNCBD in these elections; that is why they voted for rightist parties. Moreover, strong communist parties built alliances with major rightist/democratic parties.
- c) Local MPs always favour the movement during the election campaign sessions. They convince local people in their speeches. People believe them and cast their vote repeatedly for these 'democratic' leaders. After they win the election, these leaders favour the mining project.

³¹ Mostly the wealthy businesspersons give donations. The PNCBD make a list of such donors and distribute it among the different parties. Therefore, if a party collects donations from someone, others will not go to him. This distribution depends on different things like personal contacts, kinship or business relationships. For example, if the leader of the CPB has good terms with Rahim (a wealthy farmer), then CPB will be assigned to collect donations from him. In addition to cash money, sometimes the donation could be cloth, bamboo or speakers. For example, Phulbari Day requires good amount of cloth for making different kinds of banners. Therefore, I saw the leaders of Jatiyo Gonofront take a big chunk of cloth as donation from a businessperson. However, there could be some donors not included in the list and parties compete to reach them before the others.

- d) In the movement, communist parties succeeded in motivating local people to resist oppression, but could not make them communist. They failed to create anti-capitalist political consciousness among grassroots people because continuous political campaigns need enormous amounts of resources, especially supporters and money. The two main political parties (BAL and BNP) have been in state power repeatedly since the independence of the country. These parties have enormous numbers of supporters, media publicity and continuous political programs. People always find them in everyday interactions. On the other hand, communist parties do not have strong financial sources and the support-base to continue publicity on their agendas. People can see them on different occasions, but not regularly. More importantly, the entire state system is based on democracy and capitalism, instead of communism. The BAL and BNP always speak about development (food security, infrastructure, employment or industry), and that certainly attracts the public. On the other hand, communist parties speak about the class struggle, equal wages or trade unions that sometimes lose appeal for ordinary people.

When ethnicity matters!

The Santals have been actively supporting Bangalee people in the movement, but they are not free of mistrust of their colleagues in this protest. During an interview, a Santal leader was not feeling comfortable in sharing their stories with me. One of the young Santals was being candid with me and I saw the leader was warning him with blinking eyes. Most of the time he wanted to censor his words before delivering them to me. Yet, he described the cases of landlessness, illegal encroachment, social discrimination, injustice, even rapes over the decades since the Bangalee people settled here. Oppressions by the Bangalee people provoked suspicions about the Bangalee PNCBD leaders. They do not believe at all that they would get any compensation from the government. Moreover, the adjacent Bangalee villages will not embrace the Santals if they have to resettle. In addition, legal actions were not always taken in violence against Santals that created severe mistrust concerning law and order. Their local leaders were divided into different political ideologies (for example, Ramendu Soren was engaged with Gonofront and Rajendranath Soren was with the Workers Party) and central leaders do not help them get social justice.

Is friction blissful?

Tsing noted that friction does not necessarily weaken the encounters between different interrelated elements; rather it is often required for them to move. She illustrated the example of road and its relation to motion in this regard: “Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement” (2005:6). Her perspective is particularly relevant in the case of the Phulbari Movement.

In preparations for last year’s Phulbari Day, I saw different political parties use mikes on moving rickshaws to invite people on that day. Interestingly, the parties never contradict each other regarding the motto, goal, structure and organization of this celebration; rather they publicized the PNCBD’s words. I was wondering why different parties were publishing the same words. The leaders told me they do not have any problem with that because their individual invitations covered the whole area of Phulbari. For example, in organizing Phulbari Day, each political party of the PNCBD operated individually – for example, organizing followers, inviting people, demonstrating protest agendas, and so on – on their own. If one party could not communicate with people from certain areas, then other parties may already have contacted them. Therefore, their individual contributions eventually benefited the protest as a whole. At the same time, the parties were also in a competition to gather the largest number of followers to show their strength by distributing food and free t-shirts with their party logo. The PNCBD leader said they did not have any problem with that because eventually it would help their celebration because all these parties would join with their followers under the banner of PNCBD. One of the leaders told me, “People will come to the celebration at least for free t-shirts and food”. I partially agree with him. That is true that free t-shirts and food are attractions to the poor people, but my experience says that Phulbari Day is now a festival for local people in the spirit of commemoration. Dedication to own party and meeting the party leaders are also key factors for broad participation.

New identities and social relations

Glenn Banks and his colleagues suggested that the mining boom might be positive for the people who want to improve their lives and livelihoods, yet at the social level, the mining operations have been responsible for societal exclusion and inclusion (2013:490). I witnessed such an unfortunate

instance at Phulbari. During my first encounter with the Santal leader Ramendu, the movement leaders introduced him as a Santal leader to me. They told the story of his dedication in the movement. He also went on the India trip as a representative of Adivasi people in Phulbari with other leaders. However, right after he left the place, they were laughing about him. I was curious and asked the reason. They said, “On the way from Dhaka to Calcutta, he did not eat or drink anything on the plane. He thought if he eats, he must have to pay”. This loud laughter on his first air flight was not just fun, it was indicating how poor, uneducated and stingy he was. The agrarian society of Bangladesh categorizes people as rich or poor based on their access to material resources. No doubt, despite the fact that these poor Santals fought in the movement hand in hand with Bangalee people, they could not overcome the inferior social status of being financially poor in addition to the prevailing ethnic prejudice. After the preliminary victory with the help of these poor people, social discrimination has been rising again, which was minimized to save the lands of Phulbari.

However, over the years, the Phulbari Movement also created new social relations. The protesters very shortly established a pattern of fictive kinship with fellow protesters. I found many cases where two protesters did not know each other before this protest, but did not take a long time to establish a fictive kinship relation and they started to call each other by kinship terms³². In most cases, this individual relation turns into a family relation. They invite each other at different occasions and share social burdens and pressures with each other. Thus, the protest has been extending individual and family networks across the locality. For example, I saw Amirul – one of my hosts – requesting Anu Muhammad to arrange a bank job for his brother-in-law assuming that he might have connections to the bank officials in Dhaka because he is a professor of economics. Some protesters who were tortured in 2006 by the state armed forces told me that whenever they go to Dhaka for treatment the NCBD leaders help them in arranging beds in hospital³³, finding good doctors or reducing costs.

³² *Bhai*/brother, *Apa*/sister, *Bondhu*/friend, *Vabi*/sister-in-law, and so on.

³³ Sometimes it is not easy to get a bed or cabin in a hospital in Dhaka even if you have money because of extreme pressure of patients compare to the limited number of good hospitals and beds. The crisis is acute in government hospitals, which are comparatively cheap.

The movement, social status and pride

The protest itself not only has experienced remarkable modifications, the protesters also have experienced changes throughout the journey. For example, in Phulbari, I met at least two or three ‘ordinary’ protesters who were known to everybody like the leaders of the movement, even beyond Phulbari. They were neither rich nor politically powerful, but the protest changed their life; they are now cited in national newspapers, the speeches of leaders or research of professors. One of them said to me, “You do not have to ask me questions. I have everything written in a document because many people come to know my history and it is easy that I give them this document and they get everything they want to know”.

During interviews, they were very prepared and organized about events, unlike the others. Every leader of the movement asked me during the interview whether I had talked with ‘these’ people. I felt a kind of empowerment among themselves when I interviewed them. One of them claimed, “Phulbari has several more important persons than me. Then why did you come to me? Because I did something important”. I certainly saw similar kinds of pride even among the leaders when talking about the movement. They claimed that they are the good people in society because they are in a moral movement. Their pride recalls Foucault’s perception: “[power] needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (2003b:307). He believed power generates pleasure and knowledge.

New attitudes to the ‘weak’ groups

Times have changed. Unfortunately, for their heroic contributions the impoverished migrants and Santals still do not always get proper recognition. Instead, I witnessed some humiliating incidents for them. For example, in discussing the protesters’ India trip, one of my participants commented that Santals are selfish and opportunistic; they build networks for their own interest. Later, I explored the reason for this perception: on that trip, the Santal leader Ramendu got special attention because their hosts in India wanted to hear about the crisis of indigenous people resulting from the Phulbari mining project. Being poorer than his co-travellers were and still getting more attention made other protesters jealous. Classical Bangladeshi society has class stratification based on wealth and other material resources. People who do not have these resources are often treated as inferior.

Similarly, I always heard that for local protesters the probability of displacement was one of the key reasons behind their resistance. Being migrants, they would not have any status in the host society. They always point to the migrants of Phulbari as examples: how the migrants have no respect in Phulbari society, that nobody wants to have marital relations with them, and local people call them *badaimma* (an abusive word in Bangla for nomads) or *Rangpuriya*³⁴. To me, in explaining the potential impacts of the mining project, some protesters were actually humiliating the migrants who have been the active muscle power of this protest.

The movement as source of costs and income

On 26th August – Phulbari Day – I saw the protest leaders give money to the TV and news reporters. They said that without money, media personnel would not broadcast the news of the demonstration, and I saw some reporters bargaining for money with the leaders. In all their demonstrations, they have to invite journalists like special guests; otherwise, they would not cover the demonstrations. Therefore, in addition to social status, the Phulbari Movement created economic value as well. My friend Khaleque cleared this issue up for me. He said:

When Ariful was elected as the Chairman of sub-district administration through the support of protesters, everybody was happy. However, soon he made the PNCBD leaders frustrated because he was honest and could not make money for the protesters. Then, the PNCBD wanted Aman to be elected as municipality mayor to secure financial and administrative advantages for the movement. Again, because of factions in PNCBD, Aman could not win. Finally, since my family lost a huge amount of money in the movement, my brother wanted to be chairman of union council to secure money for the movement. This plan also failed because the PNCBD leaders did not help us.

Even though he did not say it, I knew that – by securing money for the movement – he was implying to the appropriation of a percentage of money from government development projects at *upazila* (sub-district), municipality or union levels.

³⁴ *Rangpuriya* means people from Rangpur, the poorest district in Bangladesh whose people tend to migrate because of extreme poverty and destitution (Annie 2010:61).

Religion and the protests

In all demonstrations I participated in Phulbari, I saw the leaders began their speeches by acknowledging and addressing people from different religions; e.g., *salam* for Muslims, *nomoshkar* for Hindus and *adab* for Christians. This proves the importance of religious sentiments in the political sphere of Phulbari. On 26th (2006) when the government forces started to fire on the protesters, a significant portion of protesters and leaders took shelter in a mosque located in the hub of Phulbari municipality. The protesters heard about the deaths of people while staying in that mosque. The *imam*³⁵ of that mosque promptly requested the leader to declare stronger demonstrations protesting their brothers' deaths. The leaders knew that Phulbari has a remarkable number of conservative Muslims; therefore, they requested the imam to declare a continuation of the protest until death or freedom. A couple of protesters told me on that day the imam's speech using microphone and the mosque's loudspeakers encouraged thousands of protesters to continue the protest, despite government oppression, to save their lands.

Two days later, the *gayebana janaazah* (details on page 49) fuelled anger among the protesters against the government and the company. Consequently, they blockaded the entire locality until the government reached an agreement with them. This success of using religious sentiments is now having the opposite effect. I talked with a significant number of protesters who believed that the communist leaders of PNCBD are atheists and therefore should not be followed³⁶. Without any doubt, this could pose an important challenge for the protesters in the future.

³⁵ The person who conducts prayer in the mosque.

³⁶ In 2013, a group of Bangladeshi bloggers built a movement to ensure legal actions against the war criminals of 1971 in Dhaka (popularly known as Shahbag Movement). Almost all of these war criminals were involved with a party based on Islamic religious politics. In opposition, the followers of this party accused these bloggers as atheist, specifically anti-Islamic. This dispute created hatred for these 'atheist' bloggers among the conservative Muslims throughout the country. This also affected the Phulbari Movement in recent times. Some people of Phulbari think that the leftist leaders (specifically the NCBD leaders) are atheist or anti-Islamic and, therefore, should not be followed. Just to clarify here, this is a recent phenomenon and was absent in 2006 and a couple of subsequent years. Moreover, these people do not have any issue with other religions (Hindu or the Santals); rather they hate atheists and especially Muslims who do not believe in Allah.

Summary

A scattered, informal and unorganized movement over the years turned into an organized one with structured institutional frameworks. The local protesters widened the boundary of the movement beyond Phulbari and extended their networks with actors even beyond Bangladesh. Collaboration through different scales reflected modifications in the ideology and composition of the movement, and the issues of environment and nationalism assumed growing importance in the movement. The collaboration brought frictions among actors of different scales and interests: the conflicts of political interest between different communist parties in the PNCBD, the distance with the rightist parties. As a result, the increasing gulf between protesters and leaders and the ethnic prejudices slowed the momentum of the movement.

Most importantly, the intention to use the movement for personal political gains raised enormous risks for the movement. Competition between leaders has divided followers into different factions. Previously unsuccessful communist-affiliated leaders defeated dominant rightist parties in local government elections. This success came at the expense of local unity, opening the way for the company and state to re-enter the local arena. The social landscape was also divided into two interest groups: the protesters and the supporters of the mining project. The company using state support entered Phulbari again by manipulating this polarization and division. These changes will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Challenging and Opposing the Movement

ভাই, আমারে বাঁচান। আমার গায়ে গুলি লাগসে।

Brother, please save my life. I have a bullet in my body.

- Last words of a wounded protester on 26th August 2006 before losing consciousness after being brutally shot by government troops.

During the last week of my fieldwork, interviewing Keertiman was special for me because, in 2006, Asia Energy drilled a testing point at his house. He was the chief of local Santal *manjhi* council who told me “both key parties of Bangladesh, BAL and BNP, maintained strong connections with Asia Energy. Whoever was in opposition supported us but if they were in power, always opposed us”. This statement could be an important hint for the motives of the government and its alliance with the company. Apparently, the expectation of significant economic returns from the Phulbari mining project motivated the governments of Bangladesh over the years. From this project, Bangladesh was supposed to get US\$21 billion worth of benefits over thirty years, electricity generation from the proposed thermal power plant and increase in the annual GDP by one percent (Gain 2007:4). To pursue this goal, several corners were cut in implementing the plan for the Phulbari project. Besides environmental degradation, the social impact – in terms of displacement and livelihood degradation – were completely overlooked. Simon Dalby noted:

Environmental [resource] disruptions are part of modernisation; the removal of populations in the way of dams, highways and other infrastructure ... is part of the process of urbanization and the expansion of commercial modes of economy into rural societies.

Violent opposition to such changes is not unusual (Dalby 2003:5076).

The intervention in Phulbari to transform nature into a commodity also fuelled similar reactions. Solid and continuous resistance from the local people in Phulbari eventually compelled the government to halt and reconsider the mining project again. Over the years, the alliance of the government and Asia Energy has been trying to stop the movement, covertly and overtly, socially and politically, brutally and peacefully. Anu Muhamman told me that “during the 2006’s protest, we

were very worried that government troops might attack us by blaming and accusing us as terrorists or extremists”. Another wounded protester said, “I was shot by the police in our first demonstration and was hospitalized for one year. As a result of this brutal torture, I will be paralyzed for my whole life”. I mention these two statements to highlight the actions the government and Asia Energy have been taking to oppose the movement. The first statement indicates government’s tactic to halt the movement by politicizing the motives of the protesters. The second statement shows that if this approach failed, the government would resist the protesters by armed force.

This chapter documents the pattern of alliance between the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and Asia Energy and how this alliance has been seeking support for the mining project, and confronting the movement’s strategies and negotiating power with the protesters. I will also reflect on state institutions in Phulbari when the movement reached its peak.

An ‘unholy’ alliance

Walker (2011) believes that in a resource frontier an unholy alliance between the states and capitalism enables corporate institutions to access land by dispossessing the poor (cited in Lahiri-Dutt et al. 2014:169). Capitalist corporations manipulate the revenue-hungry state in procuring the land at little or no cost at all, which works to deny social justice. In the case of the Phulbari mining project, this corporate alliance has been a focus of contention in terms of benefit sharing between Bangladesh and Asia Energy and with regard to socio-environmental justice for local communities.

This alliance compromised several policies and overlooked some potential environmental and social costs in designing this project (see page 8-9). The license was transferred to Asia Energy from BHP without any gazette notification, and the environmental clearance was granted before Asia Energy submitted its Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report to the government (Pegu 2010:5). Moreover, the Mines and Minerals rules of 1968 allow that a company can lease a maximum of 400 hectares of land for open pit mining and only for ten years. In that case, further extensions of contracts depend on negotiations between the company and the government. However, in Phulbari, the government of Bangladesh allowed a lease of 5,900 hectares of land for thirty-five years (Pegu 2010:5).

Furthermore, local communities and outside experts rejected the company's estimation of the number of people to be displaced (see page 9). However, despite these shortcomings, Asia Energy received environmental clearance and invested US\$24 million in this project (Gain 2007:15), with the Asian Development Bank scheduled to approve a US\$ 300 million loan (Mathiason 2008), which was later cancelled after the awakening of grassroots people against this project. Although the Phulbari Movement successfully halted this alliance between the GoB and Asia Energy since 2006, still there is evidence that the government has been favoring the company, publicly or secretly, to reopen the project. A movement leader believes that -

We cannot achieve victory unless the state breaks its relation with the company. The state needs to expel the roots of this project or the company; since this does not solely depend on us, we will continue our movement. Our movement can hardly reshape the structure of the state that considers the financial terms and conditions more than the people's lives and livelihoods.

By late 2003 and early 2004, Asia Energy came to Phulbari. The GoB did not disclose any information about its contracts with BHP or its transfer to Asia Energy at the local or national level. Asia Energy rented an office in Phulbari municipality instead of Birampur – the actual location of the mine. I think they considered Phulbari more suitable for outreach communication than Birampur, which is a comparatively rural area. They started to conduct socio-economic and geophysical surveys with well-known national and international consultants. In 2005, the company started to bargain for land price and they established an information centre in Phulbari to facilitate it. At first, the villagers agreed to participate in their surveys, but later they rejected all activities of the company when they learned of the project's potentially devastating impacts. However, the government did not respond at all to people's desire to cancel the project. Instead, the company kept pursuing their activities until the protesters declared a mass protest on 26th August 2006 and halted all of Asia Energy's mining activities.

The contentious issue of royalties

The issue of royalty sharing between the GoB and Asia Energy has been a strong pillar of the movement – both nationally and locally. According to the project contract, the Bangladesh government was supposed to receive half of the total profit including 6 percent royalties, 45 percent

corporate tax and 2.5 percent import duty (Gain 2007:5). Royalty provisions became a volatile issue and pre-empted much of the discussion, with taxation issues receding into the background. The local people refused to give up their land for *only* 6 percent of royalties. To them, it was selling the ownership of land at a loss – both financially and socially. Moreover, even in this 6 percent they could not see any individual profit for themselves. For example, in Papua New Guinea a portion of royalties is shared directly with the affected landowners’ clan, which owns land damaged by the mine (Golub 2014:151). In any mining project in Bangladesh, such royalty sharing is absent; the affected communities have always been ignored in the distribution of direct benefits.

The existing mineral rules allow the GoB to receive twenty percent royalties in signing a contract with any private company (Pegu 2010:2). However, in this project this percentage was decreased to 6 percent. The movement leaders consider this a huge financial loss for Bangladesh in addition to severe environmental and social loss. They claim that calculations showed that the contractual royalty with Asia Energy might have given the government US\$15 Crore³⁷ per annum, while the project area already gives US\$18 Crore per annum, even if calculated very conservatively. Therefore, this royalty share reflects loss of US\$3 Crore per annum with the displacement of more than hundred thousand people. This loss might increase if environmental impacts and tax allowance for nine years are considered (Pegu 2010:5). Moreover, eighty percent of the produced coal was allocated to export to India through a very sensitive eco-system of the Sundarbans (Luthfa 2015). Therefore, the experts and the protesters think that the contract was only beneficial for Asia Energy, not for Bangladesh. According to Anu Muhammad, “it is Bangladesh where the coal has been found; still the contract transfers its ownership to a foreign company. This means Bangladesh will have to buy its own coal from the company at an international price” (Gain 2007:5).

The politics of information

In the late 1980s, the liberalization of foreign trade regulations induced a massive influx of transnational corporations in sovereign national territories. This inflow encouraged states to build

³⁷ Crore is a Bangladeshi unit, normally equivalent to 10 million. Pegu’s use of this unit introduces uncertainty into the account because he sometimes seems to equate it to 1 billion. In the light of this, it is perhaps more important to read his account as registering a deep suspicion over financial arrangements, rather than a detailed economic analysis of them.

hybrid development zones, though a corporate alliance, where legal and political regulations of a state were compromised to facilitate capital accumulation (Ong 2006:88-89). I found similar compromises were offered to Asia Energy by the Bangladesh government in the Phulbari mining project. So far, the key way of supporting the mining project and opposing the Phulbari Movement has been by politicizing information: neither the government, nor Asia Energy ever cleared the 'real' adverse impacts of this project or the status of the project so far with the local community. The ESIA submitted by Asia Energy and approved by the Department of Environment is alleged to be based on false data and vague speculation. I will cite some specific examples.

In the draft Resettlement Plan (RP), Asia Energy mentioned 49,487 (including 2,200 Adivasi people) as the population that would be potentially displaced because of mining. This was a significant underestimation. Facing severe resistance in 2006 by the local communities, the government commissioned an expert committee that ensured that the project will directly displace up to 129,417 people and indirectly affect over 220,000 people (Kalafut 2008:18-19). Therefore, the company underestimated almost three-fourths of potential affected persons.

The company had a plan to develop Khulna Coal Terminal to facilitate the export of coal produced from the Phulbari mine. However, the draft RP did not include any information on how the land would be acquired for this terminal and how many people would be displaced as a result (Kalafut 2008:20). So although the company mentioned the impacts of mining in Phulbari, it avoided discussion of the impacts of associated interventions. Moreover, in its ESIA, the company also played significant games with numbers, which misrepresented the promises of development. The company said:

The workforce will mostly be sourced from Bangladesh citizens, and where required, appropriate training provided. ... The Company and its subcontractors are required to preferentially employ Bangladesh Nationals, so that ultimately at least three quarters of the workforce will be local (Asia Energy 2006a:46).

Asia Energy agents have been publicizing this contractual obligation to demonstrate their intention to pursue regional development. However, this number is nothing compared to the social loss the project will incur. The company estimated that approximately 2,100 skilled and unskilled workers will be employed during mining construction, and throughout the project's lifetime 20,000 direct and

indirect new jobs would be created (Asia Energy 2006a:48; Moody 2008:72). Local people even rejected Asia Energy's plan to employ three quarters of the workforce from Phulbari. One migrants' leader voiced their suspicion: "the company will have to confirm people's employment. Then we, all migrants, will support this mining project. [But] we know they cannot do that. They already fired previously employed local people. How can we trust them?" Another Santal leader told me –

The company offered us jobs in the mine but our people were not educated enough to get technical jobs. Probably they planned to give us menial jobs but for how long? Maybe for four or five years. Then what we will do? On the other hand, we can survive for generations earning livelihood from these lands. Then, why would we give our land to the company?

Furthermore, the company treated 1,487 households as non-displaced people who would not be physically displaced but would experience land loss. According to land acquisition and resettlement guidelines of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group, displacement not only refers to the physical displacement, but also includes losing access to resources (cited in Kalafut 2008:22, 51). Ignoring these people was another instance of playing politics with numbers.

Asia Energy's Australian ESIA consultant SMEC was accused of not involving local people in stakeholder consultations during information disclosure sessions. None of my participants was present in the dissemination meetings of SMEC, not even the leaders. They provided most of the information to selected villagers in the name of stakeholder consultations, which were held in English – and were therefore incomprehensible to local people. Moreover, they fixed the places of consultation by themselves and changed them without notice if they expected any confrontations from local people. During the household survey, the company agents deliberately over-valued household resources to seduce people and secure support for the mine. For example, for acquiring fallow or waste land, the agents promised the household compensation equivalent to that for a field with a standing crop. If the household had only five trees, the company surveyors promised compensation for fifteen trees. In this way they initially succeeded in securing people's support. Still, in some places they faced rejection. In that case, they tried to entertain those people by food and other gifts. Moreover, the villagers who questioned the whole resettlement or compensation process were invited to their office and were promised jobs ahead of others.

The politics of friendly gestures

The company agents practiced the politics of gesture to increase support. They used traditional religious and cultural norms as tools. For example, company officials built relationships with villagers through good behaviour. They arranged food for poor households during the survey, recruited local villagers for menial work in drilling tests at a very high wage. They tried to show how the company values the wages of ordinary people. Moreover, they respected the elders of the villages, knowing that elder persons are important in social decision-making processes. During the surveys, if they saw a senior citizen, they stopped the car, got down and offered *salam* (a traditional religious greeting that is an important sign of 'good' people in the locality, especially among conservative old people), asked about the health, and sometimes even offered jobs for children. They provided high quality foods in their meetings (as opposed to information disclosure meetings), which produced large crowds prior to early 2005. As a result, in that period they were able to conduct their initial survey throughout the region without any interruption.

However, at some places they faced rejection at the initial phase. There they tried to entertain people with food and other gifts. This easy approach raised questions among people. By the early 2006, the company started their drilling activities and increased their security by hiring local thugs. Some national and international NGOs started to voice opposition to the project while government officers supported it. Villagers became uncertain and requested the company to stop their activities until they found their answers regarding displacement, environment and resettlement. Eventually, the company people started to threaten local people, saying that if they did not agree to their plan, they would not get any compensation.

At this point, the company changed its 'good' approach. In discussion meetings, the company agents gradually avoided local people's queries about the displacement and resettlement issues. When people's suspicions became vocal, Asia Energy hired local muscle power (*mastans*, local goons) to intimidate opponents and create terror among villagers. This attempt to scare people did not succeed. Because of a mass awakening and the involvement of national human rights activists, the company and its agents could not control the protest or suppress the issues of displacement and resettlement.

Brutal repression

On 26th August 2006, government troops brutally tortured the protesters (see page 10). At that point, the government thought murdering people would discourage the protesters, but this irrational and unnecessary violence eventually pushed the leaders to organize the movement more effectively for a longer time. A mass awakening compelled the government to negotiate with them.

Nonetheless, the government did not stop there. Protesters are still often brutally repressed whenever the government has the chance. In the field, I heard another story of government violence. After the demise of BNP-led government in 2005, an emergency regime backed by military power was installed from 2007 to 2008. Consequently, an army unit was deployed in Phulbari, as in other places in the country, to control the law and order situation. At that time, protest leaders learned that Asia Energy bribed some army officers and gave them a list of five top leaders of the movement to torture and harass. To avoid arrest, all primary and tertiary leaders fled from Phulbari to other locations, but one leader, Aman, could not or did not leave. Army officers arrested and tortured him publicly. A couple of my participants told me that during the torture, the officers were yelling at him for leading and participating in the Phulbari Movement. After the torture, they took him to an army camp and filed charges against him. However, he was able to get bail next day, but for the last seven years, he has been almost paralysed. The leaders believed that this brutal torture was revenge for the 2006 defeat and was a warning for the remaining leaders as well. Not only Aman, but also most of the leaders of the movement have been facing judicial actions against them by the state (similar incidence of judicial action is described in page 100-101).

Manipulation of the law

The law has always been applied unequally to the protesters and to the company. In the state of emergency of 2007-2008, the local administration did not permit the protesters to stage any public protest or mass demonstration. During the same period, Asia Energy formed a group called the Uttorbongo Unnayan Forum (UUF; North Bengal Development Forum), and carried out several motivational campaigns to raise support for the mining project. The protesters tried to deploy counter-demonstrations but state administrations hindered them, using the emergency as an excuse. Again, in 2012, the government sent a letter to the local administration to allow Asia Energy to carry out survey activities concerning the mining project. This letter provoked resistance by the villagers.

Police declared an emergency, prohibited all resistance activities under the guise of protecting public property and imposed Section 144.³⁸ Villagers violated this emergency regulation and took control of Phulbari again. Eventually, the district commissioner came to Phulbari and negotiated with protesters.

National politics and its games

“Salute, Salute, Salute.” These were the three words the president of BAL, the then opposition party, used in 2006 in a speech at Phulbari in appreciation of the protesters’ apparent victory against the government and Asia Energy. She promised that if her party would come to power in 2008 election, they would implement the Phulbari Agreement. She even gave BDT 20,000 to each of the families of three dead protesters and BDT 10,000 to 64 families of wounded protesters (Gain 2007:14). Nevertheless, after six years in power the BAL still had not kept their promises. Instead, in 2012 they imposed Section 144 in Phulbari to facilitate the activities of Asia Energy by restraining the protesters. They also recruited an influential minister’s advertising agency to publicize the mandate of Asia Energy (details on page 101). These are examples of ways that national politics invaded the conflict, with the government acting relentlessly to hinder the movement. One protester told me,

No local MP supports us. In 2006, when we expressed our concern and revealed our plan to them, they scared us by saying that if we protest, government troops might kill thousands of people. Both the BAL and BNP still do not support the movement. If the political parties do not count on us for votes, we might have already been shot by government forces.

Moreover, our trusted communist parties also built alliances with the government. This is a moral degradation of leftist politics in their commitments to the people. They did not hesitate to form alliances with the BAL that cheated the protesters [because they said they would implement the agreement if the people voted for them]. People voted for the BAL and put them in power, but they abandoned people.

³⁸ This is a measure restricting people’s movement by the law and order agencies. For example, more than two people cannot walk or move together, all kinds of public gatherings or parades are prohibited and so on. This section is often imposed when there is a danger to lives and property.

Anu Muhammad explained another game of national politics concerning the movement. Before 2008's parliamentary election, a faction of *shongskarpontbi* (reformist) leaders evolved in both BAL and BNP. This faction advocated for the removal of the then chief leaders. As a result, this faction was not welcomed by a majority in either party. In the election, BAL was elected and leaders of the reformist faction were ignored in cabinet ministries, even though some of them were founding figures of the party. Surprisingly, however, the BAL nominated a *shongskarpontbi* leader as Minister of the Environment. Anu Muhammad suspected that either he convinced the Prime Minister that he would make the land of Phulbari available for the company or he had the support of Asia Energy lobbyists inside the government. During that period a protest leader was the chairman of the Phulbari *upazila* (sub-district) administration, and another was later elected as the mayor of Phulbari municipality. When the protesters were gaining administrative power, all the influential political figures – including the MPs from both BAL and BNP- united and publicly expressed their strong support for the mining project. They started to recruit paid *dalals* (see page 101 below) throughout the Phulbari sub-district. Eventually, a secret intelligence report, later leaked to the protesters revealed that any further intervention might drive Phulbari beyond the control of the government. This news temporarily restrained this group.

An imagined victory and new spaces for the state

On 4th September of 2006, the NCBD organized a rally to celebrate the “Victory Solidarity Day” (Gain 2007:14). This assumption of victory recently turned into a great challenge for the movement. After nine years, during which there was no official and visible activity of the company in Phulbari, a significant portion of the protesters and local leaders assumed that a victory had been won. As a result, they became less active. This period has been a dormant phase for the movement, and this eventually enlarged the gap between the national and local leaders and ordinary protesters. This gap has been enlarging the space for the government and Asia Energy to try to generate support for the mining project. At present the movement is facing hard times because of increasing leadership frictions, internal conflicts, factions between right and left politics, lack of coordination between different NCBD units and sub-units; and competition among protesters to gain individual benefits by using the movement.

The leaders argue that these problems arose because the protesters could not see any immediate challenges, and hence did not feel the necessity for unity. They say that the government and Asia

Energy have been utilizing this silence to increase support in their favor. One of the local leaders was telling me that some leaders were losing touch with the movement because of their personal ego problems. One day I saw the convener of the PNCBD call an important decision-making meeting. Interestingly, he himself was not present at that meeting, though – according to other leaders – he was in the area and was not that busy. After the meeting, the convener was criticized for this kind of attitude. They said that the convener wanted to show off so that people would see that without him the whole committee is nothing and other leaders do not have the capacity to take decisions. The other leaders, on the other hand, waited for the convener to implement decisions. I think the other leaders were quite capable of taking and implementing any decision but they were just neglecting their responsibilities and criticizing the absence of the convener. The convener was also accusing them of being irresponsible. Furthermore, assuming that the local leaders could handle the movement, the national leaders turned their attention to another government project that was threatening the largest ecosystem of the country, the Sundarbans. Situations such as these have led to the movement's stagnation. The result has been a growing gulf between the national leadership and the local supporters.

Still, most of my participants think that they are united in resisting this mining project, and so far, their opponents are no threat to the movement because they are few in number, they work secretly with less impact on people, and most importantly, they do not have social status to influence ordinary people. Furthermore, if the company starts their activity publicly then people will come out of their houses again like in 2006.

The government and the company have been exploiting this inactive state of the protesters. For example, because of the continuous publicity by Asia Energy's agents, people now think the coalmine would benefit them. This is especially true of the people of Birampur, who think the area will be developed since the mine is located there - so participation from that locality is declining. Most of the younger generation has been convinced by this aspiration. Furthermore, a good portion of Birampur people, who were the most active participants in the movement, now want the mine because of continuous publicity by the company suggesting that evicted people will get more than double the existing price for land in payment. Even the manager of my hotel was losing interest in the movement because he believed coal mining would increase his income with a significant influx of outsiders.

Therefore, while the supporters of the mine did not dare to say anything in favor of it over the last five years, now they demonstrate in Phulbari municipality with company slogans. The first demonstration by company agents during my fieldwork astonished even the protest leaders. Forty to fifty people participated in that demonstration. However, according to some protesters, participants in this demonstration were unemployed and drug addicts who were in need of money, while others told me that they have good connections with government and company, and therefore had the courage to demonstrate their support for mining. These two claims discount the significance of the demonstration while acknowledging concerns about it.

The relationship is not over

Asia Energy with the help of Bangladesh government has been trying to secure people's support in various deceptive and coercive ways. The company, so far, hid information about the potential impacts of this project to the local people, bribed others to speak in favor of them, created rumours about the movement leaders, judicially harassed the leaders and so on. The current Prime Minister always says in her speech that the government terminated its contract with Asia Energy because a densely populated country like Bangladesh is not suitable for open-pit mining projects; nonetheless, the company never admitted it. Recently, both the government and Asia Energy representatives expressed their thoughts about the Phulbari mining project. For example,

<p>“Asia Energy (GCM) has no valid licences to develop Phulbari coal mine. We are reviewing their activities here in Bangladesh as to see how they are running office in Dhaka without getting exploration license to develop the mine” – Secretary, Energy and Mineral Resources Division</p>	<p>“We will continue our operation here. We have no intension to wind up project in premier stage. We have mining lease and some exploration licences and renew it by paying Tk. Five lakh (half a million) annually as license fee” - Gay Lye, CEO of Asia Energy</p>
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Source: Jahangir 2014

The Phulbari protesters consider these confusing statements violations of the Phulbari Agreement, which clearly states that the government will expel Asia Energy from Phulbari to halt the project.

Protesters' mistrust was fuelled by WikiLeaks information leaked in 2010 that revealed that US diplomats had secretly pushed the Bangladeshi government to re-open the mine because the mining company had sixty percent US investment (Pegu 2010:2). I checked the company website and looked at the 'ownership' section. It says:

In February 1998, the Contract was assigned to GCM's wholly owned subsidiary, Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pty Limited, with the endorsement of the Government. GCM has fulfilled all its obligations under this legally binding Contract and holds a mining lease and exploration licences in the Phulbari area covering the prospective mine site (GCM Resources 2015b).

Facing the mass protest in 2006, government bureaucrats several times said that the government cancelled the contract with Asia Energy; however, the above-mentioned information clearly indicates that the relationship with Asia Energy is not over. Despite government denials, the company website describes the project status in the following way:

GCM has invested over £37 million in the Project to 30 June 2014. ... The Department of Environment approved the Project's Environmental Impact Assessment in September 2005. ... The approval of the Feasibility Study and Scheme of Development has been delayed by political and social uncertainty arising in the 2006-07 election year which continued into the 2007-08 period when Bangladesh was governed under a state of emergency by Caretaker Governments. Discussions with the Government continue and GCM remains ready to move the Project forward when it receives approval for the Project's Scheme of Development from the Government (GCM Resources 2015c).

During my fieldwork, I saw the police guarding the empty property of Asia Energy (especially their local office) in Phulbari. No ordinary people can enter that office. In November 2014, after four months of my fieldwork, the CEO of Asia Energy visited the Phulbari local office to meet company agents (Figure 16). His visit ignited the protesters who vandalized his vehicle and blocked the national highway by burning tyres for two days (Rasel 2014). The protesters demanded his arrest by the local government. Local people drew attention to the government's failure to live up to the terms of the Phulbari Agreement's specific requirement that the government expel the company from the land of Phulbari. For its part, the government charged all the leaders of the protest for

vandalising the CEO's vehicles. After every large demonstration the leaders face judicial harassment by the government. After reading this news online, I called my friends at Phulbari and they said that they did not want this violent resistance but they could not stop some angry protesters.

New corporate relations

Despite the constant denial of any association, the contractual relation between the government and Asia Energy has turned to a new corporate connection recently. An agency called Forethought PR is performing the role of public relations agent of the company. This new recruitment is the proof of a couple of things. First, the company may have halted their activities in Phulbari, but not entirely in Bangladesh. Second, in addition to the grassroots agents, they also appointed professional agents to increase the support for the mining project. Both kinds of agents attempt to broadcast good things about this company and its mining project. However, Forethought PR is the Public Relations wing of one of the oldest advertising agencies of the country, Asiatic, that is partially owned by a current minister. This decades-old agency is enormously influential in the media business. This suggests that the government is dishonest in its commitments to the protesters: while the prime minister has been saying that Bangladesh is not suitable for open-cut mining; her minister is working as the PR agent of Asia Energy's open-pit mining project. This alliance between the government and Asia Energy has never been accountable for its motives, goals, commitments and status.



Figure 16: CEO of Asia Energy is talking with the local agents of the company

Photo: Energy & Power

<http://ep-bd.com/online/details.php?cid=31&id=17887>

Bribing and recruiting 'dalals'

The company agents knew exactly what kind of motivational activities might work in an impoverished area like Phulbari. In order to gain the consent for the project from local

communities, the then Asia Energy reportedly distributed color televisions, cash money and cloth to potential affected populations. Last winter, the company CEO tried to distribute blankets among poor people. This kind of bribing has never been limited to only rural Phulbari; rather the company recruited paid agents at national level as well. In this regard, Anu Muhammad's reaction was –

Asia Energy's money and commissions did not enable the government to take appropriate initiatives against this project because many bureaucrats, journalists and politicians have been exploiting the company financially. They take money from Asia Energy in the name of raising the support or permitting the project. The key source of company's money is stock market: Asia Energy has been selling shares of Phulbari mine on the London Stock Exchange. Recently, they created agents across the locality and unified the large rightist political parties. This was not something new. Company agents were alleged to bribe the leaders of the first group who organized the movement, the PRC. These company agents of the PRC leaked internal movement news to government intelligence.

The company is now recruiting some former bureaucrats, army personnel or politicians to deliver supportive statements from Dhaka about Asia Energy. In addition, the company recently recruited some local people (mostly young) to gather support in favor of this mine. They pay huge amounts of money to these agents (*dalal* or traitor). All these *dalals* have to do is to arrange covert meetings in favor of the company and spread negative news about the protest and leaders. Bipul, a college teacher who also wrote a book on the movement, summed up the basic assumptions about these *dalals*. He said -

Most of these *dalals* are drug addicted. They support Asia Energy to get easy money to buy drugs. This cash money also runs all the activities of *dalals*. *Dalals* make programs in remote villages to make publicity in favor of the mine. The participants in these programs believe that this is a good way to earn some easy money from the company, and they think this is harmless because Asia Energy cannot build the mine here anyway. Some of these participants also join all protest demonstrations. So far, this attempt of the company could not have significant impacts, but they are increasing their activities.

Dalals were very contentious, and were portrayed as foolish, scary, hated and sometimes funny characters in Phulbari. Different participants responded in different ways concerning the *dalals*. For example,

“The father of one of the killed protesters, who was former member of the PRC, evidently took financial benefits from the company agents. He worked for the company even after his son’s death” – Babul (owner of a local press where the protest leaders gather unofficially on any occasion).

“A woman – whose husband was a *dalal* – saved Anu Muhammad on the night of 26th August 2006 from an attack by *dalals*” – Kabir (local college teacher and communist leader).

“The local MP is the chief *dalal*” – Qader (PNCBD leader and coordinator of sub-district NGOs).

“In addition to the new young *dalals*, there are also some old *dalals*. They are not new. They are the same people who were in the PRC, but still took money from the company to work against the movement from inside” – Jahir (college teacher and organizer of migrants in the Phulbari Movement).

Many protesters told me the leaders of the movement ignored these *dalals* since the very beginning. In Phulbari, easy and cheap drugs like *fencidil* (a kind of cough syrup) and *ganxa* (cannabis) attract the young generation either to sell them or to take them. The movement leaders did not have any effective measures to solve this social problem. Now it is said that most of the agents of the coal company are addicted to drugs, and that they support the mining project to get easy money for drugs. That might be true that the *dalals* are the young drug addict men, but on different occasions I heard the leader were discussing about *dalals* who were mature, wealthy and influential businesspersons (see Jahir’s response above). Most of the respondents’ portrayal of *dalals* to me as a young drug addict was the leaders attempt to deny the *dalals*’ power to challenge their movement.

Crafting rumours

The movement is vulnerable to the activities of government and Asia Energy supporters because of the growing gap between leaders and protesters. Company agents are targeting this absence of

communication by spreading rumours that the leaders took financial benefits from the company and left the movement. In addition, paid *dalals* broadcast the propaganda promising township or industrial development as impacts of the mining project. The company has paid thousands of young people whose job has been to spread the rumour “*khoni hoe jabe*” (the mine will certainly be developed). Some of these young people are engaged with student chapters of local rightist parties. The following are three dominant rumours they have spread:

The protesters were not local people: One man, who was once a powerful local student politician, told me that most of the lands that were supposed to be acquired by the company to implement the mining project are government-owned *khash* (forest) land. The present inhabitants of these lands are victims of riverbank erosion in the adjacent Nawabganj area (see page 39). These people participated in the movement wholeheartedly because they did not have land title, and if the mine were to be implemented, they would not get any resettlement provisions or compensation. They also gathered their kinfolk from Nawabganj to fight the movement. In reality, most of the people who participated in and organized the protest in 2006 did not belong to Phulbari at all. To me, it is true that the lands migrants have been living on are owned by the Forest Department, but this is strictly generalizing to say that the protesters were not local people. Though the migrants were very active in the movement, the majority of the protesters belong to the Phulbari area.

The leaders have been bought: Another dominant rumour was about the leaders of the Phulbari Movement. Company agents said to ordinary villagers that the company paid a large amount of money to get the leaders to slow down the movement. There was an apparent absence of the leaders at the grassroots level, except for large occasions or demonstrations. The *dalals* utilized this absence by saying that the leaders took money from the company and left the movement.

Birampur will become a separate district: The agents of Asia Energy have repeatedly said that if the mining project goes ahead, it will facilitate huge industrial growth in Birampur (the actual location of mine basin) through infrastructural and human resource development. They argue that this development will transform Birampur into a distinct district, and that Birampur inhabitants will get their own district facilities. Asia Energy agents targeted this area because two major active groups in the movement live in Birampur: the Santals and the migrants.

Indirect opposition to the movement

After August 2006, state authorities lost control in Phulbari in the face of tremendous local resistance and negative reactions nationally and internationally. Since that time, the state and the company became more cautious about their interventions. Recently, they have been mostly resisting the movement in quieter and less dramatic ways. I have two examples: one concerns hindering the protestors' office setup, and the other focuses on surveillance by the government.

To celebrate Phulbari Day and to revive the protest, the PNCBD leaders needed to establish an office, yet they were unable to rent a house for their office for two years because the local MP – through the *dalals* – threatened local property owners. After a long search, they managed to locate a space for their new office (more information on page 60). During office construction, I saw the neighbors who had connections with the MP had tried to build a wall overnight, blocking the pathway to the office (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Antagonistic neighbors built a wall to hinder the office entrance

Photo: Fieldwork, 2014

I previously discussed the protestors' spying on outsiders, but it was not only the protestors: government agencies were spying on outsiders as well. One day one of my participants showed me an agent of government intelligence in Phulbari. He said since the 2006 government appointed intelligence agents in Phulbari to collect the news of their movement. Apparently, these secret agents were not absolutely secret to the local people. National leaders believe that the factions and the leaders' reluctance to participate make it easy for the government or national politicians to intervene, overtly and covertly. Anu Muhammad illustrated an incident to me:

In 2012, the Prime Minister declared in parliament that open-pit mining could be disastrous for the densely populated locality, and therefore the Phulbari mining project should not be

implemented. This sounded exactly like what we have been saying over the years. This position made some local leaders reluctant to lead the protest. Utilizing this reluctance, the Ministry of Home Affairs shortly sent a circular to the local administration to allow Asia Energy to conduct their survey activities. The local leaders instantly informed me and we immediately responded to this with a press conference in Dhaka and declared protest in Phulbari. On the date of the demonstration, the government replied by imposing Section 144 in Phulbari and gathered police forces from ten police stations. Police blocked the stage to be used in the demonstration. However, when several small groups of marchers started to gather around the stage, the police were unable to stop them and fled from the spot. The protesters proceeded with their demonstration and blockaded the locality for a couple of days. Then the District Commissioner of Dinajpur negotiated with the protesters by cancelling the government circular in order to end the *hartal* (blockade).

The politics of 'Adivasi' identity

The indigenous groups of Bangladesh are facing a crisis of self-identification right now. At my first visit to a Santal house, the household head told me:

We prefer the name of Santals, not Adivasi, because our ancestors identified themselves as Santals. This is also humanistic, while Adivasi is a political term. The name Santal shows we are distinct from other ethnic groups. This is our identity. In modern land documents also, we are treated as Santals.

I knew that this refusal originated from the frustration of indigenous people about the recent declaration of the government that Bangladesh has 'tribal' people, but not 'indigenous' people. In 2011, the government claimed that the so-called indigenous (Adivasi) people came to this region after the Bangalee native ethnic majority and that no historical document proves that these people existed in this region before 16th century. Therefore, these tribal (*upojati*³⁹) people should be called

³⁹ The meaning of 'Tribe' in Bangla is *upojati*, which means 'sub-nation'. In popular discourse, this word *upojati* originated to deprive indigenous groups from their distinct cultural status, instead it implies a group of nomadic and exotic people. Moreover, this word also does not indicate that these groups may settle in Bangladesh territory before Bangalee people. On the other hand, the indigenous groups have been struggling for the status of *Adivasi* (indigenous), which means a culturally distinct nation who settled in the country at the first place.

ethnic minorities or small ethnic groups (The Daily Star 2011). This decision sparked anger and rejection among the scholars of the country. They believed that the government did not want to recognize them as an indigenous group because that recognition will prevent the government from encroaching on the lands of these ethnic communities for peopling Bangalee people following international laws and commitments (Minority Rights Group 2008). In his reaction, the leader (*raja*) of the largest ethnic group *Chakma* said,

The government probably is under the impression that recognising indigenous people might mean extra responsibility to bear. The constitution does not say that there are no indigenous people in the country. It has not used the word indigenous, but it has not used the word minority either to identify anybody (The Daily Star 2011).

Because of the denial, for the last two years, the government is not allowing Adivasi Santals of Phulbari to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples⁴⁰. Denial from a Bangalee government often makes the Santals suspicious about the dedication of Bangalee leaders in saving Adivasi people's land. In a long interview, two Santal leaders shared their concern about being seen as Adivasi in relation to the mining project. They said that the Adivasis in the plains do not have education, networks or employment like their hill counterparts. Therefore, hill Adivasis were able to protest encroachments and influxes of population on their land strongly. The government is likely reluctant to repeat that experience here and therefore rejected their existence as Adivasi. They said:

Indigenous people, especially the Santals, own majority of the land in this mine basin. We declared our unity with the PNCBD leaders because we understood that government wanted to do another Kaptai project, where villages of Adivasi people were displaced to build a dam.⁴¹ Now the Bangladesh government does not want to recognize us as indigenous people

⁴⁰ The United Nations mentions, "By resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous People shall be observed on 9 August every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. ... The goal of the First International Decade was to strengthen international cooperation for solving problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health" (United Nations *not dated*).

⁴¹ See Global IDP Database (2005).

to avoid international laws in grabbing our lands. We always vote the BAL because they have a history of liberal politics, compared to other conservative parties. Unfortunately, now they do not want to treat us as indigenous people. Recently, there were some small development projects (e.g. village streets) in Phulbari where Adivasi people did not get proper compensation for their lands. We think choosing this place for such a devastating project could be a legacy of the long-term conspiracy against the indigenous people because historically this area was the land of different Adivasi communities.

These words from the Santal leaders explicitly referred to the politics that has been going on concerning their identity. However, apart from their difficulties with the Bangladeshi government they were also frustrated with the Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (National Indigenous Council). They alleged that the Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (JAP) was never effective at ground level; rather they were the agents of Asia Energy and the government. Instead of protecting indigenous people, they were harming the Santals' identity. For example, in national level discussions they advocated for local Santal leaders to adopt the Bangla alphabet in writing the Santal language. They said the chief leader of JAP had not been participating in protests since his party – the Workers Party – formed an alliance with the BAL-led government.

Compromising and negotiating power

Tania Li theorizes the implications of compromise in implementing rule: “as an agreement between two parties, a compromise assumes that agency is distributed, if unevenly: both sides have a ‘power to’. It also assumes a level of conscious knowledge and understanding of what is being gained and given up” (Li 1999:298). In the Phulbari Movement, to accomplish power over the protesters the government compromised on different occasions with them. Sometimes the resistance of the protesters also compelled the government to negotiate with them. Sometimes the company had to revise its composition and sometimes the government had to negotiate with the protesters by providing services free of cost. However, both the protesters and the government compromised with each other to achieve more gains.

The Phulbari Agreement

Anu Muhammad said to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in his speech on last year's Phulbari Day “we will not continue the movement further if you implement the 6-point Phulbari Agreement

signed on 30th August 2006 between the government and the NCBD (on behalf of the protesters)”. This speech indicates the importance of this agreement in the Phulbari Movement, the largest negotiation and compromise to date between the protesters and the government. Since then this agreement has been the referendum on the continued existence of the movement. These six points included (see scanned version of original copy of agreement in Appendix A):

1. Closure of local office of Asia Energy and permanent embargo on open-pit mining throughout the country
 2. Compensation for the protesters killed on 26th August 2006
 3. Compensation for injured protesters and all affected persons on 26th August 2006
 4. Proper inquiry to find out the persons responsible for the 26th August’s killing and punishment of them
 5. Building a monument to the memory of the deceased protesters on 26th August 2006
 6. Punishment of *dalals* and withdrawal of the charges against the protesters
- (Gain 2007:13)

Although government representatives agreed with all the demands of the protesters, Qader told me none of their claims was *fully* implemented except the compensation for some wounded protesters in 2006, building a monument and halting the mining interventions in Phulbari. Moreover, recently upon a call to implement the complete Phulbari Agreement, the government replied that the agreement is not legal because the NCBD is not a legal party to sign a treaty with the government on behalf of the protesters. Therefore, the government is not obliged to implement it. The NCBD replied that if the committee and the agreement are not legal why the government already had partially implemented some of its demands. This suggests that both the committee and their demands are legal and that the government should implement it because they agreed and signed to do it in 2006. Yet, it seems to me that the government signed the agreement as a strategy to tackle the situation in 2006 but now does not intend to implement it. However, so far as I know the government did not file any petition in court challenging the legal basis of this committee and their agreement.

During the last Phulbari Day, in his speech the national chief of the movement said that “the government is now planning to violate the Phulbari Agreement by implementing open-pit mining at

Barapukuria. If the government does not implement the complete agreement within the next three months, then we will reorganize our activities again and declare new demonstration programs". The time has elapsed but I do not know of any significant protests or demonstrations. Either this was a strategic threat to the government or the worsening political situation during the last half of the year stopped the protest leaders from taking rigorous initiatives.

Change of name in response to movement

In January 2007, Asia Energy changed its name to Global Coal Management PLC, or GCM (Gain 2007:3). It is easy to assume that the mass protest in 2006 pushed the company to change its name. Being expelled from Phulbari and highly criticized nationally and internationally for pursuing a perilous project though deceiving and bribing, the company experienced significant loss in London Stock Exchange right after the protest of 2006. The company, then, disbanded the name Asia Energy to increase its brand value and named the mother organization GCM. Yet, some scholars claim that according to the contract between the company and GoB, the name of Bangladesh subsidiary of GCM will remain unchanged as the Asia Energy (Gain 2007:3).

Free land, money and service

After 2006 the government felt a strong separation from the community. To normalize this relation, the government granted a piece of land to the PNCBD to build a monument to commemorate the memory of people who died on 26th August. Moreover, the Rural Electrification Board has been providing free electricity to the PNCBD office. One of my participants told me that they did not pay any electricity bill since 26th August 2006. Apparently, the government did it as a means to express solidarity with the protesters to counter the government's image as an autocratic regime. The government did not want to lose votes from these angry citizens. According to local protesters, though this help was not enough, still the government bowed before them and tried to compromise with them.

Strategic changes

The continuing resistance since the 2006 against the mining project forced Asia Energy to adopt significant strategic changes. In 2012 through an official circular the company showed its intention to make changes in its approach to the Phulbari project. It said:

GCM Resources Plc is taking a new approach to dealing with the Government of Bangladesh (the “Government”), its most important partner in the development of one of the country’s most important world class natural resources, the Phulbari Coal Project. ... The Company recognises its approach must be more targeted to addressing the needs of the Government and people of Bangladesh, and that the Project must deliver significant sustainable benefits for the local community and the nation (GCM Resources 2012).

Nonetheless, the notice did not detail the new approach, especially how it will tackle the issue of displacement and resettlement. Rather, it emphasized the recruitment of a new CEO, power production and coal price. But, the company at the same time recognized that their project was not accepted by the community, i.e. the company failed to secure the “social license to operate” in Phulbari.

Apart from the company, the government also has been attempting to make strategic changes in its approach to the country’s coalmines. In 2011, the administration decided to form an expert committee to draft coal policy to decide whether the open-pit mining should be banned or the Phulbari mining project should be resumed (International Accountability Project *not dated*). However, the finalization of the policy is incomplete. This decision to formulate coal policy attracted two different opinions. One group was optimistic because they believed the coal policy would impose an historical ban on open-pit mining in such a densely populated region. Another group suspected this intervention is a trick to delay the government’s decision regarding the project and this policy trap might eventually encourage such disastrous mining methods. In 2012, a press notice from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations Human Rights) expresses its concerns about the project impacts and mentions that –

A national coal policy is pending in a parliamentary committee, with early indications suggesting that open-pit coal mining will be permitted and, thus, would allow development of the Phulbari coal mine in north-western Bangladesh. The mine reportedly would extract 572 million tonnes of coal over the next 36 years from a site covering nearly 6,000 hectares and destroy approximately 12,000 hectares of productive agricultural land (United Nations 2012).

'You cannot eat coal'

Zaeed Aziz and Farzana Bobby made a documentary film on the Phulbari Movement immediately after the 26th August 2006. They named the film *The Blood-Soaked Banner of Phulbari* (Ahmed 2008). The characters of this documentary were the protesters of Phulbari. Some of the dialogue of this film from ordinary villagers reflected fresh reactions to the way the government has been resisting the movement. In the words of one woman:

We have brought this government to power. How can they not do what we want? If the government does not value us, we will not value them either. If the government will not provide for us, we do not need this government. We do not need any government (Ahmed 2008).

Her concern was about her livelihood and, therefore, she raised questions about the implications of government. This anger was not just showing off. According to protesters who spoke with me, the government no longer had any control in Phulbari after the 26th August protest. The protesters shut down all government offices and there was no police activity until the government signed the agreement with them. This stateless situation again arose again in 2012 when the government allowed Asia Energy to resume its survey activities. Again, the protesters halted the control of the government and the state had to negotiate with them to restore 'normal' state functioning. This is not like other *normal* places in the country, where the government takes decisions and imposes them upon the community through its local administration and legal forces. The Phulbari awakening has shifted and weakened the government's hold on the place and its people.

Li mentions that development planning has become a normal state activity and an important mode which "asserts a separation between state (which does the developing) and populace (which is the object and recipient of development)" (Li 1999:297). This separation was echoed in every dialogue of the documentary film. Even in the field, the protesters told me that facing 26th August 2006, there was no contact with the state other than with its armed forces. After continuing the protest for four days, the government decided to negotiate with the protesters. Nevertheless, government representatives did not agree to come to Phulbari because they thought their life would be in danger, as the state did not have control: a neutral site for negotiations was only agreed upon after lengthy discussions.

Summary

In 2014 the Bangladesh government asserted that the state terminated its relation with Asia Energy while the company CEO claimed that they still had the license for the Phulbari project. The alliance between the Bangladesh government and Asia Energy has always been contentious. Since the beginning, the experts rejected the royalty arrangements and claimed that the company hid information about project-affected people in the ESIA study, as well as suppressing information on mitigation measures, resettlement mechanisms, and environmental risks. In the face of opposition, the company backed by the state troops brutally suppressed the protesters but failed to push the project through.

The mass awakening compelled the company to cease its operations in Phulbari, but as the movement's activity subsided the company and state recruited a public relations agency, bribed young people to raise support for the mine, and used the local MP's influence to intimidate protesters. Meanwhile, the GoB refused to implement the Phulbari Agreement's provisions, and despite the GoB's denials, the relationship between the company and the state continues. Increasing activities of paid agents of the company in both Phulbari and Dhaka have been building solid ground in favor of the mining project. As a result, the alliance between the GoB and Asia Energy is now challenging the continued sustainability of the movement.

Chapter 5 Concluding the Story

নেতৃত্ব ও আদর্শিক সংঘাতের পরেও আমরা যদি এই আন্দোলনকে আর কিছু বছর বেগবান রাখতে পারি, তাহলে আমাদের আর কোন প্রত্যক্ষ হুমকি থাকবেনা। কারন উন্মুক্ত পদ্ধতিতে কয়লা উত্তোলনের ক্ষতিকর দিকগুলো এখন প্রমাণিত ও প্রকাশিত। স্থানীয় জনগণও এ বিষয়ে সচেতন। সরকার এসকল ক্ষতিকর দিকগুলোকে অস্বীকার করতে পারবেনা। তাছাড়া ফুলবাড়ি চুক্তির পূর্ণাঙ্গ বাস্তবায়ন না হওয়া পর্যন্ত আমরা আমাদের আন্দোলন চালিয়ে যাব।

If we can continue the movement a few more years despite all the ideological and leadership conflicts inside the movement, then there would not be any direct threat because now the adverse impacts of open-pit mining are evident and exposed. Local people are also aware. The government cannot ignore it. However, we will continue our movement until the government implements the complete Phulbari Agreement.

- Comments on the future of the movement by the Member Secretary of the NCBD.

In the documentary film *The Blood-Soaked Banner of Phulbari*, a female protester claims that, “we had chased out the police, I was so furious, I have never had the courage before, since that day I have learnt how to fight. Now, I have limitless courage. I am not afraid to die” (Ahmed 2008). This simple and short statement suggests how brutal suppression by the state eventually motivated and empowered some local groups of socio-politically marginal people to resist a disastrous project to protect their land and livelihood. These people have been publicly resisting the mining project since 2006, although the organizational activities behind this protest started even earlier. Internally the movement focuses on one key aim – the protection of land – but officially, it encompasses three issues:

1. No open-pit: this method of mining takes more land than any other method.
2. No export: all the resources Bangladesh owns should be used first to meet the country’s own demand.
3. No foreign company: all mining activities should be performed by local companies because historically all the transnational treaties allowed foreign companies to take illegal advantage of national resources.

The protesters understand that the Phulbari coalmine is an important national resource. Still, they do not support a mining method, such as open-pit, which will displace them and destroy their villages. They want a mining method that will be able to extract the mineral resources by not disturbing surface land and resources. If such technology is not available now, then the government should wait. Power generation with the cost of such massive displacement is never a viable option.

Despite the movement's high public profile and the clarity of these aims, the movement remains imperfectly understood even after almost a decade of protest. In this thesis, my aim is to explore the Phulbari Movement in practice and to examine the roles of the alliance between the state and the coal company in a place of uprising. In doing so, it is important to realize that the movement has seen different transitions over the course of its life and its stakeholders are steadily experiencing changes in local political relationships.

Looking back to the past

The UK-based Asia Energy started its mining intervention in Phulbari in 2005. In that year, a group (PRC) consisting of local people from all kinds of political philosophies (right, left and others) initiated a movement to protect their land from being acquired for the mining project. This group was ineffective and people immediately contacted a group of national activists (the NCBD) for guidance and assistance. This led to the formation of the PNCBD, which had representation from leftist political parties in addition to the non-political leaders. This group is now the organizational and functional center of the Phulbari Movement and has been successfully leading it since 2006 in close association with the NCBD. If this successful resistance was planned and carried out by local people, the credit behind an effective political organization and institutional structure goes to their national ally, the NCBD.

The leaders of the PNCBD succeeded in creating a common goal to resist the mining project based on indigeneity, nationalism and environmentalism. Three groups of people actively responded to the PNCBD: Bangalee peasants, the indigenous Santals and destitute migrants. The Bangalee peasants did not want to lose the lands that provided them their livelihood. On the other hand, land was not only livelihood for the Santals; it was also the symbol of their indigenous identity. After making

forestlands inhabitable, the migrants have been living in Phulbari for more than four decades. Since the government owns the area they are living in, the migrants do not have proper land documents, and these migrants knew that if they were to be displaced by mining, there is little chance that they would find a vacant space for resettlement. Furthermore, they would not get proper compensation without documentation.

Women constitute another important force in the movement. Compared to their male counterparts, rural women are heavily dependent on social relations in their daily lives. Besides men's efforts in agriculture, women of the household borrow food or money from neighbours during times of hardship. In this conservative society, women's main entertainment is visiting kin or neighbours. Even after death, intimate neighbours dig most graves. Displacement, therefore, is not only losing land but also leaving important social relations behind. Upon facing the loss of this social capital, the women also participated in the motivational house meetings prior to August 2006.

Looking forward to the future

The persistence and success of the Phulbari Movement have deep implications for both the protest and the mining project. This is true that the PNCBD organized the movement with a strong political structure through an alliance of different communist parties. Today, however, factionalism in the leadership is ultimately weakening the movement. It would not be surprising if after three or four years the movement turns into a polarized protest where different factions would claim authority over it.

Mining remains a threat in the region despite the movement's apparent success. Although the government is still obligated to implement the Phulbari Agreement, its position is stronger than in 2006, and it may be able to ignore or negotiate the agreement once again. The Barapukuria underground coal-mining project has had severe adverse impacts, but there have been no protests from the inhabitants of that locality to date. Now the government is planning to introduce open pit mining there, and it is an open question whether local people will mobilize in the face of this. Here it is possible that the seeming success of the Phulbari Movement could make people complacent because some leaders thought victory had already been achieved. In fact, Asia Energy continues to

sell shares in the Phulbari project on the London Stock Exchange and is taking different measures to reopen the project. At present, the advertising agency of one of the government ministers is managing public relations for the mining company. That suggests that the relation between the state and Asia Energy continues. Company agents continuously work to raise support for the mining project by spreading propaganda about regional industrial development because of this mine. This would be a major step in weakening the Phulbari Movement.

The ultimate weapon for the government could be the new coal policy. Upon facing mass resistance in 2006, the government authority negotiated with the national activists by saying that the state will formulate a new coal policy to determine what should be done with the country's coalmines. This policy is yet to be set. New strategies to favour development and to dampen local protests around the coal basins could be introduced, for example, by offering more compensation or stronger resettlement plans for displaced people.

Some notes on the Anthropology of Mining

The dramatic expansion of the global mining industry since the 1980s has ignited resource wars in numerous countries, with ideological opposition, armed conflict and extensive loss of lives, livelihoods, and environments. This contested mineral expansion posed different challenges for developing countries: flexibility in state policies for multinational mining corporations; and internal tensions and conflict with mine-affected communities (Ballard and Banks 2003:287, 295). Gavin Bridge said in 2004 that,

Over the past decade ... communities affected by mining ... have increasingly expressed their concerns as issues of social and environmental justice, the preservation of cultural integrity and/or indigenous rights, and the ability to participate in decisions about mineral development from a position of prior informed consent (2004:217).

Bridge's statement focuses on two key issues: community concerns for socio-cultural rights and the struggle to participate in decision-making processes. In the case of the Phulbari Movement, both issues have different scenarios. First, the concern for the adverse impacts of mining was not limited solely to the agrarian communities of Phulbari; instead, external actors became quite explicitly

involved. In fact, this protest gave birth to a couple of national leaders besides local heroes. National activists, transnational organizations, and international media are now involved with the movement. Because of these multiple stakeholders, community concerns are divided into different goals: local non-political leaders want to focus on protection of ancestral lands; communist parties emphasize the issues of imperialism and nationalism, while national activists added the notion of environmentalism to the movement's list of commitments. These different stakeholders are continuously compromising and negotiating with each other in pursuing the success of the movement. For example,

- a) Despite the ideological differences, the political parties embedded under the PNCBD umbrella are still marching together – mainly because they know a single party cannot lead the movement alone.
- b) The migrant leaders built alliances with the communist NCBD activists, even though they do not believe in or follow communism.
- c) The historical ethnic coexistence between Bangalee and Santal is under threat since Bangalee people have been forcefully grabbing minority Santals' lands. Still, the Santals built an alliance with the Bangalee PNCBD leaders in order to save the remaining ancestral lands from the state and the company.
- d) On helping an injured protester, I heard a wealthy leader saying, “why should I go to government office to fix the electricity problem of a van-puller? I never even do that for my own house. My servants always do that for me”. But the wealthy leaders shake hands with very poor grassroots protesters despite their racial attitudes.
- e) The local people of Phulbari always ignore the landless migrants and make fun of them. Still, the migrants built a strong alliance with the indigenous residents of Phulbari in resisting this mining project.

The second issue from Bridge's statement that I want to discuss is local communities' struggle to participate in the decision-making process of development concerning their life and livelihood. In the Phulbari Movement, a faulty ESIA had been a key target of the protesters. This ESIA was allegedly completed without any consultation with grassroots people, was based on an inaccurate

estimation of the number of affected persons, and was approved even before being submitted. The protesters also alleged that the company itself recruited consultants to evaluate socio-environmental impacts instead of any neutral organization. However, I think even if a neutral and expert organization facilitated the ESIA study with proper consultation with the local people, this protest was unavoidable. Here I make three points: first, historically in Bangladesh, the affected communities never received proper compensation; second, these densely populated regions cannot afford to resettle such a huge number of people; and finally, these lands are the key source of livelihood for the poor protesters and they knew even proper compensation could not reimburse the loss of this resource. Therefore, the reasons for this protest were more concerned with livelihood insecurity or loss of cultural roots than a faulty ESIA by a company-favored consultancy organization.

I also want to discuss two further issues the Phulbari Movement raises for the anthropology of mining: the imagined unity of the local communities and the top-down approach of the state in securing consent. First, in much of the literature on resistance there is a common fantasy of a holy unity among indigenous communities. In the Phulbari Movement, after almost a decade both the leaders and the protesters accuse each other of deviation from their ideology and goals. The protesters think their leaders have been using the movement as a project to secure their own socio-political power. At the beginning, it was a moral movement, but now it is political movement for them. A couple of leaders already participated in local government elections using the movement as a key point of their election manifesto, and others are moving in the same direction. Moreover, the leaders created different factions inside the movement based on the political parties they support. If a supporter of the Workers Party believes that displacing poor people should be the key issue of the movement, another supporter of CPB thinks nationalism should be the motto instead of merely displacement.

On the other hand, the leaders accuse the protesters of voting in national elections for the rightist parties that have explicitly supported the mining project. A group of young people is also now operating as *dalals* of Asia Energy. Moreover, the movement has divided Phulbari's social landscape. My hosts warned me against buying everyday necessities from stores whose owners they see as *dalals*. I also saw that protesters limited their interactions with those who did not participate in the movement. Interestingly a subtle division also existed among the protesters based on ethnicity and

identity. Poor Santals often feel separation from the fellow Bangalee protesters because of the prevailing ethnic prejudice in the society. In addition, being poor they were also inferior in the social situations. The local Bangalee protesters verbally abused the migrants – who were also Bangalee – as nomads. A united movement of different groups, therefore, could not change the usual social stratification based on access to wealth and other material resources.

The recruited agents of Asia Energy are relevant to my second point about the top-down approach of the state in securing consent from the local communities in favour of a development project. It is true that in the beginning the state was more dependent on repressive or brutal confrontations to restrain the Phulbari Movement. However, recently the company and the state changed their approach by introducing a bottom-up method of subverting the movement. The company started to recruit poor, uneducated, unemployed and drug addicted young people to spread rumours, for example, that the protest had already failed, that the leaders were bought for money, or that the government will implement the mine because it is better for the country and so on. The alliance between the state and Asia Energy is now creating social factions to create support in favour of the mine and certainly here, the community itself is equally responsible.

Over the years, the protesters effectively planned their movement and utilized their links to gain power. They engaged national activists, and with their help, they sent their message to the national and international level. They had direct experiences of the adverse impacts of the adjacent Barapukuria mining project, but they did not stop. Rather, they went to India to observe such mining projects more accurately. Now to sustain the movement, they want to draw in the neighbouring people to resist the Barapukuria project. With every step, they seek to spread the movement beyond Phulbari. Still, I find it challenging to conclude with confidence about the movement. Here is one reason. Previously I mentioned (see page 70) that Malik (one of the movement's key organizers) participated in municipal election for the position of Mayor, and succeeded with the support of protesters. Since then, he has not been actively engaged with the movement, nor did he maintain his affiliation with the PNCBD. After I left Phulbari, concerning the Asia Energy CEO's visit to Phulbari (see page 100), local protesters demonstrated strong resistance and, remarkably, Malik joined actively with his followers in the protests. I talked with my friends in Phulbari. His presence was a surprise even to them. Therefore, the movement keeps changing its colors and opening space for thinking more about it.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Phulbari Agreement

ফুলবাড়ী কয়লা খনি সংক্রান্ত উদ্ভূত পরিস্থিতি নিবসনে সরকারী প্রতিনিধি এবং তেল, গ্যাস, খনিজ সম্পদ ও বিদ্যুৎ-বন্দর রক্ষা জাতীয় কমিটির নেতৃবৃন্দের মধ্যে অনুষ্ঠিত সমঝোতা বৈঠক।

তারিখ : ৩০ আগস্ট ২০০৬ইং
স্থান : পার্বতীপুর উপজেলা পরিষদ মিলনায়তন।
সময় : সন্ধ্যা ৭.৩০ ঘটিকা।

১৭

সমঝোতা স্মারক

১। উদ্ভূত পরিস্থিতিতে প্রাণহানির ঘটনায় গভীর শোক প্রকাশ করে বৈঠকে নিহতদের রুহের মাগফেরাত কামনা করা হয়, ১ মিনিট নিরবতা পালন করা হয় এবং নিহতদের পরিবার বর্ষের প্রতি গভীর সমবেদনা জানানো হয়।

২। তেল, গ্যাস, খনিজ সম্পদ, বিদ্যুৎ-বন্দর রক্ষার জাতীয় কমিটির এর ফুলবাড়ী শাখা কর্তৃক উত্থাপিত-৬ (ছয়) দফা দাবী নিম্নোক্ত ভাবে বাস্তবায়ন করা হবে।

ক) এশিয়া এনার্জির সাথে সকল চুক্তি বাতিল করে এশিয়া এনার্জিকে ফুলবাড়ীসহ ৪ থানা ও বাংলাদেশ থেকে প্রত্যাহার করা হবে। ফুলবাড়ীসহ ৪ থানা ও বাংলাদেশের কোন জায়গায় উন্মুক্ত পদ্ধতিতে কয়লা খনি করা হবে না। অন্য কোন পদ্ধতিতে কয়লা উত্তোলন করতে হলে জনগণের সম্মতির ভিত্তিতে করতে হবে।

খ) ২৬ আগস্ট ২০০৬ ইং তারিখে আইন শৃঙ্খলা রক্ষাকারী বাহিনীর গুলিতে নিহতদের প্রত্যেক পরিবারকে ২,০০,০০০.০০ (দুই লক্ষ) টাকা ক্ষতি পুরণ দেয়া হবে।

গ) আহতদের ক্ষতিপুরণ এবং দোকান-পাট, হোটেল রেস্তোরা, রিক্সা, ভ্যান, মাইক, বাড়ীঘর ভাংচুরে ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের ক্ষতিপুরণ প্রদানের লক্ষে ৯,০০,০০০.০০ (নয় লক্ষ) টাকা বরাদ্দ প্রদান করা হবে। উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার, ফুলবাড়ী, দিনাজপুর, সহকারী পুলিশ সুপার, ফুলবাড়ী সার্কেল, সিভিল সার্জনের একজন প্রতিনিধি এবং তেল, গ্যাস খনিজ সম্পদ ও বিদ্যুৎ বন্দর রক্ষা কমিটির ফুলবাড়ী শাখার দুইজন প্রতিনিধির সমন্বয়ে গঠিত কমিটির মাধ্যমে ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের ক্ষতিগ্রস্ততার পরিমান নিরূপন পূর্বক ক্ষতিপুরণ দেয়া হবে।

৩০/৮/০৬

(স্বাক্ষরিত)

১৯৯৭ সন

১৯৯৭ সন ৩১৮ ৩১৮ ৩১৮ ৩১৮

১৯৯৭ সন ৩১৮ ৩১৮ ৩১৮ ৩১৮

(ঘ) ২৬ আগস্টের ঘটনায় গুলিতে নিহতদের বিষয়ে তদন্ত করে প্রতিবেদন দাখিলের জন্য অতিরিক্ত জেলা ম্যাজিস্ট্রেটকে নিয়ে এক সদস্য বিশিষ্ট তদন্ত কমিটি গঠন করা হয়েছে। উক্ত কমিটির তদন্ত প্রতিবেদন প্রাপ্তির পর এ বিষয়ে ব্যবস্থা নেয়া হবে।

(ঙ) একজন অতিরিক্ত জেলা প্রশাসক, একজন সহকারী পুলিশ সুপার ও তেল, গ্যাস, খনিজ সম্পদ বিদ্যুৎ বন্দর রক্ষা জাতীয় কমিটির ফুলবাড়ী শাখার দুই জন প্রতিনিধি সমন্বয়ে হত্যা করে গুম করা লাশ উদ্ধার বিষয়ে একটি তদন্ত কমিটি গঠন করা হবে। এই কমিটি সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ প্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে তদন্ত করে প্রতিবেদন দাখিল করবেন। প্রাপ্ত প্রতিবেদনের ভিত্তিতে এ বিষয়ে প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা নেয়া হবে।

* (চ) নিহতদের নামে ফুলবাড়ী নতুন ব্রীজের পাশে উপযুক্ত স্থানে সরকারী উদ্যোগে স্মৃতিস্তম্ভ নির্মান করা হবে।

* (ছ) এশিয়া এনার্জির চিহ্নিত দালালদের বিরুদ্ধে সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগের ভিত্তিতে পুলিশ সুপার প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা নিবেন। কয়লাখনি বিরোধী আন্দোলনের সাথে জড়িত নেতৃবৃন্দের নামে দায়েরকৃত মামলা-জিডি, প্রত্যাহার করা হবে এবং এ বিষয়ে নতুন কোন মামলায় নেতৃবৃন্দকে জড়ানো হবে না।

৩। অদ্য ৩০/০৮/০৬ তারিখ থেকে হরতাল, অবরোধসহ সকল প্রকার কর্মসূচী প্রত্যাহার করা হবে।

[Redacted]

০০/৮/০৬

[Redacted]

০০/৮/০৬
[Signature]

Appendix B: NMREB Approval



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Full Board Initial Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dan Jorgensen
Department & Institution: Social Science/Anthropology, Western University

NMREB File Number: 105244
Study Title: Mining, Resistance and Livelihood in Rural Bangladesh
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: June 12, 2014
NMREB Expiry Date: August 31, 2014

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol	105244 Jorgensen - revised protocol	2014/06/04
Instruments	Interview checklist: villagers	2014/05/25
Instruments	Interview checklist: local administration	2014/05/15
Instruments	Interview checklist: Phulbari Movement leaders	2014/05/15
Instruments	Interview checklist: civil society	2014/05/15
Instruments	Interview checklist: mining company officials	2014/05/15
Instruments	Focus Group Guidelines	2014/05/16
Other	Participant Information Form	2014/05/15
Letter of Information & Consent	Jorgensen 105244 Revised LOI letterhead pdf	2014/06/03

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.


Ethics Officer, on behalf of Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

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2008-2009 Master of Social Sciences

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Dhaka, Bangladesh
2004-2008 Bachelor of Social Sciences

Academic Awards: Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario (2013-2015)
Regna Darnell Graduate Award, Department of Anthropology, University of Western Ontario (2014)
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Language: Bangla, English