

Peasant Movements in Bengal: Special Reference to North Bengal

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Abstract:

In the colonial period peasant exploitations and oppressions increased tremendously in Bengal like other parts of India. Agricultural lands were turned into a field of production of raw materials. Different classes of intermediaries were created in the agrarian field whose only intention was to earn money from lands oppressing the peasants. Many indigenous zamindars including peasants lost their lands and these were alienated to the new zamindars, jotdars, traders, moneylenders and covetous people. Against all sorts of oppressions of the zamindars, jotdars and other intermediaries peasants including sharecroppers and agricultural labourers started movements in Bengal. In North Bengal a peasant movement called 'Tolagandi Movement' was started in 1930s and then the 'Adhiar Movement' took place in 1940. Tebhaga movement was started in 1946 in the 24 districts of undivided Bengal which played a significant role in the history of peasant movement of Bengal. After independence peasant oppressions were not ended. In spite of passing the West Bengal Land Reforms Act in 1955 the lands were not acquired from the zamindars and other intermediaries and distributed to the landless people. Practically the zamindari and intermediary systems were going on up to 1960s. So, to abolish the zamindari and intermediary systems the Naxalite movement was started in Naxalbari, a village of Darjeeling district and very soon it was extended in different parts of North Bengal. Ultimately, the movement became failure for many limitations, but its significance in the history of peasant movement cannot be denied.

Keywords:

Zamindar, Jotdar, Adhiar or sharecropper, Tolagandi movement, Adhiar movement, Tebhaga movement, Naxalite movement

Prof. Ramkrishna Mukhopadhyay tried to show the difference of agrarian economy and society between pre-colonial and colonial period. According to him, the condition of rural Bengal, the village society and agrarian economy changed rapidly in the colonial period. He also tried to show that there were self-dependent village society and independent village community in the pre-colonial Bengal which was changed in the colonial period.¹ Rajat Kanta Roy and Ratnalekha Roy denied the view of Prof. Mukhopadhyay arguing that the jotdars were rich peasants before acquisition of power in Bengal by the British. They tried to show that the agrarian structure and agrarian economy had not been changed radically in the colonial period

because the agrarian society had not been transformed from feudalism to capitalism, rather the feudalism in the colonial period became stronger.² The Peasant- exploitation was also in the pre-colonial period, however it is told that the peasant-exploitation increased in the new forms and new systems.

But Dr. Binay Bhushan Chowdhury, an eminent agrarian historian in the field of land and peasant, had not accepted the view of Roy and Roy. According to him there raised various types of jotdari powers which made the village society more critical. He tried to show the differences in the agrarian systems between pre-colonial and colonial period. The differences were from - (a) rising of powerful classes, (b) their formation, (c) the amount of land hold by them.³

A committee was appointed in 1921 under John Kherr to investigate land relation with a view to amending tenancy resolution. The Bill based on the committees report declared that the 'bargadars' is a tenant.....who provided their own cattle plough and implements of agriculture. Intense agitation met these proposals and the Government had to issue a communiqué on the 10th May, 1932 declaring their decision not to accept the particular amendment regarding sharecroppers.⁴

Another Bill was prepared by the Government officials in 1928; long debate was going on for and against the Bill. The role of the Swarajya Party on this question was against the bargadars.⁵ So, all references to share croppers as tenants were deleted and the right of commutation for raiyots on product rents was withdrawn.

From 1929 world – wide economic depression was going on all over the world and this affected the agrarian economy and the industry of the district, the prices of agricultural crops decreased. Ranjit Dasgupta writes. “The prices of jute.....marked an extraordinary fall.....the price index (1926-29; 100) went down to in 1931-32, 30 in 1932-33, 28 in 1933-34 it rose slightly thereafter, but was still only 52 in 1937-38”⁶ Ranjit Dasgupta again writes, “Faced with the deepening crisis large section of owner-peasants and tenants and tenants in both the permanently settled portion and Khasmahal areas were forced to sell their land and faced more closure by the jotdars-cum money lenders. The farmer, however were not totally disposed but kept on the land as bargadars or adhiars.”⁷

Whether the raiyots give sub-taxes gladly or the zamindars collect it keeping stones on the chest of the raiyots, how can you (editor of Hindu patriot) realize staying in the capital? Once,

come in the villages and see how a zamindar oppresses on the raiyots for collecting sub-taxes. The weak raiyots inhabitants of villages have no wealth or helper, can not complain, naturally they surrender to the oppressor in spite of having been oppressed.⁸ Tapas Roychowdhury has shown how the lands were alienated from the original peasants to the immigrated people of different professions.⁹

In accordance with the report of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission (Floud Commission) in Jalpaiguri district the transferred area was constituted 9.4 percent of the total area inquired into district, and 42.1 percent of the transferred area was cultivated by bargadars or adhiars and another 39.4 percent by under tenants¹⁰ Another important information is found from the report that by 1939 in Jalpaiguri 26.6 percent of all cultivating families lived mainly or entirely as adhiars and 25.9 percent of the total cultivated area was cultivated by adhiars.¹¹ But this figure is not dependable fully. According to Goswami there are reasons to consider that the actual extent of sharecropping was much more extensive than these figures suggests.¹²

Hat- Tola Movement

Peasants including bargadars had to give chess or tola to the agents of zamindars and jotdars at the time of selling their goods in the Hats (weekly markets). In accordance with the enquiry report of the Government of West Bengal in 1940 there were 6000 hats in the province owned mostly by local zamindars that either managed them with their own staff or leased them to the ijaradars on a yearly rent. In all most all of these hats tolls were collected at exorbitant rates not only from the sellers but in some cases also from the buyers.¹³

In some hats the men of zamindars and ijaradars used to collect Rs. 2.00 per cow and Rs. 4.00 per buffalo as expenses for issuing receipts certifying such sales. The senior marketing officer, Government of Bengal conducting this investigating estimated that the income of zamindars or as ijaradars from a hat was usually between Rs. 1500/- to Rs. 3000/- per annum.¹⁴ Peasants were exploited for the heavy tola collected by the agents of Zamindars and ijaradars and that affected all sections of the peasantry and even small and middle jotdars. Other than peasants and adhiars, teachers, village doctors, small shopkeepers were also victimized by this system.

The conference of the district Krishak Samiti was held on 27th June, 1939, where large number of people including poor peasants, adhiars and other sections of rural population attended the conference.¹⁵ In the meeting some resolutions were taken in favour of the small

peasants and adhiars against the zamindars and jotdars' oppression including abolition of the zamindari system without payment of any compensation. Being inspired by the propaganda in the different hats against the oppression of the zamindars and jotdars, small peasants and bargadars were prepared to start a movement called 'Hat Tola Movement'. The movement started from Maidan dighi hat under Boda Police Station with red flags and Lathis (Bamboo Sticks), Kishan Volunteers marched into the hat and raised slogans, "No tola payment by the Kishan," "Down with the oppression of the zamindars and ijaradars" etc. The ijaradars threatened the peasants. Police came and supported ijaradars, but they became failure to the united strength of the peasants.¹⁶ The police came and took the side of the ijaradars, they became failure to compromise it. Later on, the Sadar S.D.O came and in his presence a meeting was held with a peasant delegation under the leadership of Radhamohan Barman. Ultimately, they reached into a compromise and the decision went in favour of the peasants and bargadars. In the many small hats in Boda, Debiganj and Pachagar Police Stations the toll rate was reduced and in a number of small hats the toll collection came to be stopped.

Adhiars Movement

Being inspired by the 'Hat Tola Movement' peasants including adhiars started another movement in 1940 called 'Adhiars Movement'. The adhiars had not right on land, they cultivated land only for the share of 50%, beside this they had to tolerate different types of tortures and oppressions of Giri (Land Lords - jotdars or intermediaries). More over, the adhiars had to give more taxes called 'abwab'. Such type of taxes were – 'Golamochhani' or expenses for cleaning the store house at the rate of half a mound of paddy for every adhiars, another levy was 'angina chachani' or expenses for clearing the threshing yard at the rate of half a mound per adhiars 'Bhuta Khaoa' or expenses for spreading straw inside the bullock cart of the jotdar was still another form of levy, 'Barkandaji' or expenses for maintenance of guards, 'Hari Sabha' or expenses on account of religions of gathering, 'Hari bandha' and 'Ghora bandha' or account of maintenance of elephants and horses were some more forms of levy. After clearing all such types of levy, the adhiars would get minimum amount of crops and this was not sufficient to maintain their families for which they had to take loan from the jotdars or 'Giri'. Such loans were taken mainly under three systems of interest (a) Derabari, (b) Dunabari, (c) 'darkata'. The bargadars had to repay the crops at the rate of 50 per cent (Derabari) interest of principal crops and 100

percent (Dunabari) interest of the principal crops only for a period of 3-6 months. Under the 'darkata' systems a certain quantity of crops was lent during lean season in terms of prevailing market price which was very high and the loan was calculated in terms of money value of the paddy borrowed. At the time of repayment after harvesting of the crop in the form of whatever amount of paddy was available at that amount of money.¹⁷ Not only that, adhiars had to store the crops after cutting from lands in the farm house of jotdars where they had been cheated. When shares are divided, the jotdar is to arrange to carry his share of produce to his own house. In case where jotdar's house is far away from the bargadar's lands, a spot is selected nearer bargadars house where the produce is stocked and divided as usual. Jotdar himself arranges to carry his share to his house.¹⁸

Amarendra Nath Suba, argued, "The adhiars had to recovered the loan at the time of distribution of crops (a) 6 mound paddy for one cow (one bish) called pana, there was no interest for seeds. Paddy for food was supplied to the adhiars (a) Dera (1.5 times) and Duna (2 times) which had been recovered at the time of distribution of crops¹⁹ The Krishak Samiti realized the minds of the exploited and oppressed adhiars and during the harvesting season 1939-40 several demands were raised such as 'Reduce the interest of Karja dhan' (Paddy taken by loan), 'No interest on seed loan'. 'Put an end to all abwabs and 'Nij kholane dhan tolo' (stack paddy in your own farm house)²⁰

The volunteers and workers of the Krishak Samiti marched from hat to hat and village to village and called the adhiars to resist the oppression of the jotdars. Dr. Sachin Dasgupta in his article 'Jalpaigurir Adhiar Andolan' writes, "In this time, Nawab Musharaf Hossain who was a minister in the Haque Ministry came to Jalpaiguri, held meeting with jotdars and discussed against the communists, the operation was started by the jotdars with the help of police against the bargadars or adhiars, section 144 was introduced, arrest warrants were issued against the communist leaders, for which communist leaders had to work from secret places. Police attacked on the peasants from village to village and more than 300 peasants were arrested including the leaders of the movement."²¹

Tebhaga Movement

The All India Kishan Sabha was formed in 1936, which organised, "partial struggles," focusing on the demands of rent-paying tenants. In Bengal the communist took the lead in

organizing, the provincial Kishan Sabha, as a branch of the AIKS. Within a year Kishan Sabha units were formed in the district.²² A commission was formed by the ministry of Fazlul Haque in 1938 and Sir. Francis Floud was selected as a Chairman of the Commission. It is noticeable that the Commission intended to abolish the zamindari system in Bengal, other than this the Commission was in favour of Tebhaga to the adhiars or share croppers. It is mentioned in the report of the Commission that the land-holders or 'Giris' had to take 1/3 of the crops produced by the adhiars instead of ½ shares of the crops.²³ Jayanta Bhattacharja has shown the percentage of lands which was cultivated by bargadars or sharecroppers.²⁴

In 1943 famine started all over Bengal. The policy of the Government was mainly responsible for the famine. According to the report of Kshitish Proshad Chattopadhyay 5% peasants sold their land fully and 11% peasants sold their land partly and the land purchasers were jotdars, rich peasants and traders. 34 lac people had died and 11 lac people had lost their every thing.²⁵ Thus the transfer of cultivable land during 1943 was about 14 percent of the total cultivable land in Bengal. More over in 1943, 3,06,000 families lost 11,47000 plough cattles as a result of famine. Out of this 8,90,000 plough cattle were lost by the poor peasants and landless labourers.²⁶ Abani Lahiri wrote, "On a conservative estimate the famine left about two millions of marginal and poor peasants and their families as landless rural proletariat making a big potential base for militant kisan struggle while land and its produce were still more concentrated in the hands of rich peasants, traders and money lenders."²⁷

The 9th conference of Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha was held from 21.05.1946 to 24.05.1946 at Maubhog. The main trend of this conference was to carry on movement against the oppression of zamindars and their intermediaries. It was resolved--

"As soon as possible the law should be introduced to have 2/3 share of crops in favour of bargadars and ½ share of crops in favour of landlords in case of supplying all outputs of cultivation by the landlords such as cattle, seeds manure etc."²⁸

In September 1946, the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha gave the call for Tebhaga. It took place for the share of 2/3 of the produced crops in favour of the adhiars and 1/3 for the 'Giri' recommended by the Floud Commission in 1940. The modes and the programmes of the movement were group meetings, mass meetings, demonstrations, Hat squads, peasant marches through the country side and other such forms were propaganda and mobilization against the

oppressors. Volunteers were recruited, trained up and assigned them specific responsibilities and raised the slogans like 'adhi nai , Tebhaga chai' 'Nij kholane dhan, tolo' 'Jan debo to dhan debo na', 'Patit jami dakhil karo' 'Inquilab Zindabad'.²⁹

At first the movement was started from a village under Pachagar Thana in late November, 1946. After that the movement dispersed rapidly from village to village under Debiganj, Pachagar, Boda and the parts of Kotowali and Rajganj Police Stations. Paddy was harvested and stacked collectively in the adhiar's place or in a common place and then jotdars were asked to come there and collect their 1/3 share of the produced crops. Peasant unrest also took a new turn in the Mal and Matiali Police Stations of Jalpaiguri district. Sunil Sen, an eminent historian on Peasant Movement writes, "On 1 March 1947, there was a clash between Oraon peasants and the police in the Duars in Jalpaiguri district in which five peasants were killed. On 4 April another clash occurred at Mateli in this district, in which nine peasants were killed".³⁰ It is mentioned in the report of Sub-divisional Officer, Alipurduar: "There is no Tebhaga Movement in this Sub-division."³¹

Samar Ganguly, a leader of labour organization of C.P.I had gone to attend a meeting of tea-labourers. He was requested there by Oraon adhiars to carry on Tebhaga Movement in the Duars. But Samar Ganguly was not interested to do it because he thought it was not proper time to do the same in this area. Then he asked the Oraon adhiars if they could provide ten thousand volunteers the movement could have carry on and he believed that it would be the herculean task, actually Ganguly tried to avoid it. But in the next day, thousand of adhiars came forth the office of C.P.I surprising the leaders of C.P.I. naturally the movement started by looting store house of paddy of a Muslim jotdar.³²

Bimal Dasgupta writes, "Madhab Dutta was attacked by the gundas of jotdars in Terai and his head was cracked by the attack of lathis (stick), this news was circulated in the areas of tea-estate and rail line. Some tribal peasant came there and told 'give a Flag' 'we shall go to meeting in Domahani of 1st March'. They had gone to meeting sequently, but this was not like ordinary movement, rather it was spontaneous influx of the peasants and labourers."³³

He again wrote in the same article "The Tebhaga in the kholan (farm house) of the big jotdar, Gayanath of Mahabari Basti was a remarkable incident. Peasants and labourers were carrying out Tebhaga communicating with the peasants and labourers around 5-6 miles areas

from Mahabari Bosti of Meteli Thana to the office of Krishak Sabha situated in Panoar bosti of Mal Thana. Police fired on the peasants and labourers of Tebhaga being in favour of jotdars as a result of which nine persons were killed on the spot and seven were seriously injured.”³⁴

In the month of November, 1946, during harvesting time, Krishak Sabha realized that it was the high time to start Tebhaga movement. A meeting was held on the 23rd November, 1946, at Pachagar Thana of Jalpaiguri district, presided by Dr. Rafiz Uddin Ahamed. Krishna Binod Roy, the president of BPKS congratulated the peasants of this area for their daring movement for food. After discussing about the Tebhaga he told, this fight was not only to protect the land and farmyard of the peasants from the aggression of jotdars and store keepers, this was the only way to live and occupy food from store-keeper.³⁵

“Came the season of harvesting paddy; threatening of jotdars and the police could not destroy the mental strength of the share croppers. Within a short period this movement spread in some parts of Sadar Subdivision, everywhere of Boda-Pachagar-Debiganj Police Stations, adjacent areas of Jalpaiguri in the Atoari Police Station of Dinajpur district and some parts of Domar Police Station of Rangpur District. Everywhere share croppers started to accumulate paddy in their own farmyard.”³⁶

It is found in the Government Report about the intensive motion of the Tebhaga Movement in Dinajpur district: “The Kisan Samitee volunteers moved about village to village shouting various anti-jotdar slogans and asking the adhiars to did rather than part with this paddy. This produced quite a lot of bitterness against the jotdars.....Since after the middle of December, 1946, large bodies of adhiars and landless labourers started looting paddy from the fields. Their modes of operation was to come 200 to 300 hands strong upon a plot of land, finish reaping all the crops standing thereon in 30 to 40 minutes remove the same to some adhiars house and the repeat the same process in other plots.”³⁷

Tebhaga movement turned in to a mass upheaval in 1.5 thousand square mile of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri districts, fifty villages in the district of Maymensing of East Bengal, thirty villages in Midnapur district of West Bengal and in the three hundred square mile areas of five police stations in Jeshor District of middle and South Bengal, large areas of Kakdip in 24 parganas, Dumuria police station of Khulna district ,... The responsibility of the great upheaval of the peasants in the history of Bengal has come under Krishak Sabha suddenly.³⁸

The struggle for land is coming ahead..... Imperialism will stand by the jodars-zamindars during the period of struggle for land. But, the Calling for the struggle of lands will unite all peasants of Bengal and will start the day of last struggle. As a training of it fifty lack peasants have assembled today in the battle of Tebhaga.³⁹ Bengal Provincial 4th Conference of C.P.I demanded various demands for the interest of the Peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers-⁴⁰

Bachha Munshi, one of the leaders of Tebhaga movement in Jalpaiguri district, played a significant role in the history of Tebhaga movement working among the peasants and adhiars and fighting against the zamindars, jodars, mahajans, money lenders and the British imperial powers. A diary written by Munshi about his experience and activities has been found. He wrote, ‘the movement was started in the village to village against the abwab (sub-taxes) and tolabati under the leadership of communist party (taxes on selling and purchasing). Every where raised the slogans ‘Land to the tiller’ ‘Destroy money-lending system’ ‘Accumulate crops in the own farmyard.’⁴¹

He also wrote, “In this movement share croppers accumulated crops in their own farmyard they collected 2/3 share of crops, they also took straw.jodars filed the case in court, sharecroppers were attacked by lathials, firing and arresting was going on in Jalpaiguri district. 22 peasants were killed in Khapur by the bullet of jodars. I myself and Gurudas Roy organized the peasants in Panchpir and Debiganj... Within a short period started meeting and the movement of occupying land by the sharecroppers in a organized way⁴²

While going on Tebhaga Movement all the Deputy Commissioners, District Magistrates and Sub Divisional Officers were asked by Govt. to send report about the bargadars, jodars and the relation among them, and the motion of the movement. On behalf of the Government it was declared “Government desire that all district Magistrate and Sub-divisional officers should exert their exclusive influence to the fullest extent to bring about amicable settlements on similar lines in their own areas wherever there is any trouble or any attempt on the part of land owners for large scale eviction of Bargadars which is likely to result in a breach of peace response it got from the bargadars as a whole.⁴³ Govt. was worried following the intensive motion of the movement with regard to maintain peace and situation under control. So the Government declared-

“The undersigned directed to request that all Subdivision officers may be asked to submit reports about the present relation between the bargadars and landlords in their respective subdivision.”⁴⁴

Maitreya Ghatak gives an over view idea about the Tebhaga movement as followed:

“Tebhaga starts in December, 1946. Agitators of outside and the educated young men of town organize the movement. The movement had spread in the seven police stations out of twelve. Debiganj, Pachagar, Kotowali, Boda, Mal and Meteli Police Stations are particularly influenced by the Movement.”⁴⁵

He also pointed out, “Even the movement have intensified in the remote villages. Share croppers, jointly, are harvesting and possessing crops from the land of jotdars on condition to give 1/3 share of the crops to the jotdars by getting receipt from jotdars. In the second phase, the sharecroppers collect 2/3 share of crops from the store house of jotdars leaving 1/3 share for the jotdars.”⁴⁶

The Sub divisional officer, Jalpaiguri gave a report on the Tebhaga movement of this Subdivision as follows.⁴⁷

“There has been a very serious movement this year to totally change the procedure of stacking of the paddy and division of the same.

The movement was started from the very beginning of the harvesting of winter paddy that is from early December 1946.

Again Sub-divisional Officer, Jalpaiguri mentioned – ‘The movement was more or less spread over 7 thanas out of 12 under this Subdivision. Thanas of Debiganj, Panchagar, and Kotowali, Boda and lastly Mal and Metely were seriously affected by the movement.’⁴⁸

The 2nd phase of the movement was forcible taking away of paddy stacks and plough cattles from the Khamars and houses of the jotdars. Some cases of removal of paddy from gola were also received. Allegations were also made by many jotdars that the volunteers were armed with lathis, Daos, Bows and other weapons and the jotdars were threatened with violence and assault. Lately women also joined such parties which forcibly removed paddy and cattle from jotders Khamars and houses.⁴⁹ “The first report on enforcement of Tebhaga in Jalpaiguri district

came in late November from a village under Pachagar Thana. Thereafter it began to spread to near and newer areas.⁵⁰

Collector of 24 Parganas wrote to the Additional secretary, Board of revenue.

“Reference your No.3/60/26 L.R of 21st April, 1947; I have had the advantage of discussing the matter with my predecessors. While we quite agree that officers should use their exclusive influence to prevent large scale eviction of Bargadars we are both at one in feeling that in such cases any attempt to interfere with the established custom of half and half division would only put a premium on further agitation and further trouble. Both of us also consider it necessary to point out that it is impossible to lay down fair rates and I trust that this is a matter which will be left to the dealt with in the light of local circumstances.⁵¹

It is mentioned in the Samaj Samikshya, bulletin (Mukhapatra) of Indian School of Social Science, Astam Barsha, Pancham-sasta Sankha, 1996, and it was a Mukhapatra of ‘BPK.S.

“We are listening to the life story of oppression of the sharecroppers sitting in the village of Panimachh Pukuriya of Pachagar Thana; We follow a lean-peasant with his wife are walking along the ridge of the field, we call him, but do not come, do not respond. Being surprised we went to their house. They were economically solvent earlier, but during the time of devastating famine in 1350 B.S. they sold their land and became sharecropper from chukanidar..... In this year he needs loan. The adhiar is agreed to have a loan of 12 mound paddy on the pledge of three cows by oral agreement, he only receive 3 mound paddies and it is decided that the rest will be given later on. But he went to jotdars house fourth times to receive his dues, but he returns with empty handed. All the members of the house are fasting till seven days. In these pathetic circumstances, his sister comes to his house with three children for want of food.⁵²

Another pathetic scene of adhiar family was written in this article,

I just tell a story, following same scenario in every house, went to the neighboring house. They have sold the elder daughter for want of food. The younger, but elder amongst boys has given as an adopted son two boys and a Girl are sucking dry breast-milk of their mother. The peasant and his wife are fasting since previous day.⁵³

Different historians and scholars have given their views from different angles about the nature and role of Krishak Sabha as well as the leaders of the Tebhaga Movement. Maitreya

Ghatak in his article raised some questions about the role of Krishak Sabha - In the first conference of Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha discussing on the problems relating to agriculture and peasants but no discussions were held on the problems of Barga systems and bargadars.⁵⁴

According to Dr. Gyanabrota Bhattacharja Tebhaga movement was an unorganized revolt by un-organizing agency.⁵⁵ Dr. Sugata Basu also supported the view of Bhattacharja. Andre Beteille thought that the bargadars were assigned to carry on the movement by Krishak Sabha as an agent of communist party which was not favorable for the interest of the bargadars. He also mentioned that the Krishak Sabha was not at all a peasant organization as because most of the leaders of Krishak Sabha were not peasants or bargadars themselves.⁵⁶

Dr. Binay Bhushan Chowdhuri denied the views of Bhattacharya, Sugata Bose and Andre Beteille. Dr. Chowdhuri pointed out that the bargadars were not poked by Krishak Sabha, rather the Sabha had a background of peasant movement, so the Scholars should know, why the movement of adhiars or bargadars had spread in all over Bengal. ⁵⁷ We get from the contemporary report of S.D.O Jalpaiguri- “The landlords were at first under the impression that the movement would not develop into such mass agitators and expected that they would be able to stop the movement with the help of the local authorities. So at the beginning the jotdars were adamant. Besides the extreme cases on the whole this year also the general system has been the sharing the produce half and half as before between the jotdars and adhiars.”⁵⁸

It is true that most of the leaders of Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha were not peasants themselves, most of whom came from middle class family and intellectuals, yet it can not be accept the view of Andre Beteille. Beside this it cannot be told that the leaders of Tebhaga movement had not direct relation with the bargadars sympathetically, rather it can be said that the leaders in spite of coming from middle class family and more or less economically in better position, they realized the situation of the bargadars, small peasants and agricultural labourers sympathetically by working directly with the bargadars and they dedicated their life in the struggle. Sunil Sen wrote, “In Bengal the communists took the lead in organizing the provincial Kishak Sabha, as a branch of the AIKS, which held its first session at Bankura in March 1937. Within a year Krishak Sabha units were formed in the district. In 1937 it had only 11,000 members; with organization improving the membership rose to 1,78,000 in 1944, 2,55,000 in

1945, 2,03,382 in 1947. In the 1940s about one thousand full-time activist that included intellectuals and peasants worked in the district; they were apparently the core of the Krishk Sabha.”⁵⁹ We also get information from Government report regarding the role of communist party and Krishak Sabha- ‘Communist workers profess that $\frac{1}{3}$ share of the jotdars have been kept in reserve under their custody but in fact that is not the case. A large part of the produce was damaged either in cutting or at the time of removal by volunteers.’ ⁶⁰

In 1946 the prices of all essential things were going up tremendously, the prices of food crops and paddy were also so high, yet jotdars and zamindars stored paddy in their store house (gola). In this circumstances Dainik Swadhinata wrote,

“As soon as the news reached in the village, Peasants and share croppers jointly surrounded the store houses of the jotdars, volunteers of seven unions in Pachagar Police Station guarded every store house following strictly on the brokers. 3 big jotdars, in the mean time agreed to give away the stored paddy.” ⁶¹

Again Swadhinata wrote in the month of November, 1946 about the motion of the movement. “Tebhaga movement created enthuse and inspiration in the mind of the peasants of Boda, Pachagar and Debiganj Police Station. Everyday hundreds of Peasants volunteers enrolled their names for the struggle against jotdars.” ⁶²

It is mentioned in the Government Report about the motion of the movement in Jalpaiguri district, “Here in this subdivision during the harvest season Communist Volunteers in batches visited different localities established camps in the interior, enlisted local support and the helped selected adhiars to cut and take the entire procedure from their lands and stack there in places suitable for the purpose of the communist. The jotdars could not oppose as a large number of volunteers armed with lathis, scythes etc. would gather together and cut paddy of some land on each occasion when the harvesting of paddy from the fields.”⁶³

Ranjit Dasgupta wrote, “It seems to be the first to make a social relation between poor peasants and us, we stepped in the village in 1941 after passing the first year of world war and the relation with town is turned. Remaining among peasants for one and half years, sympathetically following their life, halting night sometimes in cow shed, sometimes in kitchen - all these turned the mind of Psychic world of our workers.” ⁶⁴

Sushil Sen, another leader of communist party and BPKS highlighted the experience and living condition during that period in his memories as follows –

“When we arrived in the village, we did not think that we had to face in such type of critical situation. Sometimes we had to sleep in a group of pigs, sometime halt the night in the bed of straw in cow shed among cows and goats. We would eat the same which was eaten by peasants, sometimes it was only the soup of jute-leaf. We would remain fasting when they (peasants) did. Yet, we organized them against the all sorts of oppressions remaining among the peasants – because we thought always that we were communist.”⁶⁵ Kalyani Dasgupta the woman leaders of Tebhaga movement wrote, “Deben Jotdar of Pachagar is a prominent and oppressive. It is being discussed in the meeting of workers whether will be gone in the farmyard of Deben jotdar or not, and have a confusion about it. In the meantime a women stand up and boldly remark, we have to go there and ultimately happen the same..... The only woman takes over the treatment of Madhab Dutta in Panchpir of Boda inspite of having threatening and fear when he (Madhab Dutta) was injured.”⁶⁶

Hemanta Ghosal, leader of Tebhaga movement wrote, “When we organize the movement, the workers of Krishak Sabha could not promise their word everywhere. We had limited power. But the news, the movement of Tebhaga would be started, passed over the villages currently. ‘One rupee, one lathi, one youth’ – the number of volunteers reached to ten thousand depending on that slogan. They communicated with us earnestly and joined the Tebhaga movement in an organized way under Krishak Sabha.”⁶⁷ He again wrote about the heartiest cooperation and drastic promise to fight against the oppression – “Ultimately the police declared warrant against leaders. To avoid this apprehension we would shelter in Tatda and Maishal of Bhangar thana, it was walking way of six hours, after finishing the walking of whole day for safe shelter sometimes it seems to be intensive, we would become so tired.....In this circumstances we had to spent without food for 3-4 days.....Sometimes lady and women of the peasant families supplied food to us – perhaps they remained fasting. Even they protected us from the aggression of police for whole night in the absence of male persons of the house.”⁶⁸

It is mentioned in the Government: “Just at this moment the movement appears to be slightly under control on account of promulgation orders under section 144 C.R.P.C. In this

subdivision prohibiting was assembling of more than 4 persons holding of meetings and of procession etc. It is however apprehended that very soon the adhiar under the influence of the agitators will begin to plough the lands of jotdars even against the will of the latter.⁶⁹ A daring and dedicatory incident is shown in the story of Manik Bandhyapadhyay 'Haraner Natjamai' in such a way Bhuban Mandal, a leader of Communist Party and Krishak Sabha, working in a village, one day at night police surrounded the village to arrest Bhuban Mandal. Then Bhuban Mandal sheltered in the house of Moynar Ma (Mother of Moyna), Police entered the house of Moynar Ma and enquired her about Bhuban Mandal, but Moynar ma surprisingly denied and she told that she did not know Bhuban Mandal, in the mean time Moynar Ma sheltered Bhuban Mandal to take rest in the room with Moyna, her daughter to prove Bhuban Mandal as her son in law to the police. Police tried to identify Bhuban Mandal, but could not do it. Moynar Ma, then asked Bhuban Mandal and Moyna to go to bed and requested police officer (Manmath) to allow them to go to bed, Moynar Ma then shut the door.⁷⁰

Adriene Cooper argued in her thesis that the bargadars were conducted by 'communal mentality and the movement was affected by the Muslim Politics.'⁷¹ Prof. D. N. Dhanagare also emphasized the 'Primordial Loyalties' of the bargadars. According to him Muslim peasants were attracted gradually by the Muslim politics and for the demand of Pakistan and the peasants including bargadars were eliminated from Krishak Sabha and the movement against the jotdars.⁷² Peter Custers denied the views of Cooper and Dhanagare regarding communal politics. He emphasized the politics and class consciousness of the bargadars, poor peasants and labourers.⁷³ Dr. Partha Chatterjee also admitted that the peasants were inspired to have their demand by a class interest.⁷⁴ Dr. Binay Bhushan Chowdhuri denied the much role of the Muslim league on bargadars. He showed that the Muslim peasants were influenced by the Muslim League more or less where... the organization of Krishak Sabha was weak or was not existed at all.⁷⁵ Sumit Sarkar, a prominent historian wrote in the introduction of the 'Tirish Challisher Bangla' written by Abani Lahiri.

"Today, no one almost remember that how the communists had stood hard against the communal riots and sometimes they stopped the riots. Noakhali was of course, enlighten moment of Gandhiji, but would it be forget the incident of 'Lal Hasnabad', few miles north of Noakhali.

There, the Muslim Peasants gave shelter to the thousands of Hindus under leadership of communists.”⁷⁶

Abani Lahiri opined in the interview to Ranjit Dasgupta, “I believe, Bengal is the only place among Muslim dominant province where the Muslim peasants, after many confusion and hesitation, ultimately, assembled under the banner of Muslim league in the 1940’s for the defects and error of our national leaders and different historical causes. This assemblence was not inevitable. It was proved in the election of 1937 that the Muslim peasants would remains in Muslim league – it was not inevitable.”⁷⁷

From the above discussion, it may be summaries that the peasant movements particularly the ‘Tebhaga Movement Bengal had a significant role to organize the peasants including bargadars and labourers against all sorts of oppressions of the jotdars, zamindars intermediary tenure holders. Though ultimately the movement became failure, yet it is said that there were many reasons behind this failure Firstly, the Communist Party of India, Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha was failure to organize the peasants including bargadars and labourers into a class in a grass root level. In the district, Jalpaiguri as else where in India, in spite of exploitation, oppression of the peasants, bargadars labourers and lower class people by the jotdars zamindars, mahajans and money-lenders, more over oppressed and depressed of the lower castes people that was untouchables by the higher caste’s people peasant or labour movement could not grow into a class struggle as a whole due to weakness, aims, and programmes of the organization of C.P.I as well as Krishak Sabha. Abani Lahiri in wrote, “There was a serious realization amongst the leadership of the struggle of the failure to mobilize the support and sympathy of other democratic sections of the people,” ⁷⁸ He again wrote, “Explaining the peasant’s demands to other democratic sections was a very important talk. But revolutionary class alliance was not built through explanatory campaigns alone. It was necessary to have the experience of common struggle. If six million peasants had started their struggle in 1945 harvesting season for which the objective condition was as favorable as in 1946, its tidal sweep would have coincided with the revolt of the RIN ratings and the barricade fights on the streets of Calcutta. The poor and landless peasants of Bengali missed this opportunity. ⁷⁹

Secondly, the leaders of the Communist Party of India as well as Krishak Sabha were in hesitation and confusion in many respects of the bargadars while going on the movement. Some

times they could not give proper decision on high time. After 2nd world war an intensive discontent was among the peasants, workers and lower class people and they were ready to dedicate themselves in the revolution, but the communist party was failure to organize them and make a revolution as the National Congress party was not in favors of revolution. Abani Lahiri gave his view in the interview.

“The question was raised at the time of movement, what would be the way of obstruction against the aggression of jotdars and zamindars? Such moment has come after firing in Thumniya or Thakurgaon town –peasants come to the Samity office unitedly and told ‘give arms, we will fight, we have no arms, from where we would supply? But from the point of ideology and planning, how would be obstructed the problems? The way of non-violence of Gandhiji was not ours, and then what was the alternative? We could not give the answer of this question.”⁸⁰

Another mistake of the Krishak Sabha was to bring the small jotdars in their platform; if they could do it their organization would be strong, because small jotdars were not the class enemy of bargadars or communist party. 4thly, All India polities was also responsible for the failure of the movement. Indian National Congress and Muslim league were going to have the power of sovereignty dividing India into two Independent States, namely, India and Pakistan. The top leaders of both the parties were keenly interested to gain their power and position; communal riots were going on all over India.

So, in this circumstance, it should not be expected from the Tebhaga Movement or the leaders of the Krishak Sabha to carry on the movement for long time and to change whole structure of the society because of the contemporary political situation and social structure of India. Despite all these limitation the Tebhaga movement was remarkable in the history of peasant movement in Jalpaiguri as well as in Bengal. Badruddin Umar has rightly remarked that in spite of having many short comings this is the only glorious movement in the history of organized peasants movement in Bengal.⁸¹

Naxalite Movement

It is shown in earlier that the peasants, agricultural labourers and sharecroppers in the district as elsewhere in India were victimized and oppressed by the jotdars – zamindars and their intermediaries. There were lacs of landless people who had not way to survive in spite of having

huge number of landholders who occupied illegally large amount of lands. Actually, the land reforms Act, 1955 could not solve traditional agrarian problems. It was declared in liberation, “India which was a colony of Britain a little over twenty years ago has now become a neo-colony of several imperialist powers, chief among which are the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. The U.S. imperialists, the most aggressive enemies of all mankind, are also the worst enemies of the Indian people. There neo-colonial grip over India is now complete.”⁸²

Here, it is followed that the Communist Revolutionaries (Maoist) treated Soviet Union as their enemy in spite of being a socialist country. ‘Liberation’ pointed out, “The Soviet renegade ruling clique, which has set up again a bourgeois dictatorship in the first socialist state of the world, is actively collaborating with imperialize and has turned India into a neo-colony of both the USA and the Soviet Union. India provides the classic example of the collaboration of the USA imperialists and the Soviet neo-colonists for joint world domination.”⁸³ A socio-political tension was going on. This noisy condition and massacre is not limited in a particular zone, it has spread in every district of the state.⁸⁴

In the document of the anti-party Sodhanbad Birodhi Sangram Committee was written,- “Comrades the nature of invertebrate and petty-bourgeois of our party leaders is not any sudden incident, it is their compromising tendency and the logical result of the organizational policy.....Today this leadership should be removed for the interest of the labour class.”⁸⁵

B.T Ranadibhe wrote in *Deshhitaishi* published on 17.3.1967, “Stop the ousting of peasants from land, stop the expulsion of labourer abatement of land revenue distribution of food in the legal process- such types of reform works would have to be started by the Cabinet.”⁸⁶ But leaders of Siliguri subdivision of C.P.I (M) believing in revolutionary activities could not rely on the ministry of United Front Government and the parliamentary attitude of C.P.I (M). So, their grievances and discontent were going up, as a result of which, they were preparing themselves for the militant action to occupy lands from rich peasant who illegally possessed excessive lands over ceiling.

The central committee has made a declaration in favour of peaceful transition to socialism and has chosen the path of the country’s progress through parliamentary democracy.⁸⁷ So, the Revolutionaries removed themselves from CPI (M). They thought that the feudal and semi-feudal systems still existed in the Indian agrarian economy. Charu Majumdar wrote, “India

is a semi colonial, semi-feudal country. So the main force which can change the colonial condition in this country is the peasantry and their anti-feudal struggle.⁸⁸ He believed, “No change is conceivable in this country without agrarian revolution. And it is the agrarian revolution that proves to be the only path towards the liberation of this country.”⁸⁹

The members of Krishak Sabha wearing red cloths, holding red coloured flag of C.P.I (M) with lathi, bows and arrows broke out into rebellion with raising slogans ‘Mao-Tse-tung Jindabad’ ‘Militant peasants take the way of revolution.’ During the first week of March 1967, peasants of Naxal bari, Kharibari and Fansi dewa were ready to revolt any time against jotdars. In the month of March 20 general diary about, plunders and occupation of land were recorded. But the police did not take any action.

A group of peasants were organized by Charu Majumdar to occupy land with arms on 03.03.1967, demarcating land with red colored flag and declared it as the land of Krishak Sabha which was a sub organization of C.P.I (M). In the next two months, such types of 60 incidents were found in Naxalbari, Kharibari and Fanshi Dewa Police Station. Beside occupation of land, cultivation of land by force, plundering of rice and paddy, threatening and attacking to the jotdars were continuing. About 100 incidents of routing took place from 09.03.1967 to 22.05.1967. But police did not interfere on it from the prohibition of United Front Government, though the jotdars tried to protest these incident. The first area conference of Krishak Sabha of Siliguri Subdivision was held on 18.03.1967 and it was resolved in that conference that the lands would be occupied forcefully. Charu Majumdar, Souren Bose, Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santal, Khokan Majumdar were promised to defeat mutual attitude and parliamentary policy of United Front Government with revolutionary activities.⁹⁰

It was disclosed in Calcutta on Januarys that a third communist party drawing inspiration from the thought of Mr. Mao Tse Tung and accepting unreservedly the leadership of communist party had for all practical purpose started functioning in the country.⁹¹

The Naxalite movement had spread in the different states of India. In the meeting of all India Co-ordination committee of Communist Revolutionaries held on 08.02.1969 pointed out “It is during this period that the flames of agrarian revolution have spread out from Naxalbari to Srikakulam in the south and to Mushahari and Lakhimpur Kheri in the North. It has been the period when the peasant revolutionaries of Kerala have staged a heroic revolt that has shaken

period of the bursting forth of the revolutionary liberation struggle of the Adibasi people in chotanagpur and its uninterrupted advance.⁹²

In this circumstance, committee realized to form a revolutionary party. It was mentioned “Without a revolutionary party there can be no revolutionary discipline and without revolutionary discipline the struggles can not be raised to a higher level. Only a revolutionary party can infuse revolutionary discipline, the spirit of self sacrifice and death – defying abandon. So, for taking these struggles forward it is essential to form an All India Party and a centre recognized by all revolutionaries.⁹³

The All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, which met in a Plenary Session from 19th to 22nd April 1969, announces the formation of the revolutionary party, communist party of India (Maxist – Leninist), based on the thought of Mao Tse Tung on 22nd April 1969, the one hundredth birthday of Great Lenin – a task it set itself eighteen months ago, setting up a Central Organizing Committee to hold congress at an appropriate time.⁹⁴

As the Naxalites were completely revolutionary they emphasized on the armed struggle. To organize the peasant movement on the basis of the politics of armed struggle, they started to form militant organization with the leadership of poor and landless peasants and collect arms from different sources. They also formed a liberated zone in different parts of the country. Charu Majumdar wrote, “A liberated zone is a peasant area from which all the class enemies have been ousted. To build a zone we require peasant armed power.”⁹⁵ But where from the peasant would obtain guns? Charu Majumdar wrote, “The class enemies have guns and they live in the village. The guns must be snatched from them..... For this the peasant militants must be trained to set the class enemies’ houses on fire and to use all other techniques. Apart from this, we will get guns by sudden attacks on the armed forces of the Government.”⁹⁶

The tactics of the revolutionaries for organizing peasant struggle must be entirely different from the revisionist tactics. The foremost duty of the revolutionaries is to spread and propagate the thought of chairman Mao and to try to intensify the Party organization must organize propaganda by means of secret meetings.⁹⁷

Naxalites not only wanted to occupy lands from zamindars – jotdars and intermediaries, but also wanted to smash the State power. Charu Majumdar writes, “If the Naxalbari peasant struggle has any lesson for us, it is this militant struggles must be carried on not for land, crops

etc. but for the seizure of state power. It is precisely this that gives the Naxalbari struggle its uniqueness. Peasants in different areas must prepare themselves in a manner so as to be able to render ineffective the state apparatus in their respective areas. It is in Naxalbari that this path has been adopted for the first time in the history of peasant struggle in India.⁹⁸

Though the duration of the Naxalbari movement was short, it was very significant in the field of peasant movement in India as a class struggle as because the movement was carried out by oppressed and depressed classes people that were peasants, share croppers and labourers though it was led by middle class intellectuals who sacrificed their life in the revolution to change the society. Later on the movement and organization was extended various parts of India, even today Naxal organization and their activities were seen in South India, particularly, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. Many brilliant students and intellectuals participated and devoted their life in the movement.

Here it cannot be denied that the Naxalite movement attacked the bourgeois structure of the village society. They tried to breakdown the dominant class of the village and establish classless society giving the economic right for living to the lower class and depressed class people. Partha Pratim Bandhyopadhyay writes, “The evasion of apparent change is shown by the conscious work of the Naxalites. In place of old exploitation, oppression and chain, another chain has come in the new form –party politics, characterlessness eclipsed the mouth of change”¹⁰⁵ Charu Majumdar writes, “Naxalbari lives and will live. This is because it is based on invincible Marxism – Leninism – Mao – Tse Tung Thought. We shall face many obstacles, many difficulties, many acts of betrayal and there will be many set backs. But Naxalbari will not die because the bright sunlight of chairman Mao’s thought has fallen on it like a blessing”⁹⁹

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